

# Introduction to English Language A-level



This is a 6 week scheme of work. Each week you need to complete the tasks in as much detail as you can.

Week One: What is Language?

Week Two: Language and Power

Week Three: Language and Gender

Week Four: Language and Technology

Week Five: Spoken Language

Week Six: Your own Language Project

Week One: What is Language?

“The limits of my language means the limits of my world”

-- Ludwig Wittgenstein

Language is all around us and we use it every day in a variety of interesting and unique ways. People have been studying it for thousands of years, and yet we are still learning more every day!

TASK ONE: Answer these questions in as much detail as you can.

- 1) What is Language and why do we want to study it?
- 2) What has impacted language over the years?

Watch this 10 minute video from the Open University, which gives you a brief overview of the influences on English Language:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3r9bOkYW9s&t=227s>

TASK TWO: Read the two articles at the end of this booklet:

Appendix 1 – Article from The Daily Telegraph on text-speak

Appendix 2 – Article from The Guardian on dialect and slang

Underline key points that are being made about language in each article.

Answer the questions:

- What different attitudes towards language are being shown here?
- Which attitudes do you agree / disagree with? Why?
- What does this show us about the study of English Language?

TASK THREE: Write your own Language Autobiography, reflecting on your use of language and your opinion towards it. You can make reference to the articles read, if you'd like. Aim for at least a page.

Prompt questions:

- Why do you want to study English Language?
- What do you think is the biggest influence on the way you speak?
- How has your family influenced your speech?
- How have the places where you have lived influenced your speech?
- Has your English been influenced by contact with other dialects or languages?
- Have your friends influenced your speech?
- Has television or film affected your speech?
- Has the internet or social media influenced your speech?
- Have you ever tried to change the way that you speak?
- How would you describe the type of English that you speak?
- Do you like the way that you speak now?
- Are there any reasons you may want to change the way that you speak in the future?

TASK FOUR: Read through the Key Terminology to Get You Started at the back of this booklet (Appendix 3).

You need to make sure you know what each term is and write down 2-3 of your own examples. You may like to produce flash cards for each of the terms.

## Week Two: Language and Power

What does it mean to have power? How can different speakers and writers assert power?

TASK ONE: Watch the speech Prime Minister Boris Johnson delivered to the nation on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, when he announced the lockdown of the country.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LlJlwTd9fql>

What do you notice about his language? What does he do to assert power?

**Linguist Norman Fairclough believed that all texts are underpinned by a clear ideology (belief system) and that everyone has an agenda. He explored two types of power:**

- **Instrumental – when a speaker tries to assert authority**
- **Influential – when a speaker tries to persuade**

- What is Boris Johnson's ideology here? Why did he make the speech? What was his intended effect on the audience?
- What sort of power (influential / instrumental) do you think he is asserting? Why?

TASK TWO: Read the full speech at the end of this booklet (Appendix 4)

Annotate the speech for Johnson's use of:

- Lexis – what do you notice about his use of nouns (are they mostly concrete or abstract?), his use of verbs, adjectives, adverbs? What

sort of modal verbs does he use? How much figurative language does he use?

- Grammar – what different sentence moods are used in the speech? Are his sentences mostly minor, simple or multi-clausal? Did you notice any particularly interesting noun or verb phrases?
- Discourse – how was the speech structured? What did he talk about first? How did he build upon this throughout the speech? What discourse markers were used? Any anaphora or other structural techniques?

Why might Johnson have used these language features? And how does this all link to power?

TASK THREE: Write 2-3 developed paragraphs exploring how Boris Johnson asserts power in this speech. Try and write about his use of lexis, grammar and discourse. You can use the sentence starters below, if needed:

Boris Johnson asserts power through his use of...

For example, throughout the speech, he uses... such as “...” “...” He appears to use this feature because...

This may be due to...

This would assert \_\_\_\_\_ power because...

TASK FOUR: Can you find another speech that asserts power? It could be from the point of view of a politician, or someone else you are interested in. Here are some ideas to get you started:

Martin Luther King’s ‘I Have a Dream’ speech -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vDWWy4CMhE>

Emma Watson’s ‘I am a Feminist’ speech -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c9SUAcNIVQ4>

Prince Harry's speech on mental health -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZDjTWdhP94>

Make notes on how this speaker asserts power. What do you notice about their lexis, grammar and discourse?

## Week Three: Language and Gender

At A level, you will explore issues around language and gender: in particular, you will study how gender might (or might not) affect speech styles, and how gender is represented through language in a wide range of texts, and in the Media.

TASK ONE: Follow this link to read an article on why Oxford English Dictionary is replacing definitions which reflect and perpetuate stereotypes about gender:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/mar/06/no-more-nagging-wives-how-oxford-dictionaries-is-cleaning-up-sexist-language>

Now answer the following questions:

- 1) What is a stereotype? Look it up if you are not sure.
- 2) What does it mean to 'perpetuate stereotypes' and how might a dictionary be part of this process?
- 3) What examples of sexism in OED definitions does the article give?
- 4) What prompted the OED to review the definitions?
- 5) Can you see why the definitions of 'rabid,' 'shrill' and 'nagging' are problematic? What stereotypes do they perpetuate?
- 6) Who is Deborah Cameron? What is her opinion?

## TASK TWO:

Find another article in the Media on language and gender. Possible topics could include:

- Sexist language in schools
- Language and gender in the workplace
- Gendered language and stereotyping in advertising
- Attempts to replace gendered language with gender-neutral language
- Language and gender identity, e.g. use of gender neutral pronouns

You need to become an expert in it: read as much as you can about the topic and make a poster to explain it to the general reader.

## Week 4: Language and Technology

What impact has technology had on our language?
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TASK ONE: Make a list of all of the words that we now use due to technology. How many can you name in 5 minutes?

Watch this short video that highlights the impact technology has had on language:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tIUwirpJXkg>

(This video was produced in 2015 – think about how many new words have been invented since then!)

TASK TWO: There is no doubt that technology has had a huge impact on the English Language. However, the debate continues to rage about

whether it has had a positive or negative influence. Read two articles about the influence of technology at the end of the booklet:

Appendix 5: An article by broadcaster John Humphrys

Appendix 6: An article by linguistics professor David Crystal

Underline anything you find interesting in the articles. Make notes on the main points put forward by both Humphrys and Crystal. Which argument do you agree with? Why?

TASK THREE: Write your own article for a newspaper opinion column, responding to the following statement:

Technology has ruined the English Language

Aim for at least a page of writing. Make sure your writing is engaging, as well as informative.

## Week 5: Spoken Language

How does spoken language differ to written language?
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TASK ONE: Using your phone/another recording device, record yourself talking for up to a minute. You might want to talk about what you've been up to while school has been closed, a programme you have been watching, what you have learnt so far during this scheme of work, or anything else that comes to mind!

Now listen back to it. What do you notice about how you speak?

Think about:

- Your accent (pronunciation) or dialect (particular words you say as a result of where you grew up / live)



- Any features that show that this is not a prepared speech. We call these non-fluency features. For example:
  - Do you use fillers (words that 'fill' the gap in your speech, such as like, umm, you know)?
  - Do you use false starts (when you start speaking and then go back and start again)?
  - Did you notice any non-verbal features in your language, such as laughing, clearing your throat and sighing. These are called paralinguistic features.
  - Do you use emphasis or intonation on any particular words?

TASK TWO: Now watch the following videos. What do you notice about these speakers? Think about accent, dialect and any non-fluency features (as well as lexis, grammar, discourse). What does this reveal about the speaker and the situation?

Chris Ramsey on Live at the Apollo (first 3 minutes):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9er2-E34vs>

House of Commons debate on Syria in 2013 (2 minutes):

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnKKPwEX\\_ac](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnKKPwEX_ac)

Interview with Stormzy on The Graham Norton show:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEdVYeQMqrs>

Choose at least two of these videos and write 2-3 paragraphs on how language is used by the speakers.

TASK THREE: Choose someone you are interested in (it could be a famous person, someone in a job that you admire or a member of your own family).

Collect 3-5 clips of them speaking. What do you notice about the way that they speak? Do they adapt their language in different situations?

Write up a language analysis of this person, exploring their use of lexis, grammar, discourse, dialect, accent, intonation and non-fluency features. Aim for at least a page.

## Week 6: Your own language project

Choose one of the aspects we have looked at during this scheme of work. You are going to spend this week researching into it further and producing at least three detailed pages of notes. Here are some places you can go for more information:

### General

TED Talks – you can find talks on many aspects of language study on here:

<https://www.ted.com/talks>

JSTOR: You can access many academic articles for free by using our school username and password. Username: TallisSchool. Password: Kidbrooke

### Language and Power

The main theorist you need to be aware of is Norman Fairclough. You can download his book 'Language and Power' here:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/49551220\\_Language\\_and\\_Power](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/49551220_Language_and_Power) Read the introduction for a clear overview of his studies.

You can read many articles about how politicians use language to assert power. Here is one from The Guardian:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/aug/27/from-trump-to-brexit-rhetoric-how-todays-politicians-have-got-away-with-words>

Gerald L. Bruns has written a journal article for The Chicago Review, entitled Language and Power, which you can access through JSTOR.

## Language and Gender

Deborah Cameron has written an important book called *The Myth Of Mars and Venus* which explores and debunks some ideas about language use. Read this article

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/oct/01/gender.books> and make notes on Cameron's ideas.

Cordelia Fine's book *Delusions of Gender* also powerfully debunks myths about the male and female brain. Read this review

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/oct/11/delusions-gender-sex-cordelia-fine> and summarise the ideas in the book.

Although it is now 40 years old, Dale Spender's book *Man Made Language* is a key text. Read the introduction here:

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ot/spender.htm>

## Language and Technology

David Crystal has written widely about this topic. You can read a number of articles written by him through his website:

<http://www.davidcrystal.com/books-and-articles/internet-language>.

You can also watch him speak about the influence of technology in the following two videos: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h79V\\_qUp91M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h79V_qUp91M) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVqcoB798ls>

This TED talk by John McWhorter is a really interesting look at the influence of texting on the English Language:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/john\\_mcwhorter\\_txtng\\_is\\_killing\\_language\\_jk](https://www.ted.com/talks/john_mcwhorter_txtng_is_killing_language_jk)

## Spoken Language

Gillian Brown has written an article entitled Understanding Spoken Language for TESOL Quarterly. You can read it through JSTOR.

One notable theorist you need to be aware of is Howard Giles, who wrote widely about how speakers adapt their language in different situations. This is known as Accommodation Theory. You can read more about this in a JSTOR article entitled: PERSPECTIVES: Language Attitudes, Speech Accommodation and Intergroup Behavior: Some Educational Implications.

You can also watch Giles being interviewed about his theories here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KExeBNB5wy8>

## Text-speak: language evolution or just laziness?

Pupils are becoming increasingly "bilingual" in English and text-speak, a new study claims. But is it just a simple decline in proper language skills, asks Anne Merritt.

Schoolchildren as young as eight are showing a growing proficiency in bilingualism, according to a recent poll of UK parents and teachers. The only hitch? They're bilingual in English and "text-speak" – the phonetic or acronymic bites of language such as "L8R" or "LOL."

What's more, this text-speak is creeping beyond their smartphones and into pupils' everyday language. Mencap, a charity for learning disabilities, sponsored a poll of 500 UK parents and teachers. Two-in-three teachers reported that they regularly find text-speak in pupils' homework. Over three-quarters of parents say they have to clarify the cryptic text-speak in their children's texts and emails.

Almost all participants surveyed (89 per cent) said that this growing prevalence of text speak is creating a veritable language barrier between themselves and children.

Clearly, these shortened bits of language like "m8" and "b4" aren't just for concise texting with friends. They are altering the way that children communicate.

But is this linguistic evolution, or just laziness? Do children use text-speak because they no longer understand the boundaries of formal and informal English? Or, are children consciously changing those

boundaries through a one-size-fits-all communicative tone?

Call me a traditionalist, but it doesn't look like a revolution to me. Instead, it looks like a simple decline in proper language skills, born out of a digitally literate culture that has grown too comfortable in an age of abbreviations and spellchecks.

Yes, recent studies from [Coventry University](#) and the University of Hawaii have reported that children can still distinguish between formal and informal speech. They also note that frequent use of text-speak doesn't necessarily correlate with poor essay writing skills.

So students are still capable of developing arguments, writing thesis statements, and structuring their thoughts. They're just doing it with "u" instead of "you."

It's a problem of productive language skills. Though children learn proper English in school, they're not applying it outside the classroom, and the lessons aren't sticking.

Experts say that children write more these days than they did 20 years ago, because of texting and social media. Most of that writing, however, is in text-speak, and that form of language becomes a bad habit. Students are now so used to writing in text-speak that they can't easily remember (or apply) proper language rules.

Communication is becoming more global in scope and more electronic in form. By the time these children finish school and enter the workforce, this decline in the spoken word will become greater. Written communication, in a formal report, an email, or even a text, sn't just happening on the colloquial level anymore, and children need to be educated on how to use technology in formal, professional contexts.

Teachers and parents need to encourage children to discern the right time and place for casual language. Children also need to hone their proper English skills so that they can call upon correct spelling and grammar when it's needed. Text-speak in pupils' essays may be amusing,

albeit cringeworthy, nowadays. It's not as amusing to imagine our children 10 years from now, as adults, texting "can u plz c me?!?" to their bosses.

## Appendix 2: Article from The Guardian

# There's nowt wrong with dialects, nothing broke ass about slang

Policing children's language encourages them to think nonstandard English is substandard. Linguistic diversity should be celebrated, not banned

Language use is one of the last places where prejudice remains socially acceptable. It can even have official approval, as we see in attempts to suppress slang and dialects at school. Most recently, Ongar Academy in Essex launched a project to discourage students from using words like ain't, geezer, whatever, like, and literally.

We've been here before. Schools across the country have outlawed inoffensive words, with some asking parents to "correct" children at home. Slang, regionalisms, and colloquialisms are typical usages objected to, with occasional spelling errors thrown in as though somehow equivalent. The only thing uniting them is that they're not considered standard or sufficiently formal.

Banning words is not a sound educational strategy. As Michael Rosen points out, schools have been trying this for more than 100 years to no avail. Research shows that gradual transition towards standard English works better. But because dialect prejudice is so prevalent, this must be done in such a way that children understand there's nothing inherently wrong with their natural expression.

Because children are sensitive to how they're perceived, stigmatising their everyday speech can be harmful

Ongar Academy says it's not banning words, but "evolving" its pupils' speech – a description with classist implications. The head teacher, David Grant, says that students' dialect "may not favourably reflect on them when they attend college and job interviews". This may seem a reasonable position, when even those who work in education are subject to linguistic

intolerance. But to assume that students who use slang – ie, most of them – will do so in interviews does them a disservice.

Native speakers of English are generally at least bidialectal. We have the dialect we grew up using, with its idiosyncrasies of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation, and we learn standard English at school and through media like books and radio. As with any social behaviour, we pick up linguistic norms and learn to code-switch according to context. Just as we may wear a T-shirt and slippers at home, but a suit and shoes at work, so we adjust our language to fit the situation.

Standard English is a prestige dialect of huge social value. It's important that students learn it. But the common belief that nonstandard means substandard is not just false but damaging, because it fosters prejudice and hostility. Young people can be taught formal English, and understand its great cultural utility, without being led to believe there's something inferior or shameful about other varieties.

Grant says that in Shakespeare's anniversary year, we should "ensure the way the pupils talk gives a positive impression". But Shakespeare's plays abound in slang and informal language. "Geezer" appears in books by HG Wells, Graham Greene, and Anthony Burgess. Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens and Vladimir Nabokov used non-literal literally. Rather than spurning such words, we can teach students when and why they are used. Learning different Englishes gives us command of different domains, a skill we can then put to creative and appropriate use. Facility with slang is a real advantage in some jobs.

James Sledd once wrote: "To use slang is to deny allegiance to the existing order ... by refusing even the words which represent convention and signal status." That is, slang lends covert prestige – however anathema to those in authority who prefer teenagers not to be teenagers. It doesn't help Grant's cause that in a short radio interview, he put basically on the Bad List but used it himself several times.

Linguistic vetoes can be counterproductive pedagogically too. Sociolinguist Julia Snell argues that "to learn and develop, children must participate actively in classroom discussion; they must think out loud, answer and ask questions". When the focus is on the forms of speech instead of its content, she writes, "children may simply remain silent in order to avoid the shame of speaking 'incorrectly', and miss the interactions crucial to learning". In light of this I can't share Ongar Academy's satisfaction that its students are now policing each other's speech.

People feel strongly about correctness in language, but this strength of feeling isn't always matched by knowledge and tolerance. And because children are sensitive to how they're perceived, stigmatising their everyday speech can be harmful. By educating them about linguistic diversity instead of proscribing it, we can empower students and deter misguided pedantry.



There's nowt wrong with regional dialects, nothing broke ass about slang. They're part of our identities, connecting us to time, place, community, and self-image. They needn't be displaced by formal English – we can have both. As David Almond wrote, in a wonderful response to one school's linguistic crackdown: “Ye hav to knaa the words the world thinks is rite and ye have to knaa how to spel them rite an speek them rite ... But ye neva hav to put the otha words away.”

## Appendix 3: Key Terminology to get you started

Some of these will be familiar, others won't. It's a good starting point. Read through this list carefully.

### Lexis – words

Nouns - words that name people, places, things, ideas and concepts.

Concrete nouns = describe things we can physically touch i.e. table, book

Abstract nouns = describe ideas or concepts i.e. hate, fear

Adjective - a word that modifies a noun.

There are also comparative adjectives i.e. taller and superlative adjectives i.e. tallest

Verb – a word that describes an action or state

Adverb – a word that modifies a verb; it can also modify adjectives and nouns

Modal verb – a verb that expresses possibility, necessity or obligation (i.e. could, must, should, will)

Figurative language i.e metaphor, idiom, euphemism

Pronouns – words that replace nouns (first person, second person, third person)

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Grammar – how sentences are constructed

Minor sentence – a sentence that has some missing elements (“Now.”)

Simple sentence – a sentence with only one clause (“She was scared.”)

Multi-clausal sentence – a sentence involving more than one clause, including a subordinate clause

Noun phrase – a phrase which has a noun as the main focus (“There was a lonely house with an overgrown garden.”)

Verb phrase – a phrase which has a verb as the main focus (“She couldn’t stop crying.”)

Declarative sentence mood – a statement (“It’s the truth.”)

Interrogative sentence mood – a question (“What do you mean?”)

Imperative sentence mood – a command (“Stop that now.”)

Exclamatory sentence mood – an exclamation (“That’s awful!”)

Conjunctions – these words link together parts of a sentence (and, but, because)

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Discourse – how whole texts are constructed

Discourse markers – these words link together paragraphs (However, Although, In addition...)

Paragraphing

Shifts – what is being focused on at different points in the text

Anaphora – repetition

Linear – you read this in chronological order

Non-linear – you don’t have to read this in chronological order

## Appendix 4: Boris Johnson's full speech on Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020

Good Evening,

The coronavirus is the biggest threat this country has faced for decades – and this country is not alone.

All over the world we are seeing the devastating impact of this invisible killer.

And so tonight I want to update you on the latest steps we are taking to fight the disease and what you can do to help.

And I want to begin by reminding you why the UK has been taking the approach that we have.

Without a huge national effort to halt the growth of this virus, there will come a moment when no health service in the world could possibly cope; because there won't be enough ventilators, enough intensive care beds, enough doctors and nurses.

And as we have seen elsewhere, in other countries that also have fantastic health care systems, that is the moment of real danger.

To put it simply, if too many people become seriously unwell at one time, the NHS will be unable to handle it - meaning more people are likely to die, not just from Coronavirus but from other illnesses as well.

So it's vital to slow the spread of the disease.

Because that is the way we reduce the number of people needing hospital treatment at any one time, so we can protect the NHS's ability to cope - and save more lives.

And that's why we have been asking people to stay at home during this pandemic.

And though huge numbers are complying - and I thank you all - the time has now come for us all to do more.

From this evening I must give the British people a very simple instruction - you must stay at home.

Because the critical thing we must do is stop the disease spreading between households.

That is why people will only be allowed to leave their home for the following very limited purposes:

- shopping for basic necessities, as infrequently as possible
- one form of exercise a day - for example a run, walk, or cycle - alone or with members of your household;
- any medical need, to provide care or to help a vulnerable person; and
- travelling to and from work, but only where this is absolutely necessary and cannot be done from home.

That's all - these are the only reasons you should leave your home.

You should not be meeting friends. If your friends ask you to meet, you should say No.

You should not be meeting family members who do not live in your home.

You should not be going shopping except for essentials like food and medicine - and you should do this as little as you can. And use food delivery services where you can.

If you don't follow the rules the police will have the powers to enforce them, including through fines and dispersing gatherings.

To ensure compliance with the Government's instruction to stay at home, we will immediately:

- close all shops selling non-essential goods, including clothing and electronic stores and other premises including libraries, playgrounds and outdoor gyms, and places of worship;
- we will stop all gatherings of more than two people in public - excluding people you live with;
- and we'll stop all social events, including weddings, baptisms and other ceremonies, but excluding funerals.

Parks will remain open for exercise but gatherings will be dispersed.

No Prime Minister wants to enact measures like this.

I know the damage that this disruption is doing and will do to people's lives, to their businesses and to their jobs.

And that's why we have produced a huge and unprecedented programme of support both for workers and for business.

And I can assure you that we will keep these restrictions under constant review. We will look again in three weeks, and relax them if the evidence shows we are able to.

But at present there are just no easy options. The way ahead is hard, and it is still true that many lives will sadly be lost.

And yet it is also true that there is a clear way through.

Day by day we are strengthening our amazing NHS with 7500 former clinicians now coming back to the service.

With the time you buy - by simply staying at home - we are increasing our stocks of equipment.

We are accelerating our search for treatments.

We are pioneering work on a vaccine.

And we are buying millions of testing kits that will enable us to turn the tide on this invisible killer.

I want to thank everyone who is working flat out to beat the virus.

Everyone from the supermarket staff to the transport workers to the carers to the nurses and doctors on the frontline.

But in this fight we can be in no doubt that each and every one of us is directly enlisted.

Each and every one of us is now obliged to join together.

To halt the spread of this disease.

To protect our NHS and to save many many thousands of lives.

And I know that as they have in the past so many times.

The people of this country will rise to that challenge.

And we will come through it stronger than ever.

We will beat the coronavirus and we will beat it together.

And therefore I urge you at this moment of national emergency to stay at home, protect our NHS and save lives.

Thank you.

Appendix 5: Article by John Humphrys in The Daily Mail

## I h8 txt msgs: How texting is wrecking our language

There's a reason why language is getting worse and worse... and it's sinister and deeply troubling.

It is the relentless onward march of the texters, the SMS (Short Message Service) vandals who are doing to our language what Genghis Khan did to his neighbours eight hundred years ago.

They are destroying it: pillaging our punctuation; savaging our sentences; raping our vocabulary. And they must be stopped.

This, I grant you, is a tall order. The texters have many more arrows in their quiver than we who defend the old way.

Ridicule is one of them. "What! You don't text? What century are you living in then, granddad? Need me to sharpen your quill pen for you?"

You know the sort of thing; those of us who have survived for years without a mobile phone have to put up with it all the time. My old friend Amanda Platell, who graces these pages on Saturdays, has an answerphone message that says the caller may leave a message but she'd prefer a text. One feels so inadequate.

(Or should that have been ansafone? Of course it should. There are fewer letters in that hideous word and think how much time I could have saved typing it.)

The texters also have economy on their side. It costs almost nothing to send a text message compared with a voice message. That's perfectly true. I must also concede that some voice messages can be profoundly irritating.

My own outgoing message asks callers to be very brief - ideally just name and number - but that doesn't stop some callers burbling on for ten minutes and always, always ending by saying: "Ooh - sorry I went on so long!"

But can that be any more irritating than those absurd little smiley faces with which texters litter their messages? It is 25 years since the emoticon (that's the posh word) was born.

It started with the smiley face and the gloomy face and now there are 16 pages of them in the texters' A-Z.

It has now reached the stage where my computer will not allow me to type the colon, dash and bracket without automatically turning it into a picture of a smiling face. Aargh!

Even worse are the grotesque abbreviations. It is interesting, in a masochistic sort of way, to look at how text language has changed over the years.

It began with some fairly obvious and relatively inoffensive abbreviations: 'tks' for 'thanks'; 'u' for 'you'; 4 for 'for'.

But as it has developed its users have sought out increasingly obscure ways of expressing themselves which, when you think about it, entirely defeats the purpose.

If the recipient of the message has to spend ten minutes trying to translate it, those precious minutes are being wasted. And isn't the whole point to 'save' time?

Then there's the problem of ambiguity. With my vast knowledge of text language I had assumed LOL meant 'lots of love', but now I discover it means 'laugh out loud'. Or at least it did the last time I asked.

But how would you know? Instead of aiding communication it can be a barrier. I can work out BTW (by the way) but I was baffled by IMHO U R GR8. It means: "In my humble opinion you are great." But, once again, how would you know?

Let me anticipate the reaction to this modest little rant against the text revolution and the OED for being influenced by it. Its defenders will say language changes.

It is constantly evolving and anyone who tries to get in the way is a fuddy-duddy who deserves to be run down.



I agree. One of the joys of the English language and one of the reasons it has been so successful in spreading across the globe is that it is infinitely adaptable.

The danger - for young people especially - is that they will come to dominate. Our written language may end up as a series of ridiculous emoticons and ever-changing abbreviations.

## Appendix 6: Article by David Crystal in The Guardian

### 2b or not 2b?

Despite doom-laden prophecies, texting has not been the disaster for language many feared, argues linguistics professor David Crystal. On the contrary, it improves children's writing and spelling.

Last year, in a newspaper article headed "I h8 txt msgs: How texting is wrecking our language", [John Humphrys argued](#) that texters are "vandals who are doing to our language what Genghis Khan did to his neighbours 800 years ago. They are destroying it: pillaging our punctuation; savaging our sentences; raping our vocabulary. And they must be stopped."

Ever since the arrival of printing - thought to be the invention of the devil because it would put false opinions into people's minds - people have been arguing that new technology would have disastrous consequences for language. Scares accompanied the introduction of the telegraph, telephone, and broadcasting. But has there ever been a linguistic phenomenon that has aroused such curiosity, suspicion, fear, confusion, antagonism, fascination, excitement and enthusiasm all at once as texting? And in such a short space of time. Less than a decade ago, hardly anyone had heard of it.

People think that the written language seen on mobile phone screens is new and alien, but all the popular beliefs about texting are wrong. Its graphic distinctiveness is not a new phenomenon, nor is its use restricted to the young. There is increasing evidence that it helps rather than hinders literacy...Texting has added a new dimension to language use, but its long-term impact is negligible. It is not a disaster.

Although many texters enjoy breaking linguistic rules, they also know they need to be understood. There is no point in paying to send a message if it breaks so many rules that it ceases to be intelligible. When messages are longer, containing more information, the amount of standard orthography increases. Many texters alter just

the grammatical words (such as "you" and "be"). As older and more conservative language users have begun to text, an even more standardised style has appeared. Some texters refuse to depart at all from traditional orthography. And conventional spelling and punctuation is the norm when institutions send out information messages, as in this university text to students: "Weather Alert! No classes today due to snow storm", or in the texts which radio listeners are invited to send in to programmes. These institutional messages now form the majority of texts in cyberspace - and several organisations forbid the use of abbreviations, knowing that many readers will not understand them. Bad textiquette.

Research has made it clear that the early media hysteria about the novelty (and thus the dangers) of text messaging was misplaced. In one American study, less than 20% of the text messages looked at showed abbreviated forms of any kind - about three per message. And in a Norwegian study, the proportion was even lower, with just 6% using abbreviations. In my own text collection, the figure is about 10%.

An extraordinary number of doom-laden prophecies have been made about the supposed linguistic evils unleashed by texting. Sadly, its creative potential has been virtually ignored. But five years of research has at last begun to dispel the myths. The most important finding is that texting does not erode children's ability to read and write. On the contrary, literacy improves. The latest studies (from a team at Coventry University) have found strong positive links between the use of text language and the skills underlying success in standard English in pre-teenage children. The more abbreviations in their messages, the higher they scored on tests of reading and vocabulary. The children who were better at spelling and writing used the most textisms. And the younger they received their first phone, the higher their scores.

Children could not be good at texting if they had not already developed considerable literacy awareness. Before you can write and play with abbreviated forms, you need to have a sense of how the sounds of your language relate to the letters. You need to know that there are such things as alternative spellings. If you are aware that your texting behaviour is different, you must have already intuited that there is such a thing as a standard. If you are using such abbreviations as lol and brb ("be right back"), you must have developed a sensitivity to the communicative needs of your textees.

Some people dislike texting. Some are bemused by it. But it is merely the latest manifestation of the human ability to be linguistically creative and to adapt language to suit the demands of diverse settings. There is no disaster pending. We will not see a

new generation of adults growing up unable to write proper English. The language as a whole will not decline. In texting what we are seeing, in a small way, is language in evolution.