International A Level
ENGLISH LANGUAGE

AS and A Level

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Contents

This book is divided into chapters, each of which covers a distinctive topic area or skill that is developed and assessed in the AQA specification. Key features of the book include the following:

Chapter aims: Each chapter has a clear statement of aims at the start.

Key term: This label indicates that a term is important, because it will recur throughout the course. The first time that such a term is used in the book, it appears in bold and is defined briefly in the margin. Many subsequent appearances of each key term throughout the rest of the book have also been emboldened, to emphasize that they are key terms.

Glossary: A glossary at the back of the book (pages 227–233) lists all of the key terms, with their definitions, for easy reference.

Activity: This book explains and teaches concepts and ideas, and the topics covered by each chapter should be clear from the aims listed at the beginning. But in order to learn thoroughly, you need to try things out for yourself and have hands-on experience. Activities have been included throughout this book that will allow you to develop transferable skills.

Feedback: This is available near the end of the book for most of the activities (pages 214–226). The activities feedback indicates the main points that would be likely to arise in a good answer. However, feedback has not been provided for more open-ended activities. All activities with feedback provided at the end of the book include the following icon: **A**

Research idea: This offers suggestions for further work, which will enable you to go into an area in more detail, or to embark on the type of study suitable for the coursework component. A research idea cannot be completed immediately; it requires independent work and takes time to plan and develop.

Link: This feature indicates the ways in which your work on a topic may link to information online.

Remember: This prompt will give you advice on developing good study skills.

Did you know?: This feature introduces interesting facts that will be helpful to your studies.

Review your learning: A few short questions or tasks at the end of each chapter will remind you what you have learned and help you to summarize it.

References and Further reading: References enable you to follow up the work of researchers and writers. The name of the researcher or writer is given in the text and the full references are listed alphabetically at the back of the book (pages 234–236). The 'Further reading' section at the end of each chapter contains a list of texts that you will find useful when pursuing the subject further.

Index: An alphabetical list of topics is provided at the back of the book (pages 237–40). It will enable you to find passages and topics that you want to look at again.

This chapter will:

- explain 'language levels', which underpin the study of English Language in both school and university contexts

- provide some practical activities in order to show how the levels can be applied.

Did you know?

The language levels were given their name by a Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), who is often credited as the founder of the academic areas of **linguistics** and **semiotics** (at least in modern Europe).

Key terms

Linguistics. The academic study of language, including different languages.

Semiotics. The study of how signs and symbols work within human communication.

Phonetics / Phonology. The study of the sound system. Phonetics refers to the physical production and reception of sound, while phonology is a more abstract idea about all the sounds of a particular language.

Lexis. The vocabulary of a language.

Semantics. Semantics refers to the meanings of words and expressions. Semantics can also refer to meaning in a broader sense, i.e. the overall meaning of something. ▶

Language levels

The AS level and A level specification for English Language requires you to understand 'language levels'. This refers to the way in which language study has traditionally categorized language in order to make analysis easier.

When we use language, we don't separate it into parts – but in order to study language, we need to do that. The difference between using something and analysing it is similar in many other areas. For example, riding a bicycle certainly requires skill. But analysing how a bicycle works is a different kind of activity, involving looking in some detail at the mechanics of its parts.

Think of language levels, then, as a way to help you focus in on particular aspects of language. However, you still need to be able to keep a wider perspective as well. Language is for doing things, and for being someone. It is part of our thinking and our behaviour, as well as our individual and group identity. So the bicycle still needs to be something you can appreciate for its ability to get you around and give you pleasure, as well as being uniquely yours to display with pride. Language is a fascinating phenomenon that can tell us a lot about cultural history and diversity, and about power and influence.

The English Language AS level and A level specification is about analysing language and debating the issues surrounding it. It is also, crucially, about your own language use. Language is a creative tool that can be honed and sharpened so that you develop more control over your own language use, and more insights into why others use language in the way they do.

The AS level and A level specification requires understanding of the following language levels:

- **Phonetics and phonology:** how speech sounds and effects are articulated and analysed

- **Lexis and semantics:** meaning at word and phrase level

- **Grammar:** the structural patterns and shapes of English at sentence, clause, phrase and word level

- **Pragmatics:** contextual aspects of language use, such as inference and assumed meaning

- **Discourse:** extended stretches of communication occurring in different genres, modes and contexts

- **Graphology:** the visual aspects of textual design and appearance.

The levels identified above have to be understood, but not simply for their own sake. They have to be applied to language data and to language issues. They form the basis for your study of how users of English vary their language according to a range of social factors, and how language varies according to context. They can also be helpful in thinking about your own writing skills, and the different aspects that you need to bear in mind when shaping your own communication.

Phonetics and phonology

This level is all about sound. Phonetics refers to the study of sounds on an individual basis.

This can be studied at a very detailed level. For example, we might think that we recognize a /t/ sound as an unchanging, single sound. But in fact, it changes considerably, depending on where it occurs. For example, when /t/ is at the beginning of the word, as in 'top' and 'tin', it is typically pronounced with more explosive force than it is when at the end of words, as in 'hot' and 'pot'.

You will not need this level of detail in your A level work: what is known as a phonemic level is enough. This means a more general look at the individual sounds that underlie spoken English. A **phoneme** is an individual sound, studied without all of its complex possible variations.

The phonemes or sounds that a speaker makes can be transcribed by using a special alphabet designed for that purpose. It is called a **phonemic alphabet**, and a commonly used version has been set out below. Don't be confused by the fact that some common alphabetic letters are used for some sounds. These relate to the sound made when the underlined part of the word is said.

single vowels

iː	ɪ	ʊ	uː
sheep	ship	book	shoot
e	ə	ɜː	ɔː
left	teacher	her	door
æ	ʌ	ɑː	ɒ
hat	up	far	on

diphthongs

ɪə	eɪ	
here	wait	
ʊə	ɔɪ	əʊ
tourist	coin	show
eə	aɪ	aʊ
hair	like	mouth

consonants

p	b	t	d	tʃ	dʒ	k	g
pea	boat	tree	dog	cheese	joke	coin	go
f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ
free	video	thing	this	see	zoo	sheep	television
m	n	ŋ	h	l	r	w	j
mouse	now	thing	hope	love	run	we	you

A phonemic alphabet chart

It is important to understand why a special alphabet for sound is required, which can be simply illustrated by showing the mismatch between the symbols we use for writing and the sounds we make. There is no straightforward like-for-like relationship between sounds and written letters in English, because there are 26 written symbols and roughly 44 sounds (depending on the speaker's accent). So the same written symbols can produce some very different sounds.

Key terms

Grammar. The structural aspects of language that tie items together. Grammar includes **syntax**, or word order, and **morphology**, or the elements added to words to show their grammatical role (such as 'ed' to indicate the past tense of a verb).

Pragmatics. Assumptions made about what is meant, or the inferences drawn, from what is said or written.

Graphology. All the visual aspects of textual design, including colour, typeface, layout, images and logos.

Phonemic alphabet. An alphabet for transcribing general sounds, suitable for a specific language. An individual sound is called a **phoneme**.

Did you know?

At university level and in professional work – such as Speech and Language Therapy, Forensic Linguistics, Accent Coaching (e.g. for actors), and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) – phonetics can involve some very scientific work looking at how individual sounds are pronounced in specific contexts.

Activity

Transcribe the following words by saying them aloud and then writing down their pronunciation, using the phonemic chart above. When you have finished, look at how 'ough' has been pronounced in each case: how does it vary?

- through
- thorough
- cough
- thought
- bough
- dough

A version of the chart above can be found online at http://www.phonemicchart.com. Explore the links on the site to get a clickable chart, with sound. Try writing some English words and getting back a phonemic version.

A

Key terms

Phonological system. The system of sounds within any language variety.

World Englishes. Varieties of English that are used in different countries around the world (mainly in areas that were formerly colonized, such as India and Singapore). These countries have their own version of Standard English.

Repertoire. The range of language forms or styles used by a speaker.

Received Pronunciation (RP). An accent traditionally associated with high social status. 'Received' refers to the idea of social acceptance in official circles.

Prosody. Prosody is the melody that our voices create via prosodic aspects, such as rhythm and intonation.

Paralanguage. Aspects of an individual's vocal expression (such as whispering, laughter, breathiness).

Non-verbal behaviour. Communication that takes place via the body (such as gesture and facial expression).

Although the study of English Language focuses centrally on English, phonology differs from phonetics by looking at the sound system of a whole language, and comparing it with others. There are some important applications of this knowledge. For example, the study of children's language involves looking at how a child learns the **phonological system** of the language around it (see Chapter 5). Different languages, including different Englishes, will have different phonological systems, so speakers have to adapt when they move from one language or variety to another (see Chapter 6, for more information on **World Englishes**). Even speakers within one language may have different phonological **repertoires**. For example, some speakers in northern areas of the UK have no phoneme /ʌ/, which is the sound that **Received Pronunciation (RP)** speakers will use when they say the word 'up' (northern-accented speakers would say /ʊp/). The English phonemic alphabet is based on the RP accent. That doesn't mean that RP is any more 'correct' from a linguistic perspective than any other accent, although traditionally it has had higher status than other accents. There is more about this area of language in Chapter 4.

Phonetics and phonology refer to how words are pronounced, but there are other important aspects of how speakers communicate. One important area is **prosody**, which is about sound – but not individual sounds. Prosodic features make up what you might call the soundtrack behind the words we speak: areas such as rhythm, pitch, volume and intonation are all included. These are hard to mark in transcriptions, but sometimes even being able to mark and understand one or two features can be useful, because they can be important contributors to meaning.

There are also aspects of **paralanguage** that can be very significant, such as voice quality and other vocal effects (for example, whispering and laughter) and **non-verbal behaviour** (such as eye contact and facial expression).

There is no better way to learn about all of these aspects than to record and transcribe some speech. Although during the course of your studies, you will be able to work from original speech recordings, in exams you will be working from transcripts alone. Paying attention to those things that a transcriber chooses to mark is therefore important; and the more you have experienced the process of making your own recordings, the more you will be able to 'hear' the transcript from some of its markings.

Activity

Below is a transcript of a brief conversation held between four strangers on a bus. The conversation starts as the bus is parked on a riverside quay, and then continues as the bus starts up and moves off. A, B and C are local residents; D is an American visitor.

Read through the transcript and focus on the following aspects of prosody:

- How do you explain the emphasis given to some of the words?
- Why do you think there are points where there are significant pauses?
- Why does laughter occur at a particular point?

Now thinking more broadly about speech in general:

- How do you explain the simultaneous speech?
- How much of this would you have been able to understand without being given some contextual detail about the speakers and their environment?
- How much of the conversation involves speakers using sentences?
- How important do you think non-verbal aspects would have been?
- How characteristic is this example of speech between strangers in your own community?

A

Bus conversation

A: it was thundering this morning (.) here
B: sorry?
A: thundering and lightning |here
B: |yeah it woke me up
A: [*bus starts up*] here we go
C: nobody on the quay today
A: no (.) a few boats out
C: there were kayaks out yesterday
D: is there usually a lot of river traffic?
A: oh yes |a lot of families with children
B: |leisure stuff you can hire boats
A: you can go up to the double locks by river boat
D: you can go through the |locks?
A: |yes yes you can go through
D: so what does **quay** mean?
B: |waterfront
A: |by **boat** (.) by **quay**
D: I associate that word with water (.) but I didn't know why
B: I think it means a dock a **dock**
B: what do you say in the States then?
D: we say a **dock** or a **port** (.) something like that
B: well this was the port it was a big wool trade area
D: oh yes there's the Custom House
B: they had to weigh the wool and big ships came in here (2.0) in the tourist office there's a big board with a register of all the stuff that came in and went out (1.0) some strange things (1.0) **bones** and **hooves** heh heh stuff like that (.) really **odd** things
D: oh heh heh was that was that for the factories for glue?
B: could have been (.) yeah

Transcription key

(.) indicates a normal pause

(1.0) Numbers in brackets indicate length of pauses in seconds

Bold indicates a stressed syllable

Vertical lines show where simultaneous speech occurs

heh heh indicates laughter

A questioning intonation is marked with ?

[ ] square brackets indicate contextual information.

How is phonetic knowledge useful?

Knowing about sounds and spoken language helps you to understand some of the differences between speech and writing, which are important insights for any work on mode. By the end of this course, you will have a better understanding of **language acquisition**, because you will appreciate what is required both in learning to make sounds and in learning how to read and write. You will also appreciate what it means to shift between sound systems when people learn more than one language. You will also be able to describe some important aspects of language variation, particularly **accent variation**. This will help you to describe some of the characteristics of different World Englishes. Exploring sounds could be an area of coursework exploration (Paper 4b), or a possible approach to data in the equivalent examination (Paper 4a).

Understanding phonology will also give you some insights into public attitudes towards language differences, especially the ways in which some people might **stereotype** others. Picking on a distinctive sound used by particular groups of speakers, such as people from a specific region, has long been an aspect of stereotyping. Language is an important aspect of identity, and language differences can be used both to include and to exclude. Like forms of dress and appearance more generally, the way someone sounds can form the basis for attitudes about them and behaviour towards them.

Sound is also an important aspect of human connection in general. Hearing someone's voice is different from reading their writing, because it connects us closely with the person. We all have skills in hearing clues about how a speaker might be feeling. We differentiate speech from music, but in a way we all sing tunes when we speak. Performers, including performers of literary works, spend many hours crafting their sounds. Both poetry and drama can involve performances that draw power from the spoken voice. The same is true of **oratory**: making speeches is a craft that is as much about how something is said as what is said.

Representing sounds in normal writing

Not everyone who tries to represent speech or suggest sounds will use a phonemic alphabet. But that doesn't mean that they simply ignore sound. Good writers know that we read with an 'inner ear' and 'hear' the voices that are being suggested on the page. This shows that readers are active, and that making sense of language involves the receivers of messages as well as the senders. It also shows that although writing is not simply speech written down, speech and writing may be more closely connected than are sometimes thought.

Sometimes writers, such as literary authors, writers of comics, and users of **new communication tools** – which includes most of us – will try to suggest sounds by manipulating the conventional written alphabet. A linguist researching the nature of phone texts (Thurlow, 2003) claims that **phonological approximation** is common in SMS usage. By this he means that people sometimes try to personalize their messages by manipulating spellings to suggest pronunciation.

Activity

Phone texting shares many features of language use with other digital contexts, such as computer-based 'chat'. The dialogue below is an extract from a chatroom conversation between two university students called Natalie and Simon. They were part of a research project on how people adapt their language when using new forms of communication. In the chatroom, there was no sound, so the participants had try to get their writing to represent the sounds they would have used in spoken language. Natalie wants to convey to Simon a certain way of saying 'yes'. To start with, she mis-spells 'yeah' as 'yeak'. Can you work out the sounds that are being described here?

Natalie and Simon were interviewed at the end of the research, and their comments about what they were trying to do are at the back of the book.

A

Natalie>>yeak
Natalie>>sorry yeah
Simon>>why yeah
Natalie>>i dont mean it like yeah man i mean it like yeay
Simon>>what is the difference
Natalie>>it's happier and less cheesy
Simon>>and that is worthy of a yehah

(Goddard, 2005).

Below are some further examples from the research project, of students using the same 'chat' tool. The students are all shaping language in order to achieve particular effects. The examples below would be classified as **response cries**, because they are all responses to something happening in their immediate environment. For example, the laughter is triggered by humorous remarks from the other participants. Speech noises and vocal effects often accompany talk in face-to-face conversations, but it is difficult to translate these forms into writing. As you saw with Natalie and Simon, there is no official way to spell many items, because they do not count as 'words' and are therefore not listed in dictionaries.

Key term

Response cries. Spontaneous cries expressing emotion (e.g. surprise, shock, joy).

Activity

None of the participants below uses the phonemic alphabet but they are all trying to suggest aspects of spoken language. Can you identify what they were trying to do? Some context has been provided to help you.

- These occurred after another participant said they had to leave the chat site early:
  NO NO NO NO NO!!!!
  don't go pleaseeeeeeeeee
- This occurred when many people were trying to communicate all at once:
  sssllllllooooowww
- This person was asked if they wanted to go out for dinner:
  ooh…erm…flibble…maybe…don't know…aahhh…

- These are examples of laughter from different participants in a variety of contexts. Which would you use, if any, and for what intended meaning?

  ha ha ha

  he he he

  heh heh

  tee hee

  oh har har

  a-hah-hah-hah

  hee hee hee ha ha ha hooooo hoo

  A

Is language really arbitrary?

Linguists claim that there is actually no relationship between the sounds we make – or the written symbols we produce – and the thing being described. Language is said to be **arbitrary** – the relationship between any word and its **referent** is only there through social convention. Linguists turn to examples such as those in the James Chapman cartoon below to show social convention at work: different languages can use some very different words to describe the same sound. There cannot therefore be any logical or natural connection between sounds and how they are represented in language.

> **Key terms**
>
> **Arbitrary.** Having no real connection beyond that of social convention.
>
> **Referent.** The thing or person being referred to.

HOW TO SOUND LIKE A DOG IN 14 LANGUAGES by JAMES CHAPMAN

Yet we have a whole array of terms that we seem to believe echo the noises they describe. These words are called **onomatopoeic** and examples include 'crash', 'thud', 'bang', 'tinkle'. Terms such as these, and the deliberate grouping together of sounds to suggest certain ideas, show the operation of **sound symbolism**. This area – the suggestive power of certain sounds – will certainly be something to consider when doing text analysis work, as will the idea of **constructed dialogue**. You would be unlikely to see the real conversation you studied previously (page 17) appearing in a piece of fiction in transcript form. We are more used to seeing dialogue in fiction presented like the example below, which is from a novel (*Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold). The extract describes how a father attempts to talk to his daughter, Lindsey, who is upset and angry. Note how much of the meaning in the extract – particularly how we 'hear' the voices in the narrative – relies on descriptions of context and non-verbal behaviour, rather than on the dialogue itself.

> My father listened to Lindsey in her room. Bang, the door was slammed shut. Thump, her books were thrown down. Squeak, she fell onto her bed. Her clogs, boom, boom, were kicked off onto the floor. A few minutes later he stood outside her door.
> "Lindsey", he said upon knocking.
> There was no answer.
> "Lindsey, can I come in?"
> "Go away", came her resolute answer.
> "Come on now, honey", he pleaded.
> "Go away!"

Lexis and semantics

This level of language is all about vocabulary (lexis) and the different phrases and expressions (semantics) that help to shape meanings.

Words have different functions

The study of lexis is about far more than just what words are said to mean in a dictionary. For a start, words have different functions. Some words have a grammatical function, which means that they help with the structure of a sentence or utterance. Other words have more content and direct meaning, in the sense that they refer to something in the world. Grammatical words may look empty of meaning compared with content words, but they have essential functions in tying a text together. For example, in the Jo Malone perfume advertisement opposite, the grammatical words are 'and' (and the & symbol, which stands for 'and'), 'of', 'a', 'at', 'with', 'on' and 'an' – all of which tell us something about how the content words, which are all the other words, relate to each other. For example, 'a' and 'an' both tell us that a single item is being referred to; 'and' and 'with' tell us that items accompany each other; 'at' and 'on' tell us something about time and place; 'of' tells us about **constituency**. Without these little words, the text would just be a string of unconnected items.

Key terms

Onomatopoeia. The way in which some words appear to echo the sounds they describe, such as 'crash' and 'thud'.

Sound symbolism. The way in which sounds are used to represent ideas. For example, in onomatopoeia, where sounds represent noises. There is no logical connection between the sounds and the ideas they represent.

Constructed dialogue. Dialogue that is artificially created, rather than occurring naturally. For example, in novels or playscripts.

Key term

Constituency. In language study, what something consists of. A constituent is an ingredient.