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- Graduating with a 99.95, Thushan achieved a Premier's Award in English Language, whilst Lauren has achieved a Linguistics major with high distinction.

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# **ATAR** **Notes**

VCE English Language Units 3&4  
Complete Course Notes

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# Preface

Welcome to English Language! This subject has a reputation for being 'the science-y English,' and it's a well-deserved reputation because much of what you will do in this course revolves around the function and composition of communication. However, uniquely among English subjects, your knowledge of such concepts has to be demonstrated in many different ways. From analysing data in short answer questions to discussing and contrasting evidence in extended response essays, there is a wide variety of skills that English Language will test.

With that in mind, these notes are designed to cover the content required to do well in assessment tasks, as well as a few tips for structuring essays and writing with clarity. There are also a range of contemporary examples and references for you to use in your essays.

First, we're going to spend some time going over what you need to know about the different language sub-systems at a Year 12 level; then, we'll look at the Unit 3 and 4 outlines and how you can begin to apply your theoretical knowledge. Finally, there'll be some exam revision tips, plus some appendices to help you collate examples and see what they look like in the form of some high scoring essays.

Best of luck with your English Language studies!

— Lauren White and Thushan Hettige

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## **Part I**

# **Metalanguage**

## Section 1

# Phonetics and Phonology

This sub-system is concerned with the actual act of speaking and producing sound. **Phonetics** is the study of these speech sounds, and **phonology** is the study of the patterns and organisation of speech sounds. Think of it like phonetics being based on the individual 'ingredients' of language, whereas phonology is about language 'recipes' and the way these ingredients combine together.

In order to break down sound production, we first need to understand the process of phonation, which can be broken into three stages:

1. Initiation
2. Phonation
3. Articulation

**Initiation:** is the mechanism that creates an air stream to 'get air moving' and begin the process of producing sound. The diaphragm, ribs, and lungs all work together to push air through the vocal tract where it is later converted into particular sounds. In other words, initiation is what happens before air reaches the glottis. There are a couple of different kinds of initiation airstream mechanics, though the only one we need to worry about is the **pulmonic egressive** mechanic, which involves air being pushed out of the lungs.

**KEY POINT :**

Note that some of the more technical components of speech production have been listed here for the purposes of boosting your knowledge, but you will not need to draw from these processes in assessment tasks unless you are going into phonetics in a lot of depth for one of your examples. Some of the information here and in later chapters will likely be a step above some textbooks and what your teacher takes you through in class, but if you're unfamiliar with some of this content, don't stress! A lot of this theoretical stuff is designed to *augment* your analysis, but it's not absolutely essential that you understand the more complex elements of linguistic features!

**Phonation:** is what happens when we reach the glottis and sound travels through the vocal folds. Here, we can either create '**voiced**' sounds by vibrating our vocal folds, or '**unvoiced**' sounds that have no vibration. The best demonstration of this is to hold two fingers to your throat just above your collarbone, and then produce the sound 's' for a few seconds. Now switch to pronouncing 'z.' Keep going back and forth between these two sounds, and you should notice that your throat vibrates when pronouncing the 'z.' This is because 'z' is a voiced consonant, whereas 's' is unvoiced. This will become important later when we look at the IPA Chart in more detail!

**KEY POINT :**

If you see the word 'voicing' in relation to phonetics, it *always* refers to this kind of vibration; it has nothing to do with the act of speaking (i.e. producing the sound 'd' requires voicing, but you can't call an utterance like 'I want to go to the shops' an example of voicing just because it involves using your voice). The technical term 'voicing' has a very particular meaning, so try to avoid using it as a synonym for 'speaking' or 'uttering.'

**Articulation:** is the most complicated part of the speech process as it involves the interaction between the tongue, lips, jaw, and basically the whole oral cavity in producing sound. There are two components of articulation that are important here:

- Place of articulation:** refers to the place in the oral cavity where obstruction is occurring. For instance, when you produce the sound 'p,' your lips must close to form an obstruction, so 'p' is a bilabial consonant. Whereas, if you pronounce the letter 'f,' your top teeth touch your bottom lip, which makes it a labio-dental consonant. This also works for vowels too, though in these cases it's not about where the obstruction occurs (because vowels by their very nature can't involve obstruction) but rather the position of the tongue. Try to make the sound 'i' as in 'pit' and you'll notice your tongue goes to the front of your mouth and your lips widen, but make the sound 'o' as in 'or' and your tongue goes way back with your mouth taking a rounded shape. Hence, 'i' is a close, unrounded vowel, and 'o' is a back, rounded vowel.
- Manner of articulation:** refers to the different ways in which different parts of the oral cavity interact with one another. For example, when you produce the sound 't,' your tongue touches the roof of your mouth, and then releases (known as plosive articulation) By contrast, the 's' sound has the same place of articulation, but a different manner because air flows through a small channel, creating a hissing and prolonged sound (known as fricative articulation.) The different manners of articulation are explained in the following table.

Class of Articulation	Manner of Articulation	Examples
<b>Obstruents:</b> sounds that are formed by obstructing airflow.	<b>Plosives:</b> sounds that involve a complete blocking or occlusion of airflow.	'd' as in 'day'
	<b>Fricatives:</b> sounds that involve pushing air through a narrow channel in the vocal tract.	'v' as in 'vase'
	<b>Affricates:</b> sounds that begin as a plosive but then become fricatives.	'ch' as in 'church'
<b>Sonorants:</b> sounds that involve partial obstruction.	<b>Nasals:</b> sounds that involve complete occlusion of the oral tract and pushing air out of the nasal cavity (i.e. the nostrils.)	'm' as in 'mail'
	<b>Flaps/ taps:</b> sounds that involve a very quick connection between articulators (i.e. like the tongue tapping the roof of the mouth.)	'd' as in 'ladder'
	<b>Approximants:</b> sounds that are halfway between fricatives and vowels.	'w' as in 'wave'
	<b>Liquids:</b> sounds that are vowel-like but still involve partial occlusion.	'l' as in 'lid'
	<b>Vowels:</b> sounds that don't involve obstruction in the vocal tract.	'e' as in 'pet'
	<b>Semivowels/ glides:</b> sounds that are similar to vowels but behave like consonants in terms of syllable construction.	'y' as in 'yard'

## 1.1 Phones, phonemes, and allophones

So far, we've just been using the general and rather colloquial word 'sound' to refer to the kinds of noises involved in speech production, but now we can get into the more technical terminology. For starters, a **phone** refers to the **smallest structural unit of sound** that is produced in an utterance. When talking about multiple languages, it's often more useful to refer to phones, or to do what's called 'phonetic transcription' where the sound segments are broken up and expressed in [square brackets].

**Phonemes**, on the other hand, are specific to certain languages and are the **smallest unit of sound that can produce contrasts**. For example, in English, the words 'mat' and 'bat' differ in the initial sound it takes to produce them, which means that /m/ and /b/ are phonemes of English. Phonemic transcription is typically done with /slashes/ and most of what we do in this subject happens on a phonemic level. Whereas, the word 'mat' and 'mmmat' still mean the same thing in English. If someone said 'mmmat' by holding the 'm' for slightly longer, you'd still know what the word meant. So a short and long 'm' are *not* different phonemes in English, because there is no contrast in meaning between them.

**Allophones** are **sound sets within languages that change depending on their environment**. For instance, try and pluralise the following three words: *cat, dog, horse*. Easy, right? Cats, dogs, and horses; we just add the letter 's.' But notice that when we pronounce these words, the final sound is different each time, *cats, dogz, horsez*. How can that be if we're adding the same letter and creating the same plural effect? Well, in English, /s/ /z/ and /ez/ are allophones of one another, because they perform exactly the same function, but they occur in different circumstances (i.e. /s/ occurs after unvoiced consonants, /z/ occurs after voiced ones, and /ez/ occurs after sibilant consonants and affricates).

## 1.2 The IPA

In order to properly document language, the English alphabet (also known as the **orthography** of English) isn't really sufficient. As we've just shown, the letter 's' can be pronounced in different ways depending on its environment, and because English is *not* a phonetic language, meaning that there's no way to look at a word and instantly know how it is pronounced (or vice versa; we can't hear a word and instantly know how to spell it).

In order to get around this problem, as well as address the complexities of trying to compare languages that use different orthographies, linguists developed the **International Phonetic Alphabet** in an effort to standardise analysis of speech sounds. From this, they created a chart of symbols which maps out all the different sounds in the world's languages using letters and symbols. The IPA also contains several **diacritics** which are the little extra bits that add more information like t̪j̪š.

Whilst we don't use many diacritics in English orthography (aside from in loan words like naïve or fiancé) they play a crucial role in allowing us to distinguish between different variations of sounds.

### KEY POINT :

There is a website hosted by a Canadian University that lets you listen to all the IPA symbols here: <https://web.uvic.ca/ling/resources/ipa/charts/IPAlab/IPAlab.htm>. You don't really need to be familiar with all of them as the symbols for Australian English transcription are sufficient for the purposes of the English Language course, but if you're ever unsure of what a symbol means, that site should help.

## 1.3 Australian English transcription

The symbols necessary for the transcription (i.e. writing down the pronunciation) of Australian English are shown below, starting with a table of consonants. Where symbols appear in pairs, the one on the left is **unvoiced**, and the right one is **voiced**.

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
<b>Plosives</b>	p, b		t, d				k, g	
<b>Nasals</b>	m			n			ŋ	
<b>Fricatives</b>		f, v	θ, ð	s, z	ʃ, ʒ			h
<b>Affricates</b>					tʃ, dʒ			
<b>Approximants</b>				r		j	w	
<b>Lateral Approximants</b>				l				

Vowels are divided into two categories: **monophthongs** which are vowel sounds that have one place of articulation, and **diphthongs** which occur over two different places of articulation. Australian English monophthongs and diphthongs are shown in the following tables:

Monophthongs														
a	a:	æ	e	e:	ɜ:	ə	i	i:	o:	ɔ:	ʊ	ʌ	ə:	ʊ:
hud	hard	had	head	hair	heard	ahead	hid	heed	hoard	hot	hoot	hood		

Diphthongs						
æɪ	æ	ɔɪ	ʊə	əʊ	æ	ɪə
hay	high	ahoy	tour	hotel	how	hear

There are also a few examples of **triphthongs** with three different places of articulation (like in 'hour' or 'fire'), but these are much rarer and tend to just involve multiple vowel symbols run together rather than entirely new representations. Most of the consonant symbols are pronounced in the same way as their orthographic equivalents, though there are some differences:

ŋ	'ng'	song
θ	'th'	thin
ð	'th'	that
ʃ	'sh'	show
ʒ	'zh'	measure
tʃ	'ch'	chapel
dʒ	'j'	jug
r	'r'	red
j	'y'	yes

**KEY POINT :**

It can seem kind of daunting at first, but memorising IPA symbols becomes much easier if you're exposed to them often and can integrate them in short answer questions and essays where appropriate. Resources that explain each manner and place of articulation in more detail may also aid you here, but if you're not up for rote learning all this information, just keep these tables or some charts handy and refer to them when needed. For instance, if you were writing an essay on attitudes towards Australian varieties of English and wanted to discuss the difference between cultivated (i.e. 'posh') and broad (i.e. 'bogan') accents, you could just memorise the fact that in a cultivated accent, the word 'mouth' is pronounced [maʊθ] whereas in a broad accent, it's [mɛ:xθ]. Hence, you can just learn strings of symbols that fit the examples you discuss, rather than having to worry too much about learning the whole IPA and all the possible combinations of diacritics.

## 1.4 Phonetic features

In addition to the conventional sounds that form words we use to communicate, there are also other phonetic features or types of noises we can make in order to convey meaning. For instance, coughing in a certain way can be used to announce your presence or draw attention to yourself in the middle of a conversation, or a long, loud sigh could be used to signify boredom and frustration. Laughter is another particularly powerful and varied phonetic tool – think about all the different kinds of laughing that are possible in discourse; you could give a short 'haha' with a little exhaling of breath to indicate mild amusement, or a prolonged 'haaa-haaa' as a way of mocking someone (think Nelson Muntz from *The Simpsons*.)

Phonetic features can convey anything from camaraderie to hatred, and it's tough to list all possible combinations or meanings here because of how contextual these are. Luckily, your native intuitions should help when dealing with these kinds of utterances, and they're best discussed in conjunction with other more overt forms of communication like words or gestures.

## 1.5 Phonological processes

Within phonology, there are a variety of processes whereby speakers modify sounds, mostly to make things easier to articulate. All languages must strike a balance between the ease of articulation and the discernibility of sounds; it would be 'easier' for us if all of our sounds were just basic grunts or low vowels, but it would be very difficult to actually understand what was being said, and our communication probably couldn't be very intricate, but if every sound was incredibly complicated to produce, we'd be able to have a much wider range of phonemes at our disposal, but communication would be really difficult.

To achieve this balance, speakers try to alter sounds to make them suit their environments. The most important of these processes is assimilation, which accounts for most of the changes in English, though there are several others that are worth noting.

**Assimilation:** is the means by which speakers make one sound segment phonologically similar to an adjacent segment. There are two main sub-sections of assimilation:

- **Regressive/ anticipatory assimilation:** where the following segment triggers a change in the one before it. For example, when we say the word 'anthem,' we usually turn the /n/ which is usually an alveolar nasal into a dental nasal (i.e. say the word 'anthem,' then say the word 'ant'; notice how your tongue touches your teeth in 'anthem?') because of the dental fricative /θ/ that follows it. This makes the word easier to pronounce because the tongue doesn't have to do so much work moving around the mouth, but the word 'anthem' still sounds fine to English speakers despite the fact that the /n/ has been 'dentalised' (i.e. its place of articulation has changed to the dental area). Other shifts in the place of articulation are also possible (e.g. palatalisation, where a sound becomes more palatal, or velarisation, where a sound becomes velar, etc.)
- **Progressive and carryover assimilation:** is the opposite of regressive/ anticipatory assimilation, and involves a preceding segment triggering a change in what follows. In English, this usually involves voicing and devoicing sounds to make them fit their environment (as in the word 'liked' where the word-final /d/ becomes a devoiced /t/ to correspond with the unvoiced velar /k/.)

**Dissimilation:** is the opposite of assimilation, meaning that it involves speakers changing segments to make them more phonologically different so that they're easier to understand. For instance, the word 'particular' is usually pronounced /paticular/ in Australian English where we dissimilate the 'r.'

**Elision/ deletion:** is similar to dissimilation, but involves dropping sound segments that hinder the process of articulation, like how 'temporary' can become /tempori/.

**Epenthesis:** involves adding a phoneme that breaks up segments to make them more cogent, like how 'something' can be pronounced /sumpthing/ with an 'epethesised' or added /p/.

**Metathesis:** refers to the 'switching' of sounds and syllables, like how 'ask' is sometimes pronounced 'arks' in variants of English.

**Lenition:** is very common in Australian English, and involves turning consonants into weaker (or, as some would say, lazier) forms. In particular, our dental plosives ('t's and 'd's) become taps or flaps, as in 'water' and 'ladder.'

**Vowel reduction:** is exactly what it sounds like – speakers leaving off vowels to make articulation easier (e.g. for many speakers, the two words 'Rosa's roses' will sound exactly the same because the 'a' and 'e' are both being reduced.)

**Insertion:** involves adding a sound where there wouldn't normally be one; as in the pluralised form of 'bus,' where we add an /ez/ to give 'buses' instead of 'bus-s.' This is distinct from epenthesis in that epenthesis involves breaking up segments that are either too similar or too distinct from one another, whereas insertion isn't dependent on the environment on either side - it's more like attaching an extra sound before or after another one.

## 1.6 Phonological patterning

Patterns in phonology are often seen as a way of conveying additional meaning, particularly in written discourse like poetry. Below is a brief overview of common phonological patterns.

**Alliteration:** sequences of words that use the same consonant sound at the beginning (e.g. 'tricky Tracy tweeted tactlessly.')

**Assonance:** sequences of words that use the same vowel sound (e.g. 'a fat cat sat on the mat.')

**Consonance:** sequences of words that contain alliteration within them (e.g. 'think tank').

**Sibilance:** words that sound 'hissy' (e.g. 'snakes slithering and shimmying upstairs.')

**Onomatopoeia:** words that sound like the thing they describe (e.g. 'buzz,' 'crack,' 'fizz,' etc.)

**Rhythm:** patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables (e.g. 'shall I compare thee to a summer's day?')

**Rhyme:** recurrent syllables of similar sounds, usually in poetic verse (e.g. 'baa baa black sheep, have you any wool? Yes sir, yes sir, three bags full.')

## 1.7 Prosodic features

The final component of phonology involves **prosody**, which pertains to the elements of sound production that occur over multiple sound segments. If you've ever had a parent tell you that they're angry not because of '*what* you said, but *how* you said it,' then you know exactly what prosodic features are all about. Some of the terminology can be a bit confusing here, though, so be sure to distinguish the colloquial or vernacular understanding of things like 'pitch' and 'stress' from the formal phonetic features of 'pitch' and 'stress,' otherwise things can get really messy.

**Tone:** is the use of pitch in language to create 'high' and 'low' or 'rising' or 'falling' sounds that make certain sounds seem higher or lower depending on their pronunciation. Some languages, most notable Chinese, use pitch as a means of distinguishing between words (e.g. the word 'mā' with a high 'a' sound means 'mother,' whereas 'mă' with an 'a' that starts low, dips, then becomes high, means 'horse'). However, English doesn't really make much use of tone, preferring to use intonation instead.

**Intonation:** is the change in pitch that occurs over the course of an utterance. A typical example of this is the rising intonation we use to indicate a question. This is actually a surprisingly important component of our communication, and when someone doesn't make much use of intonation, they become noticeably 'monotone' or monotonous (like a really boring teacher whose voice puts you to sleep). Almost every sentence we speak has some kind of intonational inflection, and Australian English in particular has several interesting tonal phenomena which we will discuss in more detail later.

**Stress:** involves putting emphasis on particular syllables. The best example of this can be seen in words like 'conduct,' 'reject,' and 'rebel.' Did you read those words as verbs or nouns? Because your answer to that question will tell you which syllable you were stressing; for words like these, stressing the first syllable creates nouns, whereas stressing the second makes the word a verb. Note that primary stress is typically denoted with a ' mark, so 'reject is a noun, whereas *re*'ject is a verb.

**CASE SPACE :**

There is a suburb in Canberra called 'Manuka,' and curiously, people who are from Canberra will pronounce this name as 'MA-nu-ka' with the stress on the first syllable, whereas people from other states tend to pronounce it 'ma-NU-ka' with the stress on the second. Though this latter pronunciation would be more typical of stress patterns in English, linguists have determined the word to have been derived from Maori where it is written with a long 'a' (i.e. [ma:nū:ka]) where the stress is on the first syllable. In the words of Dr Pauline Bryant, "what becomes the settled pronunciation is really the right one, the one locals use."

**Volume:** is the most straightforward prosodic feature as it refers to the loudness of speech. Obviously this is only possible in oral communication, though interestingly, some linguists have argued the ALL CAPS phenomenon of online discourse is like a written form of verbal shouting. A loud volume tends to indicate extreme emotion of some kind, whereas hushed speech connotes secrecy or illicitness, though the meaning of volume is often highly contextual.

**Pauses:** are more important than they seem, though they aren't what most people first think of when they're discussing and analysing discourse. But in Mathematics, the number 0 plays a significant part in acting as a place holder and conveying information; it doesn't just mean 'nothing' (otherwise the numbers 12 and 1002 would be the same.) Likewise, the pauses in our speech are crucial parts of our language toolkit. It's how we distinguish 'that's tough' from 'that stuff,' for instance, and we can even express emotions by elongating pauses (i.e. as though speaking very slowly to someone very stupid) or omitting pauses and merging words to create a very informal dialogue (i.e. rushing sounds like 'how are you' becoming 'howarya' or 'how is it going, mate?' becoming 'howzitgoimate?')

## Section 2

# Morphology and Lexicology

What is a word? That might sound like a straightforward question initially, but the answer is surprisingly complicated. For starters, how many words are in this underlined sentence? Ten, right?

How did you work that out? Well, you just count up the clusters of letters that are separated by spaces. Each of these 'words' have meaning (hence why 'gralschebliefscht' is not a 'word' in English.) So we can conclude that a 'word' is a **free meaningful form**.

Now how many words are in the following sentence? 'Mary and I wanted to tell Tom about our holiday, but she told me not to bother.' If we follow the same process, we get seventeen in total. However, the words 'Mary' and 'she' are referring to the same person. Also, 'I' and 'me' are basically the same word, albeit in a different case (more on this later!) And what about 'tell' and 'told' – are we counting those two words as separate ones because they're in a different tense? If that were true, wouldn't English dictionaries be about three times as long?

What's more, meaning doesn't just come from individual words since there are many additions and alterations we can make to change the overall sense. For instance, the word 'reheated' contains the word 'heat,' which is clearly doing most of the work here. If we got rid of the 're-' or the '-ed,' the general idea of 'heat' would still be there, and that's the main focus.

This means that 'heat' is a **base word**, and 're-' and '-ed' are added to it.

But what do we call these left over particles of words? It'd be wrong to call '-ed' a word, because it can't stand alone. It definitely has *meaning*, but that meaning has to *attach* to something else. Therefore, '-ed' is a **morpheme**, because it is the **smallest meaningful unit of language that cannot be further divided**. Hence:

- 'heat' is both a word, AND a morpheme, and cannot be divided into any other forms.
- 'he' and 'eat' are morphemes, but they are not related to this morpheme 'heat.'
- 're-' and '-ed' are morphemes, but NOT words.
- 'r,' 'e' and 'd' are NOT morphemes because they do not carry meaning in isolation.
- 'reheated' is one word, made up of THREE morphemes.

Throughout English Language, the term 'morpheme' is usually more helpful when being technical in describing data, though if you are using the word 'word,' be careful that you're not confusing it with a 'morpheme.'

- If a word consists of **one morpheme**, it is called a **simple word** (e.g. night, run, cruel).
- If a word consists of **more than one morpheme**, it is called a **complex word** (e.g. night-s, run-ning, cruel-ty).

But we can also start to explore the different *kinds* of morphemes in English, and the relationship between **words** and **morphemes**.

## 2.1 Types of morphemes

Broadly speaking, morphemes can be divided into two categories: **free** and **bound**. We'll make some further distinctions later, but for now, we need to understand what makes a morpheme free or bound.

Put simply, a free morpheme is one that can **stand alone and communicate meaning**. For example, I could write the morpheme 'dog,' and you would understand the concept I was trying to convey.

A bound morpheme, on the other hand, is one which **cannot stand alone, even though it communicates meaning**. For instance, I can't just say '-s' and have you understand my meaning. But if I say 'dogs,' then you know I'm trying to communicate the plural form of 'dog.' So the '-s' morpheme is performing an important function; it just can't do so unless it's attached to another morpheme.

It's also safe to say that these free morphemes tend to have **more semantic weight** (i.e. more crucial meaning) than bound morphemes. Morphemes like 'dog,' 'see' and 'red' all refer to distinct entities, actions, or properties, whereas things like 're-,' '-ing,' and '-ish' are more abstract, and are dependent on the meaning of the morphemes they attach to.

You may also see **free morphemes** called **roots** or **stems**, and the differences between these isn't really a big deal in Units 3 and 4. Technically, a root word is used to refer to the most basic, underlying morpheme in a word (e.g. 'happy' is the root in 'unhappiness') whereas a stem is used to refer to any string of words that have more morphemes attached to them (e.g. 'unhappy' is the stem in 'unhappiness.') It can be good to know how to use these terms appropriately, though the separation of free and bound morphemes is often sufficient for your analyses.

Where the distinction becomes useful is when a stem can't be a standalone word. For example, we know that 'transform' can be a standalone word, and 'transformation' is fine as well. But 'transformate' doesn't work, even though we need to add '-ate' to 'transform' before we add '-ion.' In these cases, 'transformate' would be a stem, but not a root word.

However, it's also possible to get **bound base morphemes** which can't be standalone words, but still carry significant meaning.

To demonstrate this, let's look at the word 'sympathy.' What would you say the root word in 'sympathy' was? It can't be 'sympath' since that can't stand alone as a word. And it can't be 'path' or 'pathy' for the same reason. And yet when we look at other words like 'apathy' or 'empathy,' we see the same underlying morpheme occurring.

Furthermore, if we consider words like 'psychopath' or 'pathology,' that same morpheme of 'path' is also present. In each of these cases, the 'path' morpheme has something to do with the idea of feelings, so what's going on with 'path?' Most morphemes like this are **loan words** (i.e. words borrowed from other languages that have made their way into the English lexicon) and in this case, 'path' comes from the Greek 'pathos,' which has to do with emotion and suffering. In English, we treat morphemes like 'path' as **bound bases** to account for the fact that they exhibit properties of free morphemes (in that they carry significant meaning) as well as bound morphemes (since they can't occur in isolation.)

Finally, we have the rest of the bound morphemes, like 're-' or '-ed' which affix themselves to other morphemes to create words. As such, we call these **affixes**, which can also be broken up into other, smaller sub-categories that we'll explore later.

Now we have three distinct morpheme types:

1. **Free base morphemes** (e.g. 'cook,' 'nine,' 'address').
2. **Bound base morphemes** (e.g. 'path' as in 'sympathy,' 'derm' as in 'dermatology,' 'dur' as in 'durable').
3. **Bound affix morphemes** (e.g. 'im-' as in 'improper,' 'un-' as in 'undo,' '-ify' as in 'purify').

So let's explore that third group.

## 2.2 Affixation

Affixation is the process by which **affixes** are added to morphemes. The main ones you need to know about for English Language are:

- **Prefixes:** which attach **before** or to the left of the base stem.
- **Suffixes:** which attach **after** or to the right side of the base stem.
- **Infixes:** which attach in the **middle** of the base stem.

The first two categories are much more substantial with prefixes including things like 'in-,' 'ex-' and, funnily enough 'pre-' whilst suffixes include '-er,' '-ion,' '-able.'

Infixes are very rare, but they can be seen when using expletive, colloquial language like 'abso-bloody-lutely' or 'un-freaking-believable.' Their distribution is also harder to pin down – where prefixes and suffixes are more **productive** (i.e. we can apply them to the vast majority of relevant words within a language), infixes have a much narrower applicability (e.g. most speakers would agree that we can say 'fan-bloody-tastic' but not 'spec-bloody-tacular' or 'won-bloody-derful.')

## 2.3 Word formation processes

Aside from affixation, there are also other morphological processes we can use to create new words.

**Derivation:** involves changing the morphology to alter the word class. We will discuss word classes in more detail later, but for now, suffice it to say that derivational morphology involves processes like turning a noun into an adjective (e.g. 'luck' → 'lucky'), an adjective into an adverb (e.g. 'cruel' → 'cruelly'), a verb into a noun (e.g. 'transform' → 'transformation') and so forth. If the word class changes, then the process is derivational.

**Inflectional:** involves changes that *do not* alter the word class (e.g. 'teacher' → 'teachers,' 'drive' → 'drove,' 'John' → 'John's,' etc.) This will become important when we start to look at lexemes.

**Blends:** involve blending or combining words together like 'brunch' for breakfast and lunch or 'hacktivism' combining the verb 'to hack' (as in, to gain unauthorised access to digital information) with the noun 'activism,' used to refer to those who access or exploit data online to make some kind of social or political point. Another similar, though more pejorative portmanteau is 'slacktivism' which combines 'slacking' with 'activism,' often used to mock those who will 'like,' 'share,' or 'retweet' things on social media without directly contributing to ideological causes or doing any *active* activism. However, this is not a completely productive kind of word formation as it has phonological restrictions: 'hacktivism' and 'slacktivism' are acceptable to us because the words are similar enough to be blended, but you wouldn't say someone who campaigns to feed the starving a 'foodtivist,' or someone who protests book burnings a 'booktivist.' That [æ] phoneme in 'hack' and 'slack' is crucial in the blending process.

**Acronyms/ initialisms:** involve taking the first letter of each word in a phrase or sentence to create a new word. These can be initialisms (like 'the FBI' or 'ABC news' where you pronounce each letter individually) or acronyms (like 'NASA' or 'SCUBA') where you pronounce it as a collective word.

**Shortenings:** are quite self-explanatory, and also very common in Australian English (e.g. 'kindergarten' becomes 'kindy,' 'barbeque' becomes 'barbie,' etc.) You may even do this with your own VCE subjects out of habit (e.g. 'Biology' becomes 'Bio,' 'Physical Education' becomes 'Phys Ed,' and 'English Language' becomes 'Englang.')

**Compoundings:** involve attaching one word to another to create a joint compound word (e.g. 'lighthouse,' 'football' 'sunflower,' etc.)

**Contractions:** involve shortenings within words, and usually require you to place an apostrophe to signify that letters have been left out (e.g. 'cannot' becomes 'can't,' 'should have' becomes 'should've,' etc.)

**Neologisms:** refer to new words that are deliberately coined by people. These are often brought about by changes in technology or innovations like 'google' or 'uber,' though there are also words that come about as a result of social trends and phenomena, like 'instafamous' (meaning famous on Instagram.) Neologisms are often quite controversial, like the terms 'mansplaining' (for when a male explains a concept in a condescending way to a female) or 'manspreading' (to describe men who sit with their legs far apart, especially on public transport) which have been widely debated as sexist terms over the past few months.

### CASE SPACE :

You could even extend this to a discussion of emojis as 'new age' neologisms, given the fact that the 'laughing-while-crying-face' emoji was deemed the 'Word of the Year' in 2015 to widespread criticism. The response of many (i.e. 'but it's not even a word!') prompted an interesting debate over what constitutes 'language' and 'language features' with some linguists considering them more like embellishments or gestures than actual 'words' or morphemes. There was also a famous crowd sourcing project that saw Herman Melville's novel 'Moby Dick' translated into emoji-form entitled 'Emoji Dick.'

## 2.4 Difference between morphemes and lexemes

**Borrowings:** refer to words that are incorporated into the English language from other languages (either in their original or modified forms) often because there is no succinct direct translation in English, like 'déjà vu' from French or 'schadenfreude' from German.

**Australian English Suffixation:** is something that gets an explicit mention in the study design (and often comes up in short answer or data analysis questions on exams!) so it pays to be on top of the various forms of Aussie suffixes you'll find. One of them is actually evident in the abbreviation 'Aussie,' namely our tendency to shorten words and tack vowels (usually an /i/ as in 'barbie' for barbecue and 'breaky' for breakfast, or an /o/ as in 'bottle-o' for bottle-shop.) This is also evident in the prototypical Australian nicknames like 'Kevo' (Kevin) 'Robbo' (Robert) and 'Johnno' (John).

### CASE SPACE :

The formal name for these kind of nicknames or monickers is 'hypochoristics,' and have been extensively analysed as prevalent features of Australian dialects. There's a great podcast from La Trobe uni available at: <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/news/articles/2011/podcasts/how-australians-use-hypocoristics/transcript> if you want more information about this!

## 2.4 Difference between morphemes and lexemes

Where morphemes and morphology are concerned with the bits that make up words, lexemes and lexicology have more to do with 'families' of words known as **inflections**. For example, 'cat' and 'cats' are clearly two different words, and 'cats' is made up of two different morphemes ('cat + s') but we would classify these as belonging to the same general 'family' of words, because there's no real change of meaning between 'cat' and 'cats' other than plurality. The same can be said for the verbs 'running,' 'runs,' and 'ran' – they all refer to the same basic concept; hence, they are all different forms of the same lexeme.

If it helps, you can think of a 'lexeme' as being like an entry in a dictionary. Rarely will dictionaries publish different entries for 'running,' 'runs,' and 'ran.' Instead, there will be a single entry under the verb 'run' that will list some of the other inflected forms. However, the word 'runny' as in 'a runny nose' means something quite different, so that would be given its own lexical category. Lexemes can also refer to phrases or more abstract ideas; for example, the expression 'run out of something' (as in, to run out of milk for breakfast) would also be considered a lexeme as distinct from the idea of 'running.'

## 2.5 Word classes

There are several key word classes you will need to know for this course, including:

1. Nouns
2. Verbs
3. Adjectives
4. Adverbs
5. Prepositions
6. Pronouns
7. Determiners
8. Auxiliaries
9. Modals
10. Conjunctions

Note that the breakdown of word classes may differ in textbooks and other literature as different linguists like to break things down in different ways, but for our purposes, this is the terminology that's most relevant to the English Language course.

Some of these word classes are **content words**, meaning they add content to a sentence in the form of nouns, most verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. On the other hand, prepositions, determinatives, and conjunctions are **function words** because they describe the relationships between the subject matter in an utterance.

For example, in the phrase 'He said that the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog'

- 'he,' 'said,' 'quick,' 'brown,' 'fox,' 'jumps' 'lazy' and 'dog' = **content words**.
- 'that,' 'the,' and 'over' = **function words**.

You should also be aware that the first four classes listed here (i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) belong to the **open class** of words, meaning that it is quite easy for speakers to create new forms (e.g. nouns like 'meme' or 'Uber' or verbs like 'google' and 'tweet,' none of which existed a couple of decades ago.) By contrast, all other word classes (i.e. prepositions, pronouns, determiners, auxiliaries, modals, and conjunctions) belong to the **closed class**, as it is very difficult to get speakers to accept new or modified variations of such words, though attempts have been made with the class of prepositions, as discussed below. Realistically, the open class of words will be what you spend more time analysing, though it helps to have the right vocabulary to handle discussions of the forms in the closed class too, just in case.

**Nouns:** are words which function as things, whether tangible or abstract, that exist in the world. You may have been taught in primary school that nouns are the class for a 'person, place, or thing,' which is a pretty succinct summation. There is also a subset of nouns known as proper nouns, which cover names of people, places, or organisations (e.g. Elizabeth, Sweden, Wikipedia, etc.)

If you want to test a word to see if it is a noun, you can use the following sentence: 'I like that green \_\_\_\_.' For the most part, the only thing that can go in that slot is a noun, because it has an adjective and a determiner before it. On the whole, though, this is one of the easier word classes to understand, and should already be pretty familiar to you.

**Verbs:** are 'doing' words that involve action or activity. In normal English sentences, they occur after noun phrases (more on this in the section on Syntax) and are essential in clause construction. The most obvious kinds of verbs are those that end in the '-ing' suffix, but because English verbs are marked for **tense**, they can occur in many forms. Our verbs also inflect for **subject**, as you'll see in the following table which shows the different permutations of the verb phrase 'is walking'

Inflection for the verb: 'walk'	Past tense	Present tense
1 <sup>st</sup> person singular (I)	was walking	am walking
1st person plural (we)	were walking	are walking
2 <sup>nd</sup> person singular/plural (you)	were walking	are walking
3 <sup>rd</sup> person singular (s/he)	was walking	is walking
3 <sup>rd</sup> person plural (they)	were walking	are walking

Different kinds of verb phrase constructions will also be examined in more detail in our discussion of syntax.

**Adjectives:** are words which describe nouns. They typically occur pronominally (meaning before the noun, as in 'the red car' which makes it an attributive adjective, but we can also have predicate adjectives (as in, 'the car is red') which occur after a copular verb like 'is,' 'seem,' or 'feel.'

**Adverbs:** are words which describe verbs or the manner in which something occurs. Typically, they inform us about when, where, why, or how something occurs, and usually end in an '-ly' suffix (e.g. 'happily,' 'slowly,' 'bitterly,' etc.)

**Prepositions:** are particle words that express a relationship between nouns in terms of time or location (e.g. 'in,' 'after,' 'underneath,' etc.)

## 2.5 Word classes

**Pronouns:** are words that can replace noun phrases. The typical examples are 'he,' 'she,' and 'it,' though there are other pronouns as well as some complexities surrounding the way they are used, particularly in relation to 'they' being used as a gender neutral first person pronoun. There are two main kinds of pronouns:

- **Anaphoric pronouns:** occur after another noun, and refer back to that previous or antecedent noun (e.g. 'James is friends with Molly because she is a lovely person.')
- **Cataphoric pronouns:** occur prior to the noun they are referring to (e.g. 'Following his resignation, Tony didn't find another job for over a year.')

**Determiners/ articles:** are words like 'a,' 'the,' 'some,' and 'my' which indicate definiteness, quantity, or possession. Determiners are usually divided between definite articles like 'the' or 'this' (which specify which thing or things we're talking about) and indefinite articles like 'a' or 'many' (which could refer to a wider or more ambiguous number of things.) For instance, if I say 'I like my car,' you'd know which one I was talking about. But if I said 'I like some cars,' you wouldn't necessarily know which ones I meant.

**Auxiliaries:** are words that combine with verbs to create **aspect**, which is a means of indicating that an action is complete, ongoing, or habitual (e.g. the word 'have' in the sentence 'I have been to Queensland.')

**Modals:** are similar to auxiliaries (and some linguists treat these as a single word class) but instead mark for possibility, probability, obligation, or necessity. This class includes words like 'can,' 'could,' 'may,' 'must,' 'might,' etc. You can also have stacked or layered modals and auxiliaries to create sentences like 'the car may have been being cleaned yesterday,' though to some speakers, this can sound a bit ungrammatical.

**Conjunctions:** are joining words that connect clauses together. You may remember the mnemonic 'FAN-BOYS' from primary school: 'for,' 'and,' 'nor,' 'but,' 'or,' 'yet,' and 'so.' There are other conjunctions in English, but these are the most common. In the next section, we'll observe what happens when we put all these word classes together to form sentences.

## Section 3

# Syntax

Having gone through the study of words and word formation, we can now look at how these words combine to form sentences as part of syntax. A key component in this section is the notion of **grammaticality** and whether or not a sentence is 'correct' in the way it is constructed. However, the rules are often more flexible than they seem, and there are many different ways to compose sentences that go beyond what we would traditionally think of as 'correct.'

Whilst there are certainly some things we can say are definitely grammatical or ungrammatical, there's also a big grey area of 'debatable' or 'questionable' sentences that might be fine to some speakers but not others. Moreover, there are some expressions or phrasal constructions that are acceptable in some dialects and variations of English, but not others. As such, we should always aim to take a *descriptivist* approach and simply identify and analyse these discrepancies, rather than be *prescriptive* and try to brand things as categorically right or wrong.

### 3.1 Phrase types and functions

Though sentences could loosely be described as 'clusters of words,' it's more accurate to say that sentences are made up of clusters of **phrases** that we combine together in certain ways. It's like building a house – the final product is made up of a floor, walls, doors, windows, and a roof, but each of those elements is also made up of different bits like plaster, wood, nails, and glass. The word classes are like those individual materials, and it's important that speakers combine them in the right ways so that their sentences make sense.

**Noun phrases:** are groups of words with a noun as the 'head' or main focus. The 'head' of a phrase is the word that is deemed most important within that phrasal category. For instance, in the phrase 'that red car', the car is the most important element. Noun phrases can be very long (e.g. 'the heavy bucket full of water that I used to clean my car yesterday') or very short, as in the sentence 'she wants to go on a holiday' where 'she' and 'a holiday' are the noun phrases.

- **Subject:** certain noun phrases will function as the subjects of sentences, which usually means they are the active agent who is 'doing' the verb. For instance, if 'I went for a walk' then 'I' am the subject of that sentence. But if 'my teacher lent me a pen,' then 'my teacher' is the subject. The subject is usually (but not always) the required noun phrase in a clause. If you want to test which part of a sentence is the subject, you can use a **tag question** like 'She went to work, didn't she?' or 'His sons play cricket, don't they?' because the subject will be repeated in the tag question in a pronoun form.
- **Object:** the opposite of the subject is the object, meaning that the verb is 'being done' to that noun phrase. An easy example of this is to look at a sentence like 'Adam hit Bill.' Adam is doing the hitting, so he is the subject. Bill is being hit, so Bill is the object.
  - **Direct object:** in clauses with more than two noun phrases, the direct object is something that is affected by the verb (e.g. 'some soup' in 'my mother gave me some soup.') If you get confused, just remember that the direct object is the one that you'd find by asking the question 'what?' as in, 'what did my mother give me?' → 'some soup!'
  - **Indirect object:** the opposite of a direct object is an indirect object, which refers to the recipient or benefactor of an action (e.g. 'me' in 'my mother gave me some soup.') This can be found by asking 'to whom?' or 'for whom?' as in, 'to whom did my mother give some soup?' → 'me!'
- **Complement phrases:** are ones which are required by the sentence in order for it to have grammaticality, as in, 'I rang my mother last night,' where 'my mother' is a necessary noun phrase.

### 3.1 Phrase types and functions

- **Adjunct phrases:** are ones which offer additional information, but are not required elements in the sentence (e.g. 'last night' in 'I rang my mother last night.) Adjuncts can also be prepositional phrases or adverbial phrases.

Participant 1	Process	Participant 2	Circumstance
SUBJECT	VERB	OBJECT/ COMPLEMENT	ADJUNCT
the hare	met	a fox	along the way
the monster	eats	rhinos	for lunch
the ground	shook		
it	woke up	a little frog	
a tiny caterpillar	crawled out		of the dark

**Verb phrases:** are groups of words with a verb as their head. Like noun phrases, it's essential that we have verb phrases in our clauses; otherwise the sentence is incomplete. The different kinds of verb phrases we can use also determine how many noun phrases we can have in a clause.

- **Intransitive:** these verbs only require a subject and cannot take an object (e.g. 'He slept' or 'My dog smiled.' You can't say 'He slept bed' or 'My dog jumped chair' because 'sleep' and 'smile' are intransitive, meaning that there is no transitional action involved).
- **Transitive:** these verbs require a subject and an object (e.g. 'Adam hit Bill.' We can't just say 'Adam hit' because there needs to be an object; you can't 'hit' in general without hitting *something* or *someone*. The same goes for words like 'kiss,' 'smell,' and 'like').
- **Ditransitive:** these verbs require a subject and two objects (e.g. 'I gave her the money' or 'I sold my car to him').
- **Copular and catenative:** these are verbs like 'am,' 'be,' 'seem' or 'become' that usually require an adjective afterwards instead of a noun phrase (e.g. 'I am happy' or 'My car seems slow').
- **Complex-transitive:** these are sentences with a complement accompanying the object (e.g. 'I consider you a friend' or 'I find her annoying'). These sentences tend to be considered quite formal, and aren't used often in colloquial spoken discourse.

**Adjectival and adverbial phrases:** are phrases headed by an adjective or adverb and add additional information to a sentence. They are often omittable (e.g. in 'The old man walked briskly to work,' we could leave out 'old' and 'briskly,' and the sentence would still be grammatical).

**Prepositional phrases:** are headed by prepositions, and can be continuously stacked onto sentences (e.g. 'I went to the shops on Tuesday with my friend on horseback in the rain,' though obviously after a point it gets a little bit hard to follow). Prepositional phrases are also usually omittable, like adjectival and adverbial phrases, though not always (e.g. in 'I gave the money to him.')

#### KEY POINT :

Note that most contemporary linguistic theories don't consider there to be such things as determiner, article, auxiliary, modal, or conjunction phrases, though there are some new models of syntax that treat noun phrases as determiner phrases, and other similar alternatives. The reason why there's no uniform consensus is that holistic models of sentence structure that try and account for underlying patterns in all or even a vast majority of the world's languages have only really begun to surface now that globalisation and modern communication tools have allowed us to have access to all these different languages. For our purposes, the definitions above will suffice if you need to talk about phrase structure in your assessment tasks, though if you want to research other theories, there are plenty of alternatives including *X-bar theory* and *The DP Hypothesis* that you can google, though they're quite dense and not really part of the central concerns of the English Language course.

## 3.2 Sentence Types

There are four main types of sentences we can construct in English, plus an additional category of 'fragments' or incomplete sentences.

- **Simple sentences:** are those which consist of a single clause, or one main verb phrase (e.g. 'I saw a monster' or 'The tall dark clock tower chimed at midnight.')
- **Compound sentences:** are those which consist of two or more coordinated clauses, or ones that have multiple verb phrases joined together by conjunctions (e.g. 'He fell off his bike and grazed his knee' or 'I can write my name with my right hand, but I can't do it with my left.') Note that a sentence like 'I did my homework and my chores' is NOT a compound sentence because there is only *one* verb phrase, and the elements being coordinated are just different objects.
- **Complex sentences:** are ones that consist of at least one subordinate clause (i.e. a clause which involves another verb phrase, but is part of the main verb phrase and is dependent on the rest of the clause) as in 'I want to go to the movies' where 'want' is the main verb, but 'to go to the movies' is also a verb phrase with 'go' as its main verb. **Subordination** usually requires a subordinating linking word like 'to' or 'that,' as in, 'I know that you don't like apples' where the two verbs are underlined. In this case, the verb 'know' is called the **matrix verb** as it operates as the overall verb for the utterance.
- **Compound-complex sentences:** are combinations of the previous two, so involve at least one coordinated clause, and at least one subordinate clause. Though these seem complicated compared to simple sentences, most communication involves compound-complex sentences, and we often construct them without even realising.
- **Sentence fragments:** are also known as incomplete sentences because they do not contain the requisite elements that are needed to form even a basic, simple sentence.

## 3.3 Syntactic variants and functions

Next, we will examine the different purposes of particular sentence types and how alternate sentence structures can convey the same information in different ways.

**Declarative sentences:** are the 'standard' or prototypical sentences in English that are used to make a statement. They must consist of a subject noun phrase, and a main verb phrase, but can also incorporate additional information.

- **Active sentences:** have a subject or agent as their focus, and are the more conventional English sentences (e.g. 'Zach saw the ladybug.')
- **Passive sentences:** have an object as their focus, and were once thought to be 'improper' English, though these sentences are more acceptable nowadays as they are often useful when one wants to concentrate on the object of a sentence (e.g. 'The ladybug was seen by Zach.')
- **Agentless passive sentences:** also have an object as their focus, but eliminate the subject from the sentence entirely (e.g. 'The ladybug was seen.') This may sound odd, but is actually quite common in cases where the subject of a sentence is unimportant or ambiguous. For instance, signs that say 'Smoking is prohibited' is an agentless passive construction, because saying 'Smoking is prohibited by the owners of this restaurant' would be needlessly wordy as people could infer the subject based on the context or environment in which it occurs.

**Imperative sentences:** are like commands which have the verb at the front, and often have an implicit second person subject, as in 'Do your homework!' If someone said that to you, it is natural to assume that they wanted *you* to do your homework, even though that subject isn't evident in the sentence.

**Interrogative sentences:** are question statements that can occur in two forms:

- **Open interrogatives:** are open-ended questions to which there can be many different answers (e.g. 'What is your name' or 'What would you like for dinner?')
- **Closed interrogatives:** are close-ended questions, or questions to which the only answers can be yes or no (e.g. 'Is your name Karen?' or 'Do you want soup for dinner?')

**Exclamative sentences:** are like interjections or impulsive remarks that are often more expressive than regular declarative sentences, like 'How wonderful is she?' or 'What lovely weather!' Some textbooks also categorise single words like 'Ouch!' as well as swear words as exclamatives too.

## 3.4 Syntactic patterns and processes

As well as varying our sentence structures, we can also use other syntactic processes to create meaning.

**Antithesis:** is the idea of contrasting words or ideas via sentence structure (e.g. 'To err is human; to forgive divine') and is especially common in poetic literature. However, it can also be used in more practical contexts, as in many political slogans (like 'Death to fascism, freedom to the people' or 'Give me liberty; give me death.')

**Listing:** is a technique whereby a speaker can create a sense of culmination or a sense of excess by going through a series of phrases (usually noun phrases) as though they are reading out from a list. More specifically, there is **polysyndeton** which involves multiple conjunctions between items in the list (e.g. I had to pack up all the books and chairs and tables and stationary) and **asyndeton** where there are no conjunctions at all (e.g. 'I had to pack up books, chairs, tables, stationary') though the effect of both is essentially the same.

#### CASE SPACE :

Australian politicians (especially Tony Abbot circa 2013) are criticised for their use of listing in campaign slogans. Abbott's infamous three word slogans also drew much attention to particular issues (e.g. 'Axe the tax' in reference to the Labor Party's proposed Carbon Tax, and most notably 'Stop the boats' in reference to asylum seekers coming to Australia by sea.) However, politicians the world over have used three word slogans as a catchy summation of their promises or ethos (e.g. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's 'Labor isn't working!' or American President Barack Obama's 'Yes we can!') There is even some psychological research that suggests rhetorical devices like **tricolons** (i.e. words that occur in threes, like 'blood, sweat, and tears') that follow the 'rule of threes' are especially persuasive.

**Parallelism:** involves similarities in sentence structures that create a sense of cohesion or memorability in one's utterance. For instance, the famous phrase 'of the people, by the people, for the people' used to describe the ideal system of government, or even the expression 'I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice cream' can be said to have a degree of syntactic parallelism.

**Ellipsis:** involves omitting parts of a sentence to prevent unnecessary repetition, and is an incredibly common way to simplify our utterances. For example, the sentence 'I did my Methods homework last night, but Amy didn't,' we're leaving out the fact that 'Amy didn't do her Methods homework last night' because that's already obvious given the focus of the sentence. The word 'ellipsis' can also be used to refer to pauses in speech, as discussed in the section on phonetics, or the use of '...' in written discourse.

**Nominalisation:** is the process of turning a verb into a noun, as in 'The author suggests that the consequences were unavoidable' 'The author's suggestion that the consequences were unavoidable...' thereby creating a **genitive** phrase (i.e. a possessive form, like 'the author's suggestion') and enables one to use another verb phrase afterwards.

## Section 4

# Discourse

Discourses are connected stretches of language in either written or spoken forms, and is what happens when sentences link together to create a dialogue or conversation. This is where the study of sub-systems gets a little less theoretical and a little more practical as we start to examine how people are able to manipulate language and treat it as a flexible toolkit for communicating.

If you observe most written or spoken discourses, you'll probably notice a variety of very conventional features such as those we've explored so far (e.g. your parent might use an imperative sentence to tell you to do your chores, or your teacher might use a rising intonation when asking if you completed your homework) but you will also notice things that are seemingly not accounted on a purely theoretical sound/ word/ sentence-based level, such as how people establish 'topics' of conversation, or how people know who's turn it is to speak when they're in a group. This is where the study of discourse attempts to break down the nature of communicating into different factors and features which we will unpack in this section.

### 4.1 Coherence factors

The first major part of creating a discourse involves coherence, which refers to the clearness or concise nature of a series of utterances. For example, if I were to say 'these notes are predominately but not exclusively concerned with the bolstering and augmenting of students' mental conception of elements of the English Language study design,' my meaning would not be as clear as it would be if I just said 'these notes are mainly designed to help you understand the English Language study design.' By bogging down a sentence with unnecessary detail or explication, we create a discourse that is less concise and coherent, but we want language to be as coherent as possible, which is why we need to consider the following factors in our discourses.

**Inference:** is the process by which listeners and addressees are able to 'fill in the blanks' or make educated guesses about what a person means based on the context in which their discourse is occurring. For instance, if your parent asked you 'have you done everything you needed to do tonight?' you would probably infer that 'everything' was in reference to your school-work or other commitments. Nowhere in that utterance has your parent mentioned school-work or other commitments, but the implication is clear. Much of our communication relies on some degree of inference, otherwise all of our sentences would be endlessly recursive as we attempted to clarify every single bit of information. However, if too much is left up to inference, then the discourse can become ambiguous and lose its coherence, so a balance must be struck between efficiency and clarity.

**Logical order or formatting:** refers to the ways in which we present information in a discourse, and is also often influenced by topicality which will be examined later in the section on discourse strategies. Simply put, this factor involves prioritising information and presenting it in an appropriate fashion. For instance, if you were to ask me 'Where did you go for your date last night?' and I said 'The salmon that they served at the restaurant we went to wasn't very nice,' our discourse would lack coherence, whereas if I said 'We went to a restaurant and the salmon they served wasn't very nice,' it'd be easier for you to follow the logic of my utterance.

### 4.2 Cohesion factors

Cohesion, like coherence, is very important if we want our discourse to be understood by others, though cohesion focuses more so on how elements of utterances fit together and align with one another.

**Lexical choice:** as we've seen, the words we choose to express concepts or convey information can have a significant impact on the clarity of our language, as well as how it is perceived. This is especially true when it comes to **pejorative or loaded language**, and also relates to the notion of euphemism which we'll look at later. There are a couple of other factors involved in lexical choice.

## 4.2 Cohesion factors

**Synonymy:** refers to words with a similar sense or meaning. If a word is a perfect synonym, it means the definitions are virtually identical and the words could be substituted for one another in almost all circumstances. Most words, however, are imperfect synonyms, meaning that their definitions are similar, but not completely interchangeable (e.g. 'loving' and 'caring,' 'power' and 'control,' 'thin' and 'skinny,' etc.)

**Antonymy:** refers to a pair of words that have the opposite meaning (e.g. 'tall' and 'short,' 'new' and 'old').

### CASE SPACE :

A common criticism EAL (English as an Additional Language) learners have of Australian English is that it makes confusing use of antonyms as a way to convey how things aren't. For instance, when asked how their day was, an Australian might say 'not bad,' or when asked about their skills in changing a tyre, they might reply 'I'm not great at it.' This can seem perfectly discernible to native speakers, but many EAL learners initially struggle with this strange form of antonymy (or more specifically negation) wherein Australian English speakers characterise things by what they aren't.

**Hyponymy:** refers to words that are sub-sets of one another. For example, a sparrow is a type of bird; hence, 'sparrow' has a hyponymous relationship with the word 'bird.' What this means is that we could swap the word 'sparrow' for 'bird' in a sentence, and it would still be true. However, we can't swap 'bird' for 'sparrow,' because there are some birds that are not sparrows. In some circumstances, speakers may try to use a more general hypernym instead of singling out a specific group (e.g. someone saying 'people have a moral obligation to address climate change' as opposed to 'politicians have a moral obligation to address climate change' because they want *all* people to feel responsible.)

**Metonymy:** is where a speaker will use a thing as a representation of a larger whole. For instance, we often use the term 'the Crown' to refer to the royal family, or 'Parliament House' to refer to government ministers.

### CASE SPACE :

Some Australian news media will even use the word 'Canberra' as a metonym for governmental decisions or the Prime Minister's actions (as in the expression 'news out of Canberra is that there'll be cuts to hospitals' or 'Canberra has stated that they don't want people to be alarmed about this new tax'). We know that the city of Canberra is not the thing being discussed here, because speakers *infer* that Canberra is a metonym for some other person or power, though this is also sometimes dependent on native speaker intuitions.

**Collocation:** involves words being commonly associated with one another to the point where any other combination sounds odd. For example, we often refer to our immediate family as our 'nuclear family,' but it would sound odd to call a close circle of friends your 'nuclear friends.' This is because the words 'nuclear' and 'family' are collocated. The same can be said of many expressions in English (e.g. 'commit a felony' rather than 'perform a felony,' or 'religious zealot' instead of 'pious zealot') and cohesive texts will usually heed these collocations.

**Information flow:** is a fairly self-explanatory factor, and builds on our earlier discussion of the logical order within texts and dialogues. The ways in which we prioritise information (or potentially hide and obfuscate information) is crucial to establishing cohesion; this is also related to the notion of thematic sentence variations like passive or agentless passive constructions, as well as other alternative structures.

**Clefting:** involves taking an element of a sentence and 'clefting' it to the front so as to give it greater weight or focus. For instance, in the utterance 'I made you some soup,' we could cleft the direct object to give 'You are the one I made the soup for' (or to avoid ending the sentence in a preposition, 'you are the one for whom I made the soup'), or we could cleft the indirect object: 'it was soup that I made for you.' Sometimes this can sound clunky, but it's often useful when you want to emphasise particular phrases that wouldn't otherwise be at the centre of the discussion.

**Front or end focus:** is similar to clefting, but involves shifting the 'weight' of a sentence, rather than just a particular phrase or element. In English, the convention is to favour end-weight, which is why a sentence like 'I am the most impressive ballet dancer in the Western hemisphere' sounds more natural to most speakers than 'The most impressive ballet dancer in the Western hemisphere is me.' Both are conveying exactly the same information, but the latter is a bit less cohesive given it has that long noun phrase at the front.

## 4.3 Deixis

Deictic expressions (also known as indexicals) are words that allow us to 'point' via language. These words are highly context-dependent, are rely on our understanding of the discourse as a whole. For instance, words like 'here,' 'there,' 'this,' 'that,' 'now,' 'then,' 'me,' and 'you' all depend on who, what, where, and when – I could point at a hundred different things and call them 'that,' so the word is functioning as a deictic expression. Like many other discourse features, there is the potential for ambiguity, and we have to be careful not to be too vague in what we use deixis for.

**KEY POINT :**

In the United States, Donald Trump came under criticism for his use of the phrase "there's something going on here" in relation to former President Obama's response to terrorist incidents. When prompted to explain what he meant by these nebulous deictic terms, Trump simply repeated the phrase and side-stepped questions, leaving the public to speculate and fill in the gaps. The implication he was trying to create was that Obama sympathised with the terrorists, or was somehow conspiring against American citizens in some capacity, and though Trump is renowned for his inflammatory rhetoric (making him a great case study for English Language purposes) he knows it would be untenable for him to make a claim like that so directly. Instead, he uses vagueness and indexical expressions to veil his criticism without explicitly committing to statements or confirming any specific suspicious.

## 4.4 Features of discourse

As well as the many factors that influence the coherence and cohesion of discourse, you will also need to know how to analyse the features and functions within communication.

**Openings and closings:** refer to the way we signal the starts and ends of texts or conversations. In the written form, this is quite straightforward (e.g. a letter typically begins with 'Dear \_\_\_,' and a news article tends to begin with a quick summation of the event it is covering,) whereas in spoken dialogues, we might signal an opening with an obvious word like 'Hi,' or a question like 'Excuse me, do you know what time the train will arrive?' Closings can also be quite direct, though they don't just depend on lexical items like 'See you later' and 'Goodbye' as they can also be achieved through intonation or changes in pitch. Think about the ways in which you would say 'Hello?' and 'Goodbye' when answering or hanging up your phone. Now try and swap the inflection of those words – sounds strange, right? That's because you're subconsciously signalling the starts and ends of a discourse through your pronunciation of words and phrases.

**Adjacency pairs:** are words or phrases that work in conjunction with one another to create relevant discourse. For example, if I asked you how old you were, you could say '17' which would be an adjacency pair with my question because it is a valid answer. However, if you said 'I live in Geelong,' that would *not* be an adjacency pair since it does not directly correspond with the discourse we're having. This is most often seen in **phatic communication** where people communicate or fill in silence in order to create a pleasant atmosphere (e.g. 'how are you' 'I'm good how are you' – when speakers use these expressions, they're often simply being polite rather than genuinely inquiring about someone's well-being or state of mind.)

**KEY POINT :**

A Sydney-based organisation founded in 2009 recently created the 'R U OK? Day' initiative in an effort to raise awareness about mental illness and facilitate honest communication between people by encouraging them to ask one another 'are you okay?' in a "meaningful" way. According to the project leaders, too often the phrase 'are you okay' is said in a half-hearted or flippant way, and too often, people who are struggling with their mental health will just reply 'I'm good' or 'fine thanks, how are you' because of the social expectations involved in phatic communication. Hence, the literal meaning of the question 'are you okay?' was somewhat diminished in their eyes, because the question was so rarely answered honestly. This initiative aimed to reframe the way speakers utter and respond to the phrase 'are you okay,' both on the official day (the second Thursday in September) and all throughout their lives since establishing an emotional connection through language could be a great help to those in need.

**Overlapping speech:** is a very common phenomenon that comes up a lot in assessment tasks because it calls upon so many different elements of linguistic analysis. It's quite frequent in everyday conversations too, though speech can overlap to different extents. Obviously you can't have two or more speakers talking at the same time constantly – that'd be efficient, but really hard for either party to comprehend. But you also can't have long pauses between each speaker's turn, as this would make dialogue incredibly slow and cumbersome. Often, overlapping speech is a deliberate effort on the part of a second speaker so as to follow on from the first, especially if there is a large group of people involved in the discourse and this second speaker wishes to **take the floor** (i.e. begin talking and have the group's focus centred on himself) next. Hence, this speaker might try and signal his intentions to begin a response by saying 'Yeah...' or 'Well...' whilst the first speaker is still going or appears to be wrapping up his utterance. This can lead to confusion, however, if one speaker does not want to 'yield' the floor and instead wishes to continue speaking, or if there are multiple people whose utterances are overlapping. If you want to observe this in practise, take a look at some political interviews or panel shows on television (especially ABC's QandA program on Monday nights) and note how the discourse overlaps and layers as speakers interrupt or respond.

**Interrogative tags:** or 'tag questions' are added onto the ends of sentences, usually to convey a sense of uncertainty or that the speaker is seeking confirmation (e.g. 'he's over there, isn't he?' or 'I wasn't doing 70km/h, was I?') Notice how we have to reverse the polarity (i.e. swap the verb from positive to negative or vice versa) in order to create a typical tag question? If we don't do this, it creates a slightly different effect (e.g. 'You did all your homework, did you?' or 'I drive like a maniac, do I?') The sense here is more one of disbelief or challenge towards the addressee. We can also get tag particles, as in 'I look good in this shirt, right?' or, more colloquially, 'I'm doing the right thing, yeah?' In both cases, the intention is to elicit a response from an addressee and encourage them to reaffirm or reconsider something.

**Discourse particles:** is basically a fancy term for all those bits and pieces of speech that fill in the gaps or have little lexical weight but often significant social and communicative effects. For instance, I might nod and say 'mmhhmm' while you were telling me a story – I'm not actually required to signal agreement or confirmation constantly, but it is considered polite, often, to use some kind of discourse particle (also called a **backchannel** or **minimal response**) to suggest that one is attentive or interested in the discussion taking place. This also relates to the role of **filled pauses** and **voiced hesitations** which include things like 'um' or 'like' (as in, 'It was just, like, so unbelievable,' not in the verbal sense of 'I like the colour green.')

**False starts and repairs:** refer to the ways in which we restart or mend our speech when we make errors in pronunciation. These features are almost exclusively seen in oral communication (as it's much easier to address a mistake in written form – you just cross things out or delete the text.) Sometimes speakers will just restart from scratch, though often this can be cumbersome, so we will signal our error with a sigh or an eye roll and recommence in a way that makes sense to the listener. This can also be achieved in more formal settings using words like 'rather,' as in 'My maths teacher gives much better constructions – or rather, *instructions* than my science teacher.'

**CASE SPACE :**

For a great dissection of an overarching discourse, check out Nerdwriter1's video: 'How Donald Trump Answers A Question' on youtube, available here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_aFo\\_BV-Uzl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_aFo_BV-Uzl). In it, he unpacks various aspects of discourse and links them to a broader intention, so it's a great example of how these sorts of language features can integrate with one another.

## 4.5 Strategies in discourse

When engaged in speech acts, it is important that we know how to communicate appropriately and conduct discourse in a way that allows for the process of both articulating and receiving information. Some of the strategies we use to accomplish this are listed below.

**Topic management:** involves speakers indicating what the focal point of their discussion is, primarily through their syntax and intonation. Poor topic management would be if you were to say 'Should we go to the beach this weekend' and I said 'I really like to have picnics at the beach.' Sure, those two statements are related, but the topic of conversation that you've posed is 'whether we should go to the beach this weekend,' and suddenly I'm mentioning picnics out of the blue. Good topic management requires relevant and coherent responses or follow-up statements, though this is often something we do automatically.

**Turn-taking:** is a more complex kind of topic management as it requires a speaker to be able to gauge a situation and read their addressee(s)' facial expressions or body language in order to create cohesion. If one wishes to take their turn (i.e. begin speaking,) they might lean forward, open their mouths, or shift their facial expression to convey a relevant emotion, thereby drawing the attention of others involved in the discourse and signalling their intentions to take the floor. Likewise, if a speaker wishes to hold the floor (i.e. continue speaking after they've already begun,) they might also change their body language or intonation to keep the focus on them. Often, speakers will subtly speed up their speech so as to give the impression of racing through the rest of their utterance, at which point they will then **pass the floor** by gesturing to another speaker who has signalled their desire to talk next. This can be done very directly through a hand signal (e.g. holding out an open palm towards the person to direct the group's attention) or even by saying the name of the person who wishes to speak. However, it can also be accomplished more fluidly by establishing eye contact with the person wishing to take the floor and raising one's eyebrows as an invitation for them to begin their dialogue. This is best observed in a large group of people talking – see if you can notice this phenomenon occurring between your peers at school, and identify what distinguishes good turn-taking from poor turn-taking.

**Back-channelling:** as we've looked at briefly already, involves providing **minimal responses** to the discourse in order to keep the flow or convey a sense of attentiveness. Often this feedback is designed to mirror the speaker's emotional state, so you would nod if they were saying something you agreed with, or shake your head if they were talking about something despicable or shameful. However, it can also involve questioning the speaker using interjections like 'Really?' or 'Seriously?' though the tone used to deliver these doesn't really suggest genuine incredulity (i.e. you're not doubting the speaker's honesty; it's more like conveying your shock or surprise at what they are saying.)

**Code-switching:** is the process of code switching – that is, alternating between languages or dialects – is something that will probably be unfamiliar to you unless you are multilingual. To some extent, code-switching can occur in terms of the degrees of formality we use in discourse; for example, if you were having a conversation with two friends and a teacher in class, you may address your peers using slightly different vocabulary than that which you use when talking to your teacher (e.g. responding to your friend's statement with 'nah, I don't reckon that's right,' but responding to your teacher's statement with 'No, I'm not sure that's true.') But the more conventional code-switching requires knowledge of different languages or at least different dialects of the same language.

### CASE SPACE :

Throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, code-switching was looked down upon by native speakers as a kind of inferior communicative ability, particularly in relation to immigrants who would code-switch between English and their native tongue. Now that more linguists have studied the process of code-switching, we know that it's actually an inherently complicated procedure requiring speakers to navigate the prosodic and syntactic differences between their languages all in real-time. Furthermore, politicians like Pauline Hanson and Jacqui Lambie often come under fire for their comments about why immigrants should only speak English. Later, we will examine the implications of immigrant identity in relation to language usage, but just keep in mind that code-switching has some wide-reaching and rather controversial social implications.

## Section 5

# Semantics

The last linguistic sub-system is semantics, which is the study of meaning and senses. We've gone from individual sounds (phonetics), to words (morphology), to sentences (syntax), to conversations (discourse), and we've finally reached the overall meanings created by utterances. Most of what you'll be asked to do in English Language will stem from this broad umbrella term of semantics as you will be required to discuss how language creates, contributes to, and challenges meaning, though it is necessary to understand the earlier and more theoretically dense sub-systems in order to talk about semantics using the appropriate metalanguage.

### 5.1 Semantic fields and domains

For starters, the idea of semantic fields and domains is based on the notion that we make connections based on the meanings of particular words, and we form links to other related terms based on the 'field' or 'domain' that a word belongs to. For instance, the word 'window' is in the same semantic domain as the word 'house,' as well as concepts like 'doors,' 'glass,' and 'windowpanes.' If you looked at the word 'window' in isolation, there is nothing in it that would seem to suggest a connection to houses or other structural features, yet because of our understanding of what a window is and where it belongs, we're more likely to place this word inside a semantic domain in our heads.

Sometimes these domains rely on our knowledge or past experiences in order to forge connections. For instance, the words 'chukka,' 'nearside' and 'divots' probably don't mean anything to you unless you're familiar with the sport of horse polo where that terminology is well known. By contrast, you're more likely to know that 'spaghetti,' 'lasagne,' and 'pizza' are all types of Italian food, because you've probably come across them at some stage in your life.

This is also how we attempt to categorise lexemes in order to make sense of the world. For instance, 'pencils,' 'pens,' and 'rubbers' all belong to the semantic field of 'stationery,' whereas 'apples,' 'bananas,' and 'oranges' all belong to the category of 'fruits.' Some linguists have theorised that the different ways in which languages categorise or map out lexemes can have an impact on the way we see the world, though as we're mainly concerned with English, we'll be focusing on the kinds of semantic domains that are familiar to us.

### 5.2 Semantic patterning

This category of semantic functions is to do with the techniques we employ to convey or enhance communication on a meaning-based level, though it should be noted that these patterns usually employ lexical or phonetic features in their expression too.

**Irony:** is the (usually humorous, though sometimes bitter) use of words to imply the opposite of their denotative meaning. This would often be accompanied by a sarcastic lilt in one's voice in spoken dialogues, though both sarcasm and irony are much more difficult to convey via text.

#### CASE SPACE :

There has been some research into the ways we attempt to convey sarcasm and irony online or via SMS seeing as it is difficult to do so in a purely lexical format. Some linguists have theorised that the use of *italicised* text, or text that is \*emphasised\* or /marked/ like this can function as signals of irony or humour, though there is no standardised version of sarcasm indicators in speech, meaning that there are often misunderstandings between speakers who struggle to embed their writing with semantic notions like irony.

**Metaphor:** refers to a non-literal comparison or connection (e.g. 'my mood darkened' or 'I have success in my blood.') These can be very confusing for non-native speakers, or even native speakers who are unfamiliar with particular metaphors, though the frequently used ones can often be inferred from context (e.g. we know someone's mood can't literally become 'darker,' but we semantically associate darkness with sad or bleak attitudes, so we can reasonably suppose that a 'darkened mood' is the same as a bad or grumpy mood.)

**Oxymoron:** involves a contradiction in terms, like 'living dead' or 'deafening silence.'

**Simile:** refers to comparisons made through the use of the words 'as' or 'like' (e.g. 'as blind as a bat' or 'my coffee is bitter, just like my attitude.')

**Personification:** refers to the way we can make insentient objects out to be like people by attributing emotions or attitudes to them (e.g. 'the camera loves me,' or 'the trees waved goodbye.')

**Puns:** are linguistic jokes that play on double meanings (e.g. 'I'm really good at grammar because I've got comma sense!' – a lexical play on the words 'common sense,' or 'where can you find giant snails? At the end of a giant's fingers!' – a phonetic play on the words 'giant's nails.')

**Lexical ambiguity:** refers to unclear expressions that are often a source of amusement (e.g. 'The priest married me' could mean that I was married to a priest, or that the priest presided over a marriage between me and someone else.) We can usually get rid of this ambiguity by drawing from our knowledge of the context (e.g. priests don't usually marry, so you would probably assume I meant the latter.)

## 5.3 Sense relations

Here, we will examine the different semantic connections we can make between words and how these contribute to our intended meaning.

**Idioms:** are expressions (that are often the product of sociolects or idiolects, discussed later) that are somewhat metaphorical or figurative in their construction. For instance, the idiom 'every cloud has a silver lining' doesn't literally mean that every single cloud has a silver outline, but it's used as a means of implying that every situation has some kind of positive element or consequence. Likewise, the phrase 'kill two birds with one stone' has nothing to do with actually murdering birds by throwing a stone at them, and is instead employed in the sense of being efficient (i.e. accomplishing two goals through a single action.)

**Denotations:** are the literal definitions of words that are called to mind when we make particular lexical choices. For example, the word 'war' denotes a state of conflict between or within countries, usually for ideological reasons and resulting in death or injury. For proficient speakers, these denotations are almost embedded within words – when I say the word 'war,' you don't consciously run through the definition in your mind, but that is the general sense that is conveyed through my use of that word. However, miscommunication can sometimes arise when individuals misjudge denotations, or have a different sense of what a word denotes. For instance, some people consider 'refugees' to encompass those fleeing political turmoil as well as those seeking to escape unliveable economic conditions, whereas others would argue that this latter group are instead 'economic refugees' and that different rules or expectations should apply. This is particularly true in socio-political issues such as refugee intake or foreign policy where politicians or spokespeople will argue about the boundaries of definitions and what a term should encompass.

**Connotations:** are like the suggestions that come to mind when a word is used. For instance, the word 'war' might connote death, suffering, harm, bloodshed, and loss. As such, connotations have a significant impact on the lexical choices we make because there are particular words which are so semantically loaded that individuals try to avoid them wherever possible. Rarely will you hear politicians use the word 'war;' instead they will refer to 'a state of armed conflict' or generic terms like 'operations' with much safer connotations. On the other hand, we can also deliberately choose words with certain connotations to create a particular effect, for better or for worse.

**CASE SPACE :**

The former British Prime Minister David Cameron was forced to apologise in 2015 after he referred to the influx of Syrian refugees in Europe as a 'swarm of migrants.' Because the word 'swarm' has connotations of an unwanted herd of animals or bunch of insects bringing disease and pestilence (e.g. a swarm of locusts,) many people objected to what they saw as inflammatory rhetoric designed to position citizens to disregard asylum seekers and treat them as a threatening homogenous mass of something less than human. Cameron later apologised for his choice of words, but there have been many similarly loaded terms used in discussions of migration and displaced people.

**Euphemisms:** are words which mask their true meaning, often in a way that covers up negative or distressing denotations through use of more appealing or general lexemes, (e.g. referring to the killing of innocent civilians in wartime as 'collateral damage,' or talking about firing someone as an 'early retirement opportunity' for them.) Euphemisms can also encode certain societal norms and taboos as well, such as expressions like 'going to the toilet' or performing their 'morning routine' instead of going into unnecessary detail about what those processes may entail. In some circumstances, however, speakers may prefer to use euphemisms out of politeness or respect, such as when people refer to a person having 'passed away' instead of having 'died' or worse 'been killed' so as not to upset others.

**CASE SPACE :**

In Part 3 of his documentary on language, 'Planet Word,' Stephen Fry stated that "*one of the most chilling aspects of the Nazis and the Holocaust is the way the unspeakably despicable acts of murder and violence of the death camps were veiled by anodyne words. Hate speech gave way to something more subtle and arguably more insidious: euphemism. Annihilating a whole ethnic group was called 'the final solution.' The murderous industry was disguised by expressions like 'special treatment,' 'bathhouses,' and 'auxiliary equipment.' These bland, neutral words allowed the perpetrators to dissociate from reality and disconnect from their emotions. Used this way, euphemisms are more dangerous, and infinitely more obscene than swear words.*"

**Dysphemism:** is the opposite of euphemism in that it involves using a harsher or more pejorative term instead of a nicer or more sensitive one. Most swear words are considered examples of dysphemisms, especially in circumstances where there are much politer and more considerate alternatives.

**CASE SPACE :**

In Harper Lee's 'To Kill A Mockingbird,' the character Atticus Finch attempts to explain a particular racial dysphemism to his daughter as something that "*ignorant, trashy people use when they think somebody's favouring negroes over and above themselves. It's slipped into usage with some people like ourselves, when they want a common, ugly term to label somebody.*" This can be an interesting starting point for a discussion on people's attitudes towards languages features.

Interestingly, you can also look into **euphemistic dysphemisms**, like when someone says 'oh fudge' or 'flipping heck' instead of the more blasphemous alternatives.

## Section 6

# Other Metalanguage

**Register:** is a word used to describe the variety of language used in a certain context (e.g. a formal register, a colloquial register, etc.) This can be affected by the environment or situation in which discourse is taking place, the form of communication (i.e. written or spoken), and the relative understanding of the intended addressees (e.g. a jargonistic register would be inappropriate if a doctor was talking to a patient about their treatment as that patient is unlikely to be able to understand such a register, but it would be completely acceptable if a doctor was talking to her colleagues as they would be more familiar with the lexicon she was employing.)

**Overt and covert norms:** refer to the obvious (overt) and subtle (covert) conventions in language and communication, and are often useful when talking about how EAL learners come to terms with the different norms between English and their native language. This often pertains to the ways in which speakers seek prestige in their communication; for instance, a speaker might deliberately make an effort to swear or use a less formal register amongst their peers such as to feel included or give the sense that they are part of the group. If this is done with confidence, other speakers usually won't notice this attempt (hence it is 'covert.') On the other hand, certain dialects or registers might be widely regarded by others in society as having innate prestige or being indicative of high-status, which would be more overt.

**Standard and non-standard English:** refer to the two groups of English that are dichotomised by the idea of 'correctness' – that is, Standard English which is accepted by institutions and most of society as being proper and characteristic of a good education, and non-standard, which is seen as being 'wrong' in terms of its grammar, pronunciation, or lexical choice. For a long time, non-standard dialects were treated as a homogenous mass of 'language mistakes' that were simply written off as being incorrect or the product of a lack of prestige. However, in more recent years, linguistics have attempted to understand where such non-standard usage comes from, and why certain speakers might be making these 'mistakes.' Often the overall meaning being communicated is still clear (e.g. 'How much old are you?' or 'I shouldn't of done that') but there are some structural or lexical issues that prevent the utterance from being accepted in formal contexts.

**Political correctness:** refers to the attempts made by speakers to avoid any language that may discriminate against or insult others, particularly minority groups. Political correctness is an extremely vexed and topical issue with some people arguing that it's important we are politically correct so as not to offend or oppress other groups, whilst others suggesting that political correctness has 'gone mad' and infringes on our freedom of speech.

#### CASE SPACE :

There are countless examples of the debate over political correctness in the media all the time, both in Australia and overseas. Figures like Andrew Bolt and Nigel Farage regularly dominate media coverage with their offensive or provocative statements, and whilst there is often heated discussion about whether or not what they said was 'politically incorrect,' many people also use such incidents as a means of debating whether or not political correctness is a good thing. Typically, these debates will also touch upon the notion of our right to freedom of speech, though you could also look at the notion of **hate speech** – that is, expressions or utterances which deliberately offend, threaten, or insult individuals and groups based on their race, gender, nationality, etc. Australia's Racial Discrimination Act of 1975 forbids acts of hate speech in public for the express intention of harming or upsetting others, so the discussion about where we draw lines between 'hate' speech and 'free' speech can make for some interesting analysis.

**Jargon:** refers to the specialised lexicon employed by people within a certain context (usually a profession) that would not be easily understood by others outside that group. Almost all professions have some sort of jargon, most notably the medical, legal, and commerce industries. However, jargon is not always an indictment of prestige or social power, as it can be used in almost all environments where speakers have a shared semantic domain they use to convey information (e.g. tradespeople may use jargon to refer to particular tools, structures, or actions which non-tradies would not comprehend.) Sometimes we can infer jargon from context (e.g. if you went to a doctor with a sore hand and they told you that one of your metacarpals was fractured, you'd be able to infer that the 'metacarpals' must be bones in your hand.)

**Slang:** refers to the colloquial and informal language often used in non-standard dialects of English, and is more common in spoken form than written form. Australian English is renowned for its use of slang vocabulary, and is usually used to create an in-group/out-group distinction between those who understand the lexicon and those who do not. Slang is also a very fluid phenomenon in linguistics, and changes rapidly over time; if you look back over the kinds of slang frequently employed over the past few decades (e.g. 'hip,' 'rad,' 'wicked,' 'sick,' 'awesome,' 'on fleek,' etc.) you'll see how suddenly words can become popularised or passé.

**Double-speak:** is a word used to refer to language that obfuscates its true meaning by being ambiguous or euphemistic. This is particularly common in political discourse where a politician might say 'I apologise if offence was taken at these actions' instead of 'I'm sorry I caused offence by what I did.' It's also often used when a speaker wants a negative concept to seem more positive (e.g. referring to a business cutting down its workforce by firing people as 'downsizing.')

**Taboo language:** refers to words or phrases which are considered inappropriate in most, if not all contexts. In Australian society, swear words are usually considered somewhat taboo in public, in the workforce, or in the media, but in more informal settings, it is less controversial. There can also be taboo topics or semantic fields or reference which people will not usually refer to in conversations unless they can't avoid it. The notion of what is or isn't taboo does shift somewhat depending on the context of discourse, but for the most part, racial epithets, words that relate to sexual kinks or deviancy, and general vulgar vocabulary are considered taboo or 'off-limits' in most situations.

**KEY POINT :**

Note that for the purposes of your essays, you don't want to get *too* opinionated in evaluating whether or not these taboos are accurate or justifiable. The English Language course can touch on some rather controversial topics like how language reflects race, sexuality, and gender roles. But your task is to discuss *how* this language creates meaning, and whilst your essay can adopt a stance that aligns with your personal opinion, you don't want this to be a substitute for evidence-based analysis.

**Public language:** simply refers to the dialect we use in a public context, which will often be distinct from 'private language' or personal idiolects based on the fact that other people aside from our intended addressee might hear our utterances.

**CASE SPACE :**

In the United States, a public servant working in Washington D. C. resigned over the controversy surrounding his use of the word 'niggardly' (meaning 'stingy' or not very generous.) The word has no etymological connection with the racial slur, and in fact is derived from an entirely different branch of language families, but because of this phonetic similarity, there was a significant backlash to his choice of words. By contrast, others claimed that this was an overreaction, or an instance of political correctness going too far, and that our sensitivities surrounding language usage should not be triggered by such occurrences.

**Positive and negative face needs:** relate to the notion that we need to feel accepted by others (positive face) but we also need to be somewhat independent (negative face.) In order to establish a healthy discourse and communicate appropriately, we must respect both the positive and negative face needs of others (e.g. inviting someone out for a social gathering and inquiring about their well-being, but not pressuring them to attend the event and not being too nosy or prying into their personal affairs.)

**Situational and cultural context:** refers to the environment (either literal or figurative) in which communication is occurring.

**Social purpose:** refers to the reasons for a discourse occurring, or the intended aim of communication. For instance, your social purpose of saying hello to your school friends might be to establish companionship and invite them to begin communicating with you, whereas your purpose for saying hello to the cashier at Coles would simply be a gesture of politeness or reciprocity, rather than an indictment of your long-standing friendship.

**Ethnolects, sociolects, and idiolects:** refer to the ethnic, social, or individual dialects we use to communicate. There are many different kinds of variations within these general areas (e.g. European immigrants using words like 'nonno' and 'nonna' to refer to their grandparents in English dialogues, using 'youse' or [ju:z] as a second person plural pronoun, etc.) and it pays to familiarise yourself with the hallmarks of distinctive dialects so you can recognise them in the data you're given in assessment tasks.

**Paralinguistic features:** refer to features which are used to communicate information, but are non-lexical and do not derive from any of the major sub-systems. For example, body gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact are all examples of features which can modify or augment your discourse, but can't really substitute for actual lexical items. Some linguists also classify tone and vocal inflection as paralinguistic features too, but most English Language textbooks regard these as prosodic features within phonology.

**KEY POINT :**

Be careful when talking about paralinguistic features – they can make for excellent complimentary points in your analysis, but as most questions or essay topics in English Language requires you to examine the particular *linguistic features* of a text with reference to certain sub-systems or types of metalanguage, you don't want to veer too far off course. As a general rule, try to only discuss paralinguistic elements of communication in addition to another, more conventional feature just to be on the safe side.

## **Part II**

### **Unit 3**

## Area of Study 1

# Informal Language

How do you distinguish between casual and serious conversations? In what way does your speech change when you're talking to your mates in class as opposed to your school principal? And how do you know which language features to use in such circumstances? Unit 3 of English Language is dedicated to understanding these questions about **language in context**, mainly in relation to **formality**. In this Area of Study, we're going to examine informal language and the kinds of linguistic and paralinguistic markers that separate informal written and spoken communication from other discourse.

### 1.1 Phonetics and Phonology

Though the shifts between degrees of formality is more apparent in our morphology and word choices, there are still some phonological differences between formal and informal speech that have arisen in society.

**CASE SPACE :**

An amusing urban myth is that rural Australians tend to speak with more closed vowels (i.e. with their mouths mostly shut, almost as though they're talking out from the corner of their mouths) because of the population density of blowflies in such areas. Legend has it flies would end up in the mouths of those who stood agape or spoke with too many open vowels, leading to a phonological shift in those regions. This is *not* backed up by research and is highly unlikely to be true, but does make for an entertaining theory.

When speaking informally, we will often make more frequent use of phonological blends and assimilation between sounds since there is less of a need to carefully articulate sounds. Australian expressions like [hæɔ̚zɪtga:mæɪt] for 'how's it going mate?' are often highly blended and spoken with a Broader accent. The same can be said for many other phonological processes like elision or lenition where sounds are assimilated and become a more unified utterance allowing for more casual expression.

**CASE SPACE :**

Some linguists believe there to be informal versions of intonational patterns in Australian English too, particularly in South Australia where speakers tend to utilise a wider variety of pitches (i.e. their 'high' tones are higher than ours, and their 'low' tones are lower,) as well as sharper, more dramatic contrasts in their tonal shifts. This gave rise to the popular belief that South Australians sound inherently different to other Australian English speakers, and that their words are somehow 'bouncier' than ours.

### 1.2 Morphology and Lexicology

This is probably the biggest area of variation between formal and informal dialogue as the use of slang or colloquial lexemes are hallmarks of informality. Contractions and abbreviations, for instance, are often considered relatively informal, especially if one is making use of Australian English suffixation (e.g. 'povo' for poverty, or 'arvo' for afternoon.) Moreover, whilst morphological rules aren't totally abandoned in informal settings, they're often much more relaxed as speakers are free to use more non-standard constructions.

The advent of technology has also seen some additional lexemes added to informal discourse. In fact, this can often be a chain reaction of technology and ease of communication influencing one another. For instance, when mobile phones used to have physical key pads instead of touch screens and letters were assigned to buttons in groups of three or four (e.g. '2 = abc, 3 = def, etc.') many speakers would abbreviate words to letters and numbers (e.g. 'c u l8r' for 'see you later') so they would not have to go through the laborious process of spelling out each word. This also precipitated the popularisation of abbreviations like 'lol' (laugh out loud) and other similar discourse particles. However, you may notice 'lol' appearing in spoken dialogues too as speakers gradually adopted it as a feature of oral discourse in order to convey amusement without the more traditional signal of laughter.

**CASE SPACE :**

For those of you who don't remember the 'Boaty McBoatface' debacle, I highly recommend googling it because it was a very amusing story, but the gist of it was that there was a competition to name a new boat that was put to a public vote, and the response that proved to be the most popular was 'Boaty McBoatface.' Now I'm sure we've all been in situations where we have weird inside jokes with friends and family that other people don't get (or worse, when you try and explain a joke to someone and they don't find it at all funny) but for some reason, hundreds of thousands of people read those two words 'Boaty McBoatface' and thought they were hilarious. Why is that? It became a running joke across the world for a few weeks with all sorts of other competitions (e.g. 'Bridgey McBrideface,' 'Trainy Mc Trainface,' 'Schoolie McSchoolface,' etc.) What is it about this informal morphological construction that registers as being instantly amusing to so many people? And (given that the organisers vetoed the name choice and went with something else instead,) why was it considered inappropriate in that situation? It's easy to dismiss informal language as being simplistic or improper, but it can be inordinately powerful and seemingly unifying in cases like these, so whilst the circumstances are somewhat laughable, this may be an interesting and contemporary example if you wanted to discuss language as it pertains to humour and camaraderie.

The most obvious example of this sense of togetherness achieved through colloquial lexicology is the Australian word 'mate,' which transcends many social (and arguably gender) boundaries to become an epithet that suits all sorts of informal situations and even spills into some more formal ones. Much has been written about the function of 'mate' in Australian dialects, so if you wish to discuss this in essays, be sure to do some research.

Word formation is also easier to accomplish in an informal setting than a formal one. For instance, typical affixes like '-phobia' or '-aholic' can be applied to form any number of nouns, like 'Sydneyphobia' (an irrational fear of Sydney) or 'goonaholic' (i.e. someone who is addicted to cask wine, colloquially known as 'goon.') However, though these may be recognisable to speakers who have not heard or used them before, the fact that they are not Standard English words would make them seem quite informal, and hence only appropriate in casual settings.

### 1.3 Syntax

Rules of syntax and sentence grammaticality are also often much looser and more relaxed in informal contexts with things like sentence fragments or run-on sentences being much more forgivable in such situations. Often in spoken dialogue we don't even notice improper sentence construction because communication is happening more spontaneously, as opposed to a formal speech or a letter/email where one has the chance to ponder lexical choice and syntactic composition.

Ellipsis is also very common in informal written settings. For instance, if one speaker wrote or messaged another asking 'Do you want to get lunch on Friday' (with the added semantic implication that the speaker and addressee would be getting lunch together,) the other may respond 'Sounds good!' as a highly elliptical means of saying 'Getting lunch together on Friday sounds good to me.'

Consider the differences between informal verbal communication, and informal communication via texting or instant messaging. In what ways is technologically-aided discourse similar to the spoken mode? Do you text the way you talk? Do you become more elliptical and abrupt via text, or are you more likely to ramble on? One interesting feature to think about here is the role of punctuation since, aside from emoticons, most people will not punctuate their informal discussions to create proper syntactic utterances. Sometimes this is partly due to laziness and the fact that one does not need to see a full stop at the end of a text message to know it is the end of a message, but to some extent this is also a product of the medium of communication since many people (especially the younger generation) will simply split sentences up over multiple messages.

For example, the following could be individual messages sent over the course of a minute or so:

hey are you free for lunch on tues

was thinking of going out to see Monica's new place

could go on wed arvo too if that suits?

In these situations, punctuation at the ends of each message are more or less optional - it is clear that the first message is a closed interrogative without the aid of a question mark, though this speaker has included one at the end of their third message, which is a slightly elliptical declarative statement (i.e. We could go on Wednesday afternoon too, if that suits you.) This serves to make the statement less intrusive or presumptive, opening the discourse for the addressee to respond (almost like yielding the floor.) However, you'll notice that the syntax is lacking a subject and would not conform to the regular standards of formal written English.

**CASE SPACE :**

There is a theory put forth by several linguists that ending text messages with full stops (as would normally be the convention in the formal written mode Standard English) actually conveys a sense of insincerity or impatience, especially when it comes to one word confirmational responses like so:

you up for hockey practice tonight?

Yep.

cooooo, see you at 7 then :)

Sure.

What impression do you get of this respondee? Do they seem keen on the prospect of meeting up? Typically, these one word responses would be considered fairly informal and casual, but the inclusion of the more formal punctuation creates a sense of distance between the two; the former's colloquial expression 'you up for...' coupled with the elongated 'cooooo' and emoticon attempts to establish a sense of friendship or alliance, but the addressee seems much more haughty and reserved. This may be a misinterpretation since the lack of any other contextual or paralinguistic features involved in instant messaging or text-based communication can make it difficult to draw definitive conclusions, but the varying degrees of formality evident in syntax can have an impact on how speakers are perceived.

## 1.4 Discourse

In relation to turn-taking, communication is usually much more multi-dimensional between participants as informal dialogue can involve group participation, and where overlapping speech or taking the floor out of turn might be considered rude or improper in formal contexts, in informal settings it's much more appropriate.

It is still crucial for texts to be coherent and cohesive, even when they are informal, though the strategies used to achieve this are often much more relaxed. Discourse particles are employed more frequently, especially in one-on-one verbal communication, and one can make greater use of deictic references because to speak informally to someone usually entails that you have a relatively close relationship with that person or are able to make assumptions based on what you know about one another. Speakers may also use particles or epithets to refer to other individuals in their lives (e.g. talking with colleagues at work about what 'me and the missus' did over the weekend, or discussing 'the ex' in reference to a previous girlfriend or boyfriend.)

**CASE SPACE :**

Another great example of an informal discourse particle is the expression 'yeah-nah' in Australian English – particularly in broader variants. The 'Living Lingo' textbook contains a detailed breakdown of the function of this particle and the way it can act as a marker of: agreement (as in, "yeah nah, you're right, let's go to the footy tonight,") disagreement, as in: "yeah nah, I'd rather just stay home,") cohesion, especially after a long pause in a conversation (as in, "yeah nah, how great is footy?") and hedging, in terms of downplaying compliments (as in: "yeah nah, I'm not the best footy player, though, you know?")

Most speakers are also far more comfortable using idioms or slang expressions in informal settings. For instance, where a primary school teacher might have scolded you for saying 'I brang my pencil case to school' speakers in an informal setting would be much less likely to correct these errors. In fact, some 'wrong' slang words (most notably the term 'versus') have actually become part of the general vernacular despite the fact that they were once considered objectively incorrect or the product of a poor vocabulary.

## 1.5 Semantics

In informal settings when speakers are usually close to or at least familiar with one another, their semantic fields are most likely going to be quite similar. For example, you and your peers might talk about how 'the Chem SAC's in period 3 tomorrow but VTAC applications are due straight after so we should go talk to Mr. Hamilton' which, to an outsider, would be a rather confusing statement. The kinds of shared meanings we create through long-term discourse (i.e. knowing your family and friends for years and years) also helps make informal communication quite efficient. For instance, your parent might ask you to 'pick your brother up tonight,' and because you are aware that your brother will be at his tennis club after school until 6:00 that day, you can infer from the semantic context when and where you need to go.

In terms of more elaborate semantic features, it's rare that speakers will deliberately employ things like connotations or euphemisms spontaneously unless they are in situations that require careful lexical choice. For instance, if you knew someone in your peer group had lost a loved one to cancer recently, you'd likely be more cautious in using hyperbolic expressions like 'wow, that last maths test was worse than cancer' or other statements that could be seen as callous and insensitive.

**CASE SPACE :**

One of the Liberal Party's campaign election ads in 2016 featured a 'tradie' or tradesperson talking directly into the camera criticising the Labor Party's various policies. You can watch the whole thing here: <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2016/06/20/liberal-partys-fake-tradie-advertising-campaign-backfires>

However, the ad was largely ridiculed by Australians (who got the hashtag #faketradie trending) because of how clunky the attempt at informality seemed. The man in the ad (who, the Liberals claim, is a *real* tradie, though there is some suspicion they hired an actor instead) makes statements about how Labor leader Bill Shorten "even wants to go to war with someone like me who just wants to get ahead through an investment property." This, coupled with the stilted delivery and seemingly uncomfortable body language and eye contact gave the advertisement the sense of forced informality, and the words like 'go to war with someone like me' came across as a remarkably pointed attempt to create a relatable figure for the Liberal Party's argument. Hence, in spite of its efforts to elicit sympathy and a sense of camaraderie with their audience, the ad actually had the opposite effect, depicting the creators as out-of-touch and ultimately unable to use sense relations in an appropriate or realistic manner.

## Area of Study 2

# Formal Language

Having discussed the features of informal language, we can now examine its inverse: formal language. This sort of communication tends to be more conventionally 'correct,' based on Standard English, and is often used to convey gravitas or importance.

Though formality exists on a continuum and it is possible to have situations be far more formal than others, the situational context and the purpose of communication often give us some idea of how formal a discourse is likely to be. Generally if you know who is talking, to whom they are talking, and why they are talking, you can discern how formal their speech and lexical choices will be.

### 2.1 Phonetics and Phonology

In contrast to informal language, formal communication is marked by very different phonetic features. In terms of pronunciation, Cultivated Australian accents are usually considered to be more the formal variant of speech, and even those who do not normally speak with such an accent will occasionally emulate it in formal settings by shortening and rounding their vowels or speaking with greater attention to diction. As such, there will usually be less assimilation of sounds or things like metathesis found in formal speech.

In terms of prosodic features, on the other hand, formal discourse is marked by much fewer conversational features like pauses or inappropriate volume. In written discourse, people may also employ phonological patterns to create meaning, especially in literary texts or utterances that are designed to be 'catchy' and memorable.

### 2.2 Morphology and Lexicology

Lexically speaking, our choice of words contributes greatly to the formality of our speech and writing. For starters, the use of slang or colloquialisms is obviously avoided in formal discourse with more conventional vocabulary being employed instead. More frequent use of modal verbs and generalised pronouns are also common in formal texts.

In written discourse, we may choose to adopt a different voice as opposed to the inclusive pronouns we can see in this sentence here. Instead, one may employ the impersonal and generic 'one' as a marker of a hypothetical individual. This can lead to a sense of distance compared to the inclusive nature of 'we' and 'us,' but in situations where the writer does not wish to create a connection between themselves and their addressees, this can be a viable alternative. It's often seen in legal documents or formalised rules and regulations where using 'we' would be inappropriate and lack authority, whereas 'you' could be seen as a tad accusatory.

### 2.3 Syntax

Formal syntax is typically more complex than informal syntax with frequent use of subordinate clauses and conjunctions to make things flow. Sentence variants like passive or cleft constructions are also more common, and people will usually measure their sentence lengths more carefully, particularly in the written mode.

Syntax is also an area where many grammar pedants bemoan the more informal or 'wrong' variations that some speakers employ in less formal contexts, most notably in the switching of **nominative** (i.e. subject focused, like 'I,' 'he,' and 'she') and **accusative** (i.e. object focused, like 'me,' 'him,' and 'her') forms of pronouns. Often, young children will be corrected for saying 'Jane and me went to the shops' when the conventional and formal Standard English equivalent is 'Jane and I went to the shops.'

**CASE STUDY :**

By extension, there's also an issue of 'over-correction' that stems from this kind of pronoun usage that relates to our perception of linguistic prestige. Because the 'person and I' form is seen as more formal and speakers will recall having been corrected for saying otherwise (i.e. 'person and me,') they will occasionally overgeneralise the rule and try to apply it in circumstances where it actually violates Standard English (e.g. 'She bought new clothes for Lenny and I' when the correct form should be 'She bought new clothes for Lenny and me' because the object should be in the accusative case.) However, because most speakers acquire these rules and are left to make their own assumptions about them instead of being taught how and why they are correct or incorrect, we leave open the possibility that we will make grammatical errors like these.

Though it has been thoroughly studied for decades now, there is still debate over the extent to which elements of language learning - especially grammar - are universally hard-coded in our brains. According to some, formal syntax is something we must be taught, whilst others suggest that we acquire syntax based on the input we receive from the world around us, and from this we create a framework of our language's grammar.

**CASE STUDY :**

The famous linguist Noam Chomsky who you will likely have come across in Units 1 and 2 postulated that there was an innate structure of Universal Grammar that all people are born with. His rationale was, in part, based on a principle called the 'poverty of stimulus' which stated that our linguistic knowledge goes beyond what we are explicitly taught, and we are capable of creating sentences that we have never heard before. For instance, I could type a sentence like 'a vicious purple bear dances in Finland while playing the tambourine' which is probably not a sentence you have ever heard or read before – it may not have ever been written or spoken aloud in human history, but you can still conceive of what I am communicating. Chomsky's notion of an innate internal grammar tried to account for this, though there are many other frameworks which have evolved from and challenged his original hypothesis.

## 2.4 Discourse

Typically, formal language occurs more often in written texts than spoken ones, and most correspondence via letter writing or emails (in a professional context) is fairly formal in nature. This is especially true in ceremonial contexts, as in weddings, funerals, or legal proceedings. However, this largely depends on the social distance between the speaker and the addressee(s) with things like status and purpose also influencing levels of formality. Speakers can both widen or narrow the social distance between one another through their language choices, though in general, formal language is usually used to distance oneself (particularly in the written mode where a letter might be addressed to 'Dear Sir/Madam,' or 'To whom it may concern.')

Politeness is another key feature used by speakers in formal contexts with lexical choices and even the tone of one's voice altered to reflect respect or consideration. Discourse particles and interjections like 'Excuse me' and 'Sorry' in the sense of 'Excuse me, do you know what the time is' or 'Sorry, have you got a minute?' are often useful, and remove any potential awkwardness or ambiguity that may exist in informal discourse.

There is also likely to be less reliance on deictic references because formal language is often targeted at a larger or even unknown audience (e.g. informational pamphlets, promotional advertisements, bills sent through the mail, etc.) Since formal language is more frequently geared towards informing addressees, there will usually be a more explicit purpose, and as such, the speakers are less concerned with establishing a connection or fostering relationships between themselves and whoever they're communicating with.

In terms of coherence and cohesion, formal texts will usually be more logically ordered with clear demarcations for openings and closings, which means overlapping speech is quite rare (especially in extremely formal settings or officious matters.)

## 2.5 Semantics

Formal language often has greater freedom in the semantic patterns it can employ, especially in written modes where things like metaphors or puns can be crafted more carefully. It may reinforce certain relationship hierarchies if a speaker is able to employ authoritative linguistic features, but it also aids in navigating taboo language and providing semantically 'safer' or more neutral terms to use when referring to confronting or uncomfortable subject matter.

As a general rule, formal language tends to be less ambiguous because of its dependence on structure and specific purposes. However, it's also possible to use formal languages for the purposes of obfuscation and to obscure true meaning, especially if one is employing jargonistic terms in a context where the addressees are unlikely to be familiar with them. As such, it pays to discern the purpose of any formal text you are given; at the very least, try to distinguish whether the author's intention is to create clarity or ambiguity.

**Part III**

**Unit 4**

## Area of Study 1

# Language Variation within Australian Society

In this section, we will examine the ways that Australian English changes across different social divides and how speakers navigate these variations. This Area of Study is particularly concerned with contemporary Australian society and how language reflects or shapes our collective values and understanding, so your ability to draw from the right kinds of examples is crucial to scoring highly in your Unit 4 SACs.

### 1.1 Diachronic and synchronic variation

A key distinction here is the difference between **diachronic variation** (which refers to variation across different time periods) and **synchronic variation** (which refers to variation that exists at the same time.) For example, if you've ever had to study a Shakespearean play or sonnet in class, you'll have noticed that the kind of English used in Elizabethan times is quite different from how we speak today – both in terms of the lexicon (e.g. words like 'fustilarian' and 'fopdoodle' that have, sadly, not made it into the vernacular of Modern English speakers) and in terms of syntax (e.g. "What light through yonder window breaks?" or "was the hope drunk wherein you dressed yourself?") The disparity is even plainer when we look at Old English, which is almost unintelligible nowadays, (e.g. "geweorbe ðin willa on eorðan swa swa on heofenum, urne ge dæghwamlican hlaf syle us to-deag" – a line from the Lord's Prayer that very few speakers would even be able to read in its Old English form.) Hence, the disparity between the Early Modern English of Shakespeare's time, and the Modern English we use is an example of diachronic variation.

Synchronic variation is often seen as more topical and worth of discussion from a Unit 3 and 4 perspective, and most of the examples you collect will revolve around this kind of language use. A typical example of this kind of variation can be seen in the different lexemes we have in Australian English compared to those in American English (e.g. autumn vs. fall, footpath vs. sidewalk, boot (of a car) vs. trunk, etc.) But there are also synchronic variations within Australian English, like how different speakers will refer to what people in Victoria usually call a 'potato cake' as a 'potato scallop' or 'potato fritter' if they are from other states, or how young people are more likely to use words like 'chill' in the sense of something being relaxing as opposed to older people's sense of it referring to cold temperatures.

### 1.2 Australian English and Non-Australian English

The banner of 'non-Australian English' is a term that encompasses many different dialects and variations. For one, all other forms of English, such as British, American, New Zealand, or Canadian can be dubbed 'non-Australian English,' but we can also consider different **creoles** and language variants within our country as different kinds of 'non-Australian' forms.

A key question here is how different language variants have to be before we call them 'dialects,' 'creoles' or some other alternate form. The technical definition of a dialect or variant is a language that, "as spoken in a particular locality within that language realm, may vary by peculiarities of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical form, something so divergent as to be almost unintelligible to those speaking the same language in another locality." However, the classic conundrum linguists face is in the degree of 'peculiarities' and 'divergence' evident within language variants. For instance, imagine there are three civilisations living near to one another; if Group A can communicate with Group B, and Group B can communicate with Group C, but Group A cannot communicate with Group C, where do we divide the barriers of language? Do they all speak separate languages? If not, how similar do they have to be before we call them dialectical speakers of the same languages? In an Australian context, there are variations across a number of different groups in society, and our communication is greatly influenced by changes in technology and societal values. As such, whilst we can undoubtedly look at 'Australian English' as an umbrella term for other variants, it's important to remember that classifying 'languages' in this manner is often more complex than it seems.

## 1.3 Socio-economic variation

Below is an outline of the three primary differences in pronunciation that are thought to mark for socio-economic difference between Australians. To some extent, these divisions can become self-perpetuating as those trying to belong to the upper echelons of society will (either deliberately or sub-consciously) mimic the Cultivated accents usually held by the upper class, whereas those in rural environments or who are aiming to feel included amongst a working-class group will imitate a Broad accent. Keep in mind that these general categories are not perfect dissections of the whole society, and we will look at other distinctions later.

**Broad accents:** are those which are characterised by slower or longer diphthongs and more open vowel sounds, most commonly spoken in rural areas. Typically, Broad accents are considered more stereotypically Australian (e.g. think Steve Irwin or basically any famous AFL player) though they can also be considered more working-class and belonging to those lower down the social strata.

**General accents:** are what most of us likely speak and refers to the middle band between the broad and cultivated variations of Australian English. It is by far the most common, so it is a little harder to generalise the attitudes people have about General Australian accents, though they are marked by fairly obvious phonological features like centralised vowels and frequent diphthongisation.

**Cultivated accents:** are associated with more prestigious and upper-class members of society, likely because of the similarity between Cultivated Australian English and British English. This tends to be considered a more careful or intellectual form of speech that is common in metropolitan areas, especially Adelaide and Melbourne.

## 1.4 Cultural variation

The multicultural fabric of Australia means that, happily, we have a wide range of different cultural variants we can discuss. On the one hand, you can look at Indigenous Australian languages and the effect these have had on Standard Australian English, particularly in relation to borrowed lexemes. There's also a whole range of linguistic influences that have been brought by migrants over the past hundred years, particularly from European nations (post World War II) and Asian countries (1980's-present.) Certain regions of Australia are more affected by these than others, largely due to the fact that migrant communities often settled in particular clusters of suburbs, leading to the development of ethnolects in those areas. However, there have also been broader changes and adoptions of new words across the country, particularly on a lexical level.

For example, there is often some variation in the use of epithets, which are kinds of monikers or labels we use to refer to people, ranging from things like 'dear' and 'sweetheart' all the way to racial epithets. Often, the kinds of epithets a person employs stem from the cultures in which they were raised. In many languages, there are usually different modes of address depending on the intended level of closeness or respect between parties (as is the case with most Latin languages as well as some South-East Asian languages) but in English, our second person pronouns are essentially limited to 'you' and very informal variants like 'youse' or 'you guys.' As such, speakers who are more used to a greater variation in the epithets or honorifics they use may be uncomfortable with the idea of referring to a group of people who are older than them or to someone in a position of authority as 'you' and will instead use their full name or a title like 'Sir' or 'Ma'am.'

## 1.5 Geographical variation

Though there is far less geographical variation in Australia than there is in the United Kingdom or the United States, we do have some key differences across our states both lexically and phonologically that can separate groups of speakers from one another.

**CASE SPACE :**

Linguists like Debbie Loakes and Janet Fletcher have noted that there is a "curious transformation" happening right here, right now in our very own state. It involves a phonological vowel shift before the velarised alveolar lateral approximant or 'dark l sound' [ɫ], like the 'l' in 'full' as opposed to the non-velarised 'l' in 'leaf.' (Notice how your tongue is closer to the front of your mouth in 'leaf' than in 'full?') That's basically how we distinguish velarisation.) Funnily enough, this change is most apparent in one's pronunciation of our capital city: Melbourne. If you and/or your parents were born and raised in Victoria, you will likely pronounce the first syllable as [mæɫ], instead of [met] like most other English speakers. This is also seen in words like 'helicopter' and 'alps,' though the most confusing example of this is the fact that Victorians who have undergone the vowel transformation will pronounce the names 'Alan' and 'Ellen' exactly the same. There is currently a preliminary study investigating this phenomenon under the working title of 'Hallo, Walcome to Malbourne.'

There are also some significant variations in the lexicology across the continent, though these differences are mainly based on nouns and one can usually infer their meaning from context.

**CASE SPACE :**

Research conducted by the Australian Linguistic Roadshow aimed to map out the differences in word choice in different regions of the nation by asking participants what they would normally call particular things or objects. For example, what would you call a device that enables you to drink water in a public place? A fountain? A water fountain? A water tap? A bubbler? And what would you call the clothes you wear to go swimming? Bathers? Swimmers? Togs? Cossies? A swimsuit? Your answers will likely reveal something about where (or at least which state) you live in. In Victoria, we're more likely to use the words 'water tap' and 'bathers,' though the ALR published various maps with coloured dots spread across the different states to mark what the most common responses were in different areas. They also tested alternative lexemes for 'potato cakes,' 'blood noses,' 'a canteen,' 'milk bars,' and 'icy pole,' all of which had significant variation between states. Some lexemes were unique to particular regions (e.g. the word 'milk bar' is virtually unique to Victoria, and calling bathers 'togs' is typical of Queenslanders) whereas others were more widely distributed, particularly in Western Australia where there are very few unanimous conclusions about which vocabulary to use.

There have been very few syntactic differences found across different states, though there are some linguists who believe that rural Australians are more accepting of the use of the first person singular 'we' being used in the genitive case as a possessor (e.g. 'I'll just go grab me car keys and then we can get going') which would be otherwise unacceptable in Standard English. Aside from these minor variations, Australian syntax is not affected too greatly by geographical distance.

## 1.6 Attitudes to Australian English Varieties

Attitudes towards cultural varieties are often especially fraught with the unfortunate incidents of racism and discrimination often causing feelings of isolation amongst ethnic or religious groups and stoking the bigotry and intolerance of others still playing a significant role in many serious debates.

Much of what you will discuss in relation to attitudes towards language varieties will stem from issues of prejudice with language prestige and where these attitudes come from. For instance, consider the racial or socio-economic stereotypes associated with particular modes of speaking - what would distinguish a typical 'bogan' Broad accent from the refined voice of someone of the upper class? Or, in terms of gender, age, and education levels, how might your perception of someone be affected by certain varieties or features they employ?

This often contributes to a sense of in-group and out-group exclusion between groups of speakers, and it can be difficult to break down such barriers when there are subtle communication barriers that are evident in these variations of language. On the whole, Standard Australian English is more unified than many other forms of English, but the perceptions and prejudices that exist in society still have an impact on the way we communicate.

## **Area of Study 2**

# **Individual and Group Identities**

This Area of Study is dedicated to the connections between the language we use and the identities we create for ourselves. Many essay topics in the past few years have been grounded in this notion of how our language choices reflect aspects of our personalities and values, and the question of how language and identity relate to or influence one another is very central to this whole course. Most good examples can be moulded to suit different prompts or focal points, but ideally you want to be collating examples from a wide range of different kind of individual and group identities in order to fully prepare for exam-style questions.

### **2.1 Age**

When talking about language changes in users of different ages, there are a couple of different angles you can take. On the one hand, we can make generalisations about how groups of teenagers as opposed to adults speak as an example of synchronic variation, but you can also consider how particular speakers will alter their language depending on the age of their addressees. For instance, you probably don't speak the same way to your parents or grandparents as you do amongst your peers. You may even vary your speech around small children (i.e. using less complex grammatical constructions or perhaps more basic lexemes). Furthermore, you can discuss the ways in which the language used by particular age groups contributes to their individual or group identities.

**CASE SPACE :**

There is also the interesting 'hashtag phenomenon' whereby speakers will use the word 'hashtag' in informal conversations in the same manner that they would employ it on a site like twitter or facebook that allow users to '#words' and tag things that are relevant to the conversation. For instance, someone might comment '#me' in response to a cartoon of someone trying to smother their alarm clock and go back to sleep as a highly elliptical way of saying 'this cartoon relates to me as I sympathise with the subject matter that's depicted here and/or have experienced this myself.' But recently, in spoken contexts, people (particularly young speakers in their teens) will use the word 'hashtag' out loud to perform this same function (e.g. a teacher might assign several hours of homework one night, prompting someone in the class to say 'hashtag child abuse!') Curiously, this has not occurred with the '@name' functions of twitter and facebook which allow users to tag one another and direct their attention to particular content (i.e. you probably haven't heard someone say 'at Brandon!' when something happens that reminds them of something their friend once did or would like.) Perhaps this is because the '@name' features performs a slightly different function in that where #ing can be a one-directional means of communicating a sentiment or opinion, @ing someone is more direct, and if the person you are @ing is one of the addressees, then there are less clunky ways to get their attention or express an idea. However, the @name features is undoubtedly a unique and efficient means of communicating what would otherwise take several words to say, so perhaps future generations will adopt this as part of their lexicon.

Age plays a big part in the way groups of speakers in Australia communicate both with and between one another. The variant often dubbed 'teenspeak' used to refer to the unique linguistic features employed by teenagers and young adults (often via instant messaging or social media, but also in terms of oral communication too) has been picked apart in recent years, and was found to contain some rather complex semantic notions that Standard English would struggle to convey. Given that language change can happen so rapidly, the gap between generations is becoming more and more pronounced, and the advent of so many different communication modes and tools over the past few decades as sped up this process even more.

**CASE SPACE :**

The expression 'hang up' the phone obviously derives from the days when wall phones were the most prototypical kinds of phones, and mobile devices were not yet invented, or at least very rare. However, in the age of smartphones and particularly for the younger generation of people who have never known a world without them, the notion of 'hanging up' a phone seems somewhat foreign since 'hanging up' nowadays is achieved by tapping a screen. We are probably a while away from phasing out this expression (though it may stick around if there is no viable, succinct alternative) though this is a great example of how changes in technology can bring about generational shifts in our language use.

## 2.2 Gender

Likewise, we can examine language differences in relation to gender. Typically, most studies will discuss the differences in language use between males and females, though in more recent years there have been more nuanced analyses of pronoun usage, particularly in relation to the potential adoption of gender-neutral pronouns (e.g. 'Mx.' instead of 'Mr.' or 'Mrs./Ms.', or 'xe' instead of 'he/she.') These are still very much in their infancy and aren't widely recognised by speakers outside of certain communities, but there will occasionally be examples of such discussions in the media if you wish to look at these topics.

Mostly, though, you will be examining issues of discrimination or sexism, like the criticism of 'he' being the default term in many types of formal discourse.

**CASE SPACE :**

Australian of the Year in 2016 David Morrison published a list of words which he suggested should be phased out of workplace environments because of their sexist or exclusive nature. This included words like 'bossy,' 'feisty,' and 'bitchy' which Morrison remarked were inherently gendered ways of criticising women for being vocal and assertive as such adjectives would never be used to describe a male employee. Perhaps the most controversial item on this list was the word 'guys,' which was presented as a somewhat discriminatory term that could be used to segregate or discount female colleagues. However, many commentators saw the word 'guys' as relatively gender neutral, and argued that even though it may once have been used to refer to males (as opposed to its counterpart: 'gals,') that the word had undergone a semantic widening and was now a fairly colloquial way of referring to a group of people collectively in the second person (as in, 'come on guys, let's get some work done.')

As well as these criticisms levelled against what are perceived to be subtle or insidious kinds of gender discrimination, there are also often issues with how institutions validate particular words and thus validate the sentiments that accompany them.

**CASE SPACE :**

Recall from our discussion of neologisms that the term 'mansplaining' was a portmanteau of the words 'man' and 'explaining,' used to describe the phenomenon whereby a man explains something to a woman in a manner considered patronising or supercilious. That word was actually Macquarie Dictionary's 'Word of the Year' in 2014, and they dealt with some harsh backlash over the alleged sexism that the word conveyed. In fact, many dictionaries and similar institutions often face criticism over the way they 'legitimise' words. Their defence (and the defence of other groups like the Oxford English Dictionary when they agreed to put 'selfie' and the erroneous use of the word 'literally' in their lexicon) was that their role was to reflect how people were using language, not to discount words that were offensive or 'wrong.' In short, these dictionaries took a *descriptivist* approach that let them describe the ways in which people used words to communicate, rather than a *prescriptivist* approach that attempted to tell people what they should or should not say.

## 2.3 Occupation

This is an area where your ability to discuss examples of jargon will be highly advantageous, as often the kinds of jargon people employ is indicative of the industry they work in. Most students will attempt to discuss medical jargon, 'legalese' and 'bureaucratese') but almost all workplaces and workforces will have a variety of lexical items relevant to what they do.

**CASE SPACE :**

You could even extend this to a discussion of how changes in occupational lexicons can lead to shifts on a syntactic level too, such as the way the noun 'action' has become a verb in certain circles. For instance, in the commerce profession, one person may say to another 'can you action this report for me?' or 'what day are we going to action the new draft?' Apparently it's also common to hear this with additional verbal morphemes, as in, 'can you actionise this report for me?' which some linguists regard as strange given that inflectional morphology designed to turn a verb into another verb is rare in English.

You may also combine a discussion of language in occupational contexts with one that considers age or gender too. For instance, some linguists argue that certain common nouns, like 'doctor,' 'pilot,' or 'boss' are more often associated with males, as opposed to words like 'nurse,' 'teacher,' or 'librarian.' The divide is less pronounced nowadays than it was throughout the 20th century, though if you wanted to delve into the implications of gender discrimination or covert prejudices in a work setting, you could think about the extent to which people's identities are still affected by such notions.

## 2.4 Education

Education levels are also quite influential in our construction of language, and the reservations we have about what constitutes 'good' and 'proper' English can largely be attributed to what was taught to us in the schooling system. Those who are uneducated or who received a poor or improper education will typically adopt more colloquialisms, idioms, and figures of speech, and will have a far more flexible internal grammar than those who adhere to the Standard English conventions that are deemed proper.

Given that Australia is a relatively egalitarian society (which is also a concept reflected in some of our language, incidentally) and the class divide is not as pronounced here as it is overseas, the discrepancy between uneducated and highly-educated registers is less significant than some other factors, but it can still play a role in our perception of people and groups.

**CASE SPACE :**

In October 2016, Victorians participated in the local government elections whereby every citizen of voting age is mailed a voting slip (to be mailed back to the Electoral Commission to be counted) containing brief, 200 word bits of prose from each of the candidates encouraging people to vote for them. However, *The Age* and various other media outlets were contacted by members of the public complaining that there were various spelling and punctuation errors in the material. Voters reported seeing missing apostrophes (e.g. "Im" "wont" "Melbournes") and general spelling mistakes like one candidate promising to be "compensate" towards struggling families (instead of "compassionate"). A candidate named John Cummings had various errors, including an added apostrophe in the plural "idea's," and misspelling the word 'mismanagement' as "mismanagent." When asked about these errors, he stated that having left school in Year 9, he was never involved in careers that required much by way of literary skills and hoped that people would not judge him by their own higher grammatical standards. This prompted the CEO of the Victorian Local Governance Association, Andrew Hollows, to advise people to judge candidates by their stances and policy platforms rather than their spelling errors, remarking that people of lower levels of education should not be discouraged from running for elected office.

## 2.5 Race

The interplay between racial identity and language is a controversial, but extremely topical one, and it's an issue that permeates many debates in the media. Even the adjective we use to describe ourselves – 'Australian' – is often transformed, at least in informal and spoken contexts, into the shortened and colloquial form 'Strayan' in imitation of Broad accents, in a way that separates the concept of Australian identity from that of the British or American counterparts. Within our country, though, discussing the notion of ethnolects and racial prejudice more broadly can open up your discussion to include many famous past and current examples.

**CASE SPACE :**

The next time you read or watch the news, keep an eye out for the word 'un-Australian.' This is an incredibly common term with rather unclear denotations and parametres used by people across the political divide to refer to anything they disapprove of. Skimming through some articles, I managed to find references to things as varied as foreign aid, traffic lights, and working on weekends that were deemed 'un-Australian' by a commentator or public figure. Because the semantics of this word are so ill-defined, it becomes a catch-all term that politicians and others can easily apply to circumstances and elicit feelings of aversion and distaste (because if something is 'un-Australian,' and you are Australian, then you *must* be against it, because it is antithetical to your identity.)

You can also look into language shifts with regards to neologisms or semantic narrowing and broadening to discuss impacts this can have on the identities of racial minorities.

**CASE SPACE :**

In his video on the use of emoticons and emojis as forms of language, Mike Rugnetta (see: PBS Idea Channel's 'Can You Speak Emoji' on youtube) points out that for a long time, emojis on the iPhone mainly consisted of Caucasian bodies and faces, in a way that was somewhat discriminatory against people of colour. This has since been corrected with a much wider range of emoji skin tones available to 'speakers,' though it does raise questions about how our lexical toolkit might affect our perception of ourselves and others.

## 2.6 Speech Communities

Putting these factors all together, we can start to consider what characterises a 'speech community,' and how the language features shared by a particular group helps to define membership or create a sense of belonging amongst people. To some extent, technology has aided the development of speech communities in that it's now easier than ever to contact and engage in discourse with individuals from across the world. However, you can also examine how there can be certain prejudices against particular speech communities or even the modes of communication people use (e.g. people of an older age looking down on young adults for being so antisocial and 'plugged in' to their screens all day instead of interacting with others, even though much of what teenagers use digital mediums for revolves around social interaction). You can also look at 'sub-communities' and the different semantic fields or parametres of appropriateness apply in those circumstances, which also relates to the idea of public and private discourse and personas.

**CASE SPACE :**

For some people, it is the intention behind our communication that matters most. However, the way language and utterances are received is also something we need to consider. There are countless stories in the media (most often revolving around sportspeople or famous figures) where they say something that is interpreted as sexist, racist, or in some way offensive. In such circumstances, a common defence is that 'it was a joke' or that the person 'didn't mean to cause offence,' which raises this question of whether intention truly matters. You could also link this to a discussion of appropriateness in language, and how things said in some contexts become less justifiable in others.

Keep in mind that the definition of a 'speech community' has changed over time, and different textbooks may treat it in different ways. However, this is a change you can (and should - if it's relevant) acknowledge when analysing speech communities and the practices and norms involved in belonging to them.

## **Part IV**

# **Exam Tips**

## Section 1

# Approaching the Exam

Doing well in English Language ultimately comes down to three things:

1. Your understanding of linguistic sub-systems and ability to use appropriate metalanguage.
2. Your knowledge of contemporary discussions about and notable examples of language use.
3. Your ability to integrate these two things fluently.

Or, to put it even simpler:

1. Theory
2. Examples
3. Linking

In an effort to aid you in cultivating skills on all three levels, these notes have taken you through the crucial theoretical components of English Language whilst also providing sample references for you to use in your essays. Keep in mind that these are not conclusive, nor are they the only possible examples you could use to support your arguments. However, they will provide a decent foundation for your analysis and hopefully cut down on some of your research and reading.

The examination criteria for this subject are as follows:

- use metalanguage to describe and analyse structures, features and functions of language in a range of contexts.
- explain and analyse linguistic features of written and spoken English in a range of registers.
- understand and analyse relationships between language and identities in society.
- identify and analyse differing attitudes to varieties of Australian English.
- draw on contemporary discussions and debate about language.
- write clearly organised responses with controlled and effective use of language appropriate to the task.

In preparation for your exam, you may find it useful to consult a list of the key 'themes' or topics within English Language around which VCAA are likely to base their questions and essay topics. What follows is a list of eight of these themes, though you may also want to add to these depending on the practice material you come across throughout the year, as well as which areas you consider your strong and weak points.

1. Australian English.
  - (a) Evolution.
    - i. Cockney origins, development during the penal era and influences of convicts, indigenous people, free settlers, gold rush era, and immigration, Federation, World Wars, post-war immigration, political and social events.
  - (b) Varieties.
    - i. Broad, General, and Cultivated forms, migrant ethnolects, and indigenous varieties.
  - (c) Characteristics
    - i. Lexical (vernacular, idioms, slang, borrowings)
    - ii. Morphological (suffixes, diminutives, abbreviations)
    - iii. Phonological (accent, assimilation, elision, flapping, etc.)
    - iv. Syntactic and Grammatical
2. Language variation according to user
  - (a) Geographical variation
    - i. National variation (Aus, NZ, UK, Ireland, USA, Canada)
    - ii. Regional variation within Australian (lexical and phonetic)

- (b) Social variation
  - i. Socio-economics (education, background, location)
  - ii. Ethnicity (indigenous and migrant varieties/ ethnolects)
  - iii. Gender (male and female stereotypes)
  - iv. Age (difference between age gaps)
  - v. Professions/ occupations and interest groups (jargon, slang, registers like legalese and bureaucratese)
- (c) Personal variation
  - i. Idiolects, personality, etc.
- 3. Language variation according to use
  - (a) Relationship between speaker and audience
  - (b) Setting/ context
  - (c) Subject matter/ topic
  - (d) Mode
    - i. Spoken
    - ii. Written
  - (e) Purpose of interaction
- 4. Language change over time
  - (a) Lexical, phonological, and grammatical change
  - (b) Taboo and dysphemisms
  - (c) Semantic shifts (narrowing, broadening, elevation, deterioration)
  - (d) Words becoming obsolete
  - (e) Words arising out of new inventions and concepts
  - (f) Words being borrowed
- 5. Attitudes to the varieties
  - (a) Value judgements
  - (b) Prescriptive and descriptive approaches
  - (c) Language offences
  - (d) Standardisation and codification
  - (e) Schools, style guides, government institutions, dictionaries, courts, and the media
- 6. Functions of language
  - (a) As an instrument of communication
  - (b) As an instrument of action
  - (c) As a means of cognition and conceptual development
  - (d) To express, reflect, or construct identity
  - (e) To differentiate between groups
  - (f) To maintain social relationships
- 7. Language in interaction
  - (a) Political correctness (gender, race/ ethnicity, disability, age)
  - (b) Power play (inclusion and exclusion)
  - (c) Discrimination and manipulation
  - (d) Value systems and changes over time
  - (e) Public language and doublespeak
  - (f) Euphemism and dysphemism
  - (g) Taboo
  - (h) Jargon and slang
- 8. Modes of language – speaking and writing
  - (a) Features – compare and contrast
  - (b) What functions they serve
  - (c) When they are employed
  - (d) Changes due to technological advantage
  - (e) Overlap
  - (f) Metalanguage required to analyse different texts

## Section 2

# Appendices

### 2.1 Resources

The following resources may be useful to you in collecting viable quotes and observations about language use throughout the year:

#### Books:

- 'The Language Instinct' and 'The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature' by Steven Pinker.
- 'The Power of Babel' by John McWhorter.
- 'In Praise of English: The Growth and Use of Language' by Joseph T. Shipley.
- 'The Mother Tongue' by Bill Bryson.
- 'Stories of English' by David Crystal.
- 'Eats, Shoots, and Leaves' by Lynne Truss.
- 'Forbidden Words: Taboo and the censoring of language' by Kate Burridge

#### Podcasts:

- 'The English We Speak'
- 'A Way with Words'
- 'Talk the Talk'
- 'Superlinguo'
- 'World in Words'

#### Videos:

- Kate Burridge's 'Euphemisms: TEDx Sydney'
- Xidnaf's 'Grimm's Law,' 'What Even is a Language,' and 'Football Etymosemanticology'
- PBS Idea Channel's 'Can You Speak Emoji?'
- Stephen Fry's 'Planet Word' Documentary Series
- Australian Linguistics Roadshow – Words that divide the nation

#### Websites:

- [www.allthingslinguistic.com](http://www.allthingslinguistic.com) (especially this post which collates hundreds of different examples and theories: <http://www.allthingslinguistic.com/post/144823001541/4-years-of-all-things-linguistic>)
- [www.linguism.co.uk](http://www.linguism.co.uk)
- [www.lingroadshow.com](http://www.lingroadshow.com)

## 2.2 Sample essays

### Sample 1:

**SAMPLE :**

"Language plays a powerful role in both contributing to, and eliminating discrimination." (Commonwealth of Australia Style Manual, 1994). In what ways can language both contribute to and eliminate discrimination?

- Note that for this prompt, you would be required to acknowledge **both aspects** of the relationship between language and discrimination. It would not be sufficient to argue that language contributes to discrimination but does nothing to eliminate it, or vice versa. Most topics will require a fairly balanced approach – issues in linguistics are rarely straightforward enough to warrant a one-sided answer.
- When given prompts with two (or more) key words or ideas, try not to simply divide your response such that you end up dealing with one word or idea per paragraph. It is possible to score well doing this, but it makes your essay seem much more **fragmented**. For example, if you were writing an essay on this prompt that dealt with the ways in which language contributes to discrimination in your first paragraph, then the ways in which it eliminates discrimination in paragraph two, then a third paragraph on how it does both, your essay won't have much cohesion. Instead, aim to find **thematic links** that let you explore the whole prompt in each paragraph, just from different angles.
- The following essay incorporates several examples (some concrete, with references to particular publications or statements, and some more general, dealing with social norms and typical epithets). It also bookends with a quote about language, which can be very effective when it is relevant to the topic.

Writer Nathaniel Hawthorne summarised the potency of language in the following statement: "words, so innocent and powerless as they are, as standing in a dictionary, how potent for good and evil they become in the hands of one who knows how to combine them." Contributing to and eliminating discrimination are but two uses of language. Discriminatory language lowers the standing of one social group of people, whilst non-discriminatory language mitigates this effect. These uses of language in contemporary society can be found in various domains, including issues surrounding asylum seekers, gender, and race. Furthermore, a key model of discriminatory language is that two groups of people are assigned different value judgements by association with lexemes with negative connotations, or reference to traits. On the other hand, non-discriminatory language either equates these connotations, or uses a single lexeme to refer to the two groups together.

Discriminatory language is highly prevalent in the discussion of asylum seekers, and is used in various ways. The deterioration of the value judgements assigned to this group of people is evident in the negative connotations of the lexemes associated with them. Examples include "illegals" and "queue jumpers," both suggesting that the asylum seekers are intrinsically doing something wrong. The use of 'air arrivals' and 'boat arrivals' by the media dehumanises asylum seekers, given that these lexemes make no reference to them as living entities. Descriptive language is also used to further demonise asylum seekers. For instance, Monash University lecturer Adrienne Millbank describes asylum seekers as those who "break in illegally" and are "manipulating the system," which further implies that they have vested interests. A Herald Sun article from 2011 used the verb phrase "flood in" in reference to asylum seekers entering Australia, which dehumanises them by removing their individuality. Politicians such as ex-Prime Minister Gillard referring to "processing asylum seekers" also contributes to this sense, given that the verb "process" is generally associated with managing inanimate objects such as "processing meat." The government's use of noun phrases like "the Malaysia solution" and "the Pacific solution" also suggests that the asylum seekers are simply a problem for society to solve, rather than implying that they are people who genuinely need help. One can thus see how the above examples show the means by which language can be used to discriminate against asylum seekers.

Discrimination against women is also a common use of language, and the mechanisms are numerous. This type of language accentuates the erroneously assumed subordinate role of women in society, at worst as simply sex objects. For instance, IBM worker Susan Spiteri was told to "get her breasts out [to get sales]" and Channel 9 presenter Christine Spiteri was told that female employees are hired based on their "f\*\*kability." The above examples imply that the role of women in the workplace is simply to appear desirable. Another mechanism for gender discrimination is through the assignment of different lexemes to the two genders that describe the same trait. The lexemes assigned to women generally have more negative connotations than those assigned to men. For example, where a man may be socially considered "assertive" or a "player," a woman may be considered a "bitch" or a "slut" respectively. Gender-specific nouns for professions were once generic, for instance "chairman" and "air hostess," which implies that particular jobs belong to particular genders, with the subordinate role allocated to females. The gender could also be specified in the pre-modifier of the noun phrase, for instance in "lady doctor" and "male nurse." These epithets imply that doctors are generally male and nurses generally female, hence the use of the pre-modifiers is required to clarify the gender of the doctor or nurse. It is quite evident that, although the methods vary, all of the above instances demean the status of women in society.

However, non-discriminatory language is also used in society, which effectively offsets the effects of discriminatory language. Non-discriminatory language simply elevates the status of a previously demeaned social group in various ways. One way is through the use of language that does not differentiate between the social groups, for instance the use of gender-neutral lexemes such as "chairperson" and "flight attendant," instead of "chairman" and "air hostess" as generic terms. A second way is through the use of lexemes with elevated connotations; examples include the use of "Anglo-Australian" in an article on The Age to refer to what would sometimes be called "white Australians" and the use of "sex worker" instead of more negatively loaded terms for a prostitute. A second way is through circumlocution of the noun phrase by replacing the pre-modifier with a qualifier. This yields noun phrases such as "students with Asian backgrounds" (as used in an article entitled 'White Flight' in The Age) and "people with visual impairments," replacing "Asian students" and "blind people." The revised versions place focus on the head words "people" and "students" rather than their modifiers "blind" and "Asian." This mitigates the effect of the descriptions and value judgements assigned to these lexemes. Hence, these examples display the many methods by which language can also alleviate discrimination.

Language can discriminate in various ways, including through the use of lexemes with negative connotations and descriptive language that assigns negative value judgements on a social group of people. Language can do the opposite by removing those negative value judgements by various means, including the use of qualifiers instead of modifiers as descriptors and lexemes with higher connotations. Again, we see how powerful a tool language can be for many purposes - how 'potent for good and evil [words] become in the hands of one who knows how to combine them,' as aptly put by Hawthorne.

## 2.2 Sample essays

### Sample 2:

#### SAMPLE :

Jargon has two distinct functions: the primary function is to serve as a technical or specialist language. The other is to promote in-group solidarity: to exclude those people who do not use the jargon. How does jargon (professional or popular) create cohesiveness within a speech community? Support your response with specific examples.

- Much like the first sample, this prompt calls on you to discuss two key ideas – in this case, two distinct functions of language. And again, the more competent responses would be those which unite these concepts and consider how a language feature contributes to both of these functions simultaneously, whereas the mid-range essays would simply separate the concepts and attempt to prove how the feature contributes to each one individually. Hence, an essay that simply said 'here is how jargon serves as technical language, here's how jargon includes and excludes people, and here's how it creates cohesiveness within communities' is not going to be as effective as one that merges these ideas to say something about the broader function of jargon.
- This essay uses the same bookending quote as the previous one and shows how the same general sentiment can suit a variety of different essay topics. However, note that this piece *makes* it relevant by virtue of the discussion and analysis; this student hasn't just thrown a nice sounding quote at the start and end and let those words do all the talking. Instead, the essay outlines the significance and the meaning of the quote to show the assessor why it belongs here.
- Note also that the introduction does an excellent job at setting up what 'jargon' is, and gives us some idea of what this discussion will be dealing with. It avoids the typical, simplistic listing of key ideas (i.e. one sentence per body paragraph, signposting the focus of each one) and instead just opens up the prompt and teases out some general talking points.

As put by famous writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, "words, as powerless and innocent they are, as standing in a dictionary, how potent for good and evil they become in the hands of one who knows how to combine them." This is a reference to the notion that language is a powerful tool for many purposes, particularly when it comes to efficiency of communication. Jargon, a variety of language specific to a particular profession or interest group, has features that make it conducive for a variety of purposes, including creating cohesiveness within a speech community (the members of such an interest group or profession). However, jargon can also be used to obfuscate meaning, or to mark in-group and out-group membership through specific lexemes and morphology, suggesting that its function varies depending on the context in which it is used.

Jargon enhances communication within the speech community through its semantic precision and specificity. This feature ensures that lexical density is reduced, as the complex concepts within the profession can be expressed in fewer words. This is seen in medical jargon, where specific adjectives such as "proximal," "distal," and "medial" are used to precisely describe spatial relationships between different anatomical parts of the body, rather than the vague "next to," "above" and "below." As a result, the utterance "the upper arm bone is closer to the trunk of the body than the lower arm bone that is further away from the trunk of the body when the palm of the corresponding hand is facing the front of the body" can be replaced by the more concise "the humerus is proximal to the radius." Biology jargon is another example where this occurs; the jargon is so precise that biology students are often penalised in examinations in giving definitions of biology terms, because the definitions are not watertight. For instance, the terms "dominant" and "recessive," whilst used in wider society in references to genes and alleles (specific forms of a gene) in the noun phrases "dominant gene" and "recessive gene" only refer to the corresponding phenotypes (the physical characteristics exhibited by a person) in the jargon. This facilitates communication as the same two alleles can give rise to multiple pairs of phenotypes, which have different dominance relationships, and the terms "dominant" and "recessive" used in reference to genes do not take this fact into account. The above examples show how lexical density is reduced and precise meaning is conveyed through jargon, and through this, cohesiveness within the speech community is achieved.

Furthermore, this can also be seen in the use of jargon as a marker of in-group solidarity. Jargon can only be used and understood by people familiar with it – those within the profession or interest group. This feature enables jargon to act as a marker of identity, and through the establishment of this common identity this solidarity is achieved (primarily through the spoken mode). This is seen in the use of the jargon of the card game "500." The players use lexemes such as "renege," "void," and "misere," and they bask in the knowledge that only they understand such terms. Another instance of this is seen in the general public, who have been exposed this year to financial jargon through the media, or technological jargon through their extensive use of computers – instances of jargonistic terms being opened up to the populace. The populace is familiar with lexemes such as "dead cat bounce," "GFC," and "recession," and they constantly talk about "networking" and "interfacing" with one another. Through the use of these lexemes the general public identifies itself with technology and finance, and through this, cohesiveness is achieved throughout the populace as a speech community.

By extension of creating in-group solidarity, jargon can also cement the speech community through exclusion of outsiders. The fact that the jargon is specific to this speech community implies that members outside this group will be excluded as the jargon is not within their lexicon, and therein lie the group boundaries. Medical practitioners, for instance, use a more informal version of jargon – 'slargon' – to one another in the presence of their patients. A paramedic would refer to a recent arrival of a patient with alcohol poisoning as having a "UBI" (for "unexplained beer injury") and if the patient was particularly rude, the paramedic would subtly remark to his/her colleague that he is treating a "CLL" (for "complete low-life") or a "FLK" (for "funny-looking kid"). These kinds of abbreviations are unknown to the patients, but are known to the medical practitioners, and on that basis the group boundary is drawn between the medics and the laypeople. Inside jokes, which only members of the in-group are able to appreciate, may be achieved through the use of jargon. However, jargon can be seen in many other disciplines, as in the mathematical pun 'I can't think rationally with a log on my head' or chemistry, as in the utterance 'chemists do it periodically on the table.' The puns are on the jargonistic terms "rationally," "log" (a shortening of "logarithm"), and 'periodic table,' and given that only members of those academic groups possess these lexemes, only they appreciate the joke, and in doing so they exclude outsiders who do not understand it, cementing their identity. In effect, these examples demonstrate the power of jargon in tightening the bonds between the members of the profession or interest group whilst excluding those outside it.

Hence, jargon creates cohesiveness within a speech community through promoting effective communication within its members, enhancing in-group solidarity and solidifying their identity and distinctiveness through exclusion of outsiders. In this sense, the sociological effect of jargon is manifold, and its use contributes to speech cohesion in many different ways.

**Sample 3:****SAMPLE :**

Texts do not exist in a vacuum; they are created to be interpreted within a particular context. Discuss how context determines the register and the degree of formality of language use. By drawing on a range of subsystems of language, support your response with specific examples of Australian English.

- This prompt is somewhat more direct than the others as it contains a more definitive statement; that is, "texts do not exist in a vacuum." Although it is fine to mostly agree with these kinds of statements, be careful not to take any absolutes for granted. Ideally, you want to challenge such assertions a little, even if you do think they're broadly true.
- The introduction for this piece lays out various definitions for things like 'context' and 'register' without making it too clunky (i.e. 'context, which can be defined as the sociolinguistic features of audience, purpose and mode, can be seen in...'). The body paragraphs also make an effort to connect the examples and prevent the 'listing' effect of essays that simply run through a series of disconnected pieces of evidence. The end of the third paragraph, in particular, is a great example of how to build up to overall contentions and observations about language.

Language use is highly variable and depends on a variety of sociolinguistic features including audience, purpose, and mode, which together comprise the context. The audience must be considered in a two-dimensional manner; one must factor in their social distance as well as their social status relative to their audience, which are both positively correlated with formality. The registers themselves have linguistic features which may be conducive or deleterious to one's purpose, depending on the context, and hence their use needs to be regulated for the speaker or writer to fulfil the purpose. Three registers widely used in Australia – slang, jargon and varieties of Australian English – are no exception; their use is also determined by context.

The causative relationship between context and register can be explained through an examination of the use of the non-standard varieties of Australian English, which include the Broad and ethnocultural varieties. The non-standard linguistic features of these varieties are correlated with informality, and a decreased social distance. These varieties are highly distinctive, and hence can serve as powerful identity markers. They are also used for particular purposes; for instance, Julia Gillard utilises the distinctively Australian lexeme 'g'day' in greeting New Zealand rugby players (the audience). Her purpose was to identify herself as Australian to a foreign group of people. Similarly, Kevin Rudd's purpose to instil in-group solidarity with his audience, his Australian citizens, can be seen in his usage of the characteristic Australian noun phrases 'happy little Vegemite' and 'fair shake of the sauce bottle.' Sports commentary also sees the use of the Broad variety for the purpose of creating solidarity with the Australian audience. Cricket commentator Ian Healy often utters the Australian phrase 'you little beauty,' even accentuating his Australian accent with the tapping of the [t], pronouncing the phrase as /ju lɪdəl bjudi/. Another prime example is seen in the language of second-generation Sri-Lankan Australians. When speaking with their contemporaries, they utilise a General Australian accent. However, when their audience changes to their Sri Lankan parents (for instance through a phone call), they code-switch and immediately adopt the linguistic features of the Sri Lankan ethnolect, including the monophthongisation of [eɪ] to [e:]. In effect, these examples all exemplify the consideration of audience and purpose in selecting a distinctively Australian informal register.

This context-register relationship can also be examined through slang and its features. It possesses non-standard features of English, making it an informal register that is only used when the social distance with the audience is low. This informality also makes it more prevalent in the spoken rather than the written mode. It is also a register used only by a specific group of people, and hence can also act as an identity marker. If the purpose were to create in-group solidarity and the audience were from the specific social group, slang may be used. This idea is prevalent in teenage slang, where teenagers often use 'so' as an intensifier and 'sick,' 'awesome' and 'fail' as adjectives. Even the EMC-derived acronym 'lol' is incorporated into their spoken language. By contrast, medical slang (as distinct from medical jargon) is used amongst doctors (whose peers are the general public) only in an informal context. A patient could be admitted with what is dubbed a "UBI" (for "unexplained beer injury") and if they were rude, they were labelled with the abbreviation "CLL" (for "complete low life"). This is similar to the olympiad slang which is used amongst

competitive olympiad mathematicians (again in an informal context), where lexemes such as "coord-bash" (a clumsy, inelegant solution to a problem that uses exclusively coordinate geometry) are used. In all of these cases, the lexemes involved are only found within the lexicons of the members of the group; this is conducive to the purpose of fostering a sense of harmony and cohesiveness within the group and decreasing the social distance between its members.

However, a more formal register such as jargon may be adopted in certain contexts. Jargon is a register specific to a profession or area of knowledge, and its formality derives from a variety of linguistic features, including the lack of non-standard features. Given that those knowledgeable in a discipline would be competent users of the jargon, it is also associated with credibility. This feature is observed in the UK, where the rather dubious Brain Gym concept was deemed credible by school teachers, who were impressed by the jargonistic terms "reticular formation" and "increased oxidation" in its promotional material. Jargon also possesses semantic precision and specificity, as seen in medical jargon, where precise adverbials such as "proximal" and "lateral" are used to describe the spatial relationships between the anatomical parts of the human body. In addition, specific jargon has specific linguistic features that facilitate individual requirements of the profession. For instance, legal jargon is designed to fulfil the primary requirement of precision. Hence, it is devoid of pronouns as anaphoric references and full noun phrases are repeated instead. It is also rife with subordinate clauses, which unambiguously identify the exact relationships between the clauses. Likewise, academic jargon fulfils the discourse requirement of uncertainty through hedging expressions such as 'it can be deduced that' or 'one may assume that.' These features would make jargon a highly appropriate register to utilise within the context of the specific profession. More generally, the aforementioned linguistic features of jargon are suited to specific purposes and audiences. Firstly, being a formal register, jargon would be appropriate if the social distance with the audience is high. Furthermore, if the context entails a referential purpose and a familiarity of the audience with the jargon, then jargon would be the register of choice, given this semantic precision. However, if the audience were outside the profession or interest group, the jargon cannot be used for a communicative purpose – but it may be used to establish credibility within the audience, if that were the purpose. This demonstrates that the appropriateness of jargon is dependent upon context.

The dependence of the register used on the overall context is thus evident in Australian English's slang and jargon. This is due to the fact that registers have linguistic features that may be conducive or pernicious to the purpose, and this is itself dependent upon the audience. Hence, the dependence of register on the context is based on a simple idea – the principle of appropriateness.

**Sample 4:****SAMPLE :**

How is language used to confuse, mislead or obfuscate in the twenty-first century? Discuss in relation to public language.

- This prompt requires a precise approach to the ways speakers achieve confusion and obfuscation. In particular, the addition of the prepositional phrase 'in the twenty-first century' tells you that you should probably aim to draw from particularly contemporary examples, especially those precipitated by changes in technology.
- Note that this essay endeavours to group together examples that demonstrate similar and related ideas, helping the cohesion of the piece as a whole.

The effect of language and the sheer power it can be imbued with is often highly impactful, especially if the purpose of those who know how to use language effectively is to confuse and mislead people, or to obfuscate ideas. This can be done in a myriad of ways. One can carefully select lexemes that have the intended connotations, such as euphemisms or dysphemisms, or employ a register associated with credibility, like jargon. It is also possible to craft and manipulate syntax in such a way as to influence the inferred meaning, all of which are powerful tools of communication via public language.

A primary example of this is how euphemisms can be used to mislead by mitigating meaning through indirect reference. This indirect reference means that meaning is inferential rather than direct, so the connotations associated with the euphemistic lexemes are elevated. Hence, the public can be misled through euphemism into accepting potentially inflammatory concepts as their senses are not aggravated to such a high degree. This device is used to great effect by the military, which refers to a lethal operation as "kinetic military action" and the practice of taking suspects outside the country with its legal rights and brutally torturing them as "rendition." Although both terms refer to the torture and killing of human beings, they are palatable to the public as the derivation of meaning requires inference, allowing the military to kill and torture with little opposition. Similarly, hospital systems use the term "serious diagnostic misadventure" as a reference to an anaesthetist killing a patient through administering a fatal dose of anaesthetic, in order to prevent prosecution. The term has no denotative suggestion of killing, and therein lies its euphemistic nature.

The euphemism tactic can even be coupled with the use of dysphemism to create a false dichotomy between two sets of people. The euphemistic term is assigned to one set, elevating their standing through elevated connotations, whilst the dysphemistic term is assigned to the other set, lowering their standing through negative connotations. The military, for instance, discriminates between two types of fighters who use guerrilla warfare. Those who fight with US interests are termed "freedom fighters" or "rebels," whilst those who fight against US interests are labelled "terrorists." The "freedom fighters" are viewed as intrinsically good, whilst the "terrorists" are viewed as intrinsically evil, despite the fact that they undertake the same practices. A similar idea occurs with the description of entering a country without its members' permission; the euphemistic "liberation" is used for the US military, whilst the dysphemistic analogue "invasion" is used for incursions by enemy forces. Even former Prime Minister Tony Abbott has used this tactic, distinguishing between instances of "untruths." He terms his own lying as a "misconsistency" whilst he described climate change using the expletive dysphemism "absolute crap." Here he aims to portray some untruths as so, and others as less so, according to his purpose, thus showing how the careful use of euphemism and dysphemism can be used to obfuscate.

This can also be achieved through the manipulation of syntax, however, which is another common tactic in misleading the public by obfuscation. Lengthy sentences with subordinate clauses are highly effective, as people process each sentence as one unit, and they have to determine the complex relationship between the clauses. Former Deputy Prime Minister Mark Vaile used this method in his utterance "they are moving things around the different baskets, and it will be the end game in terms of putting numbers in square brackets in terms of tariff reductions, if there are significant requests on time frames in terms of phase-in." Confusion lies in the use of three clauses, including the subordinate clause "if there are...," along with the repeated use of the vague prepositional phrase "in terms of." But other constructions, such as the agentless

passive voice, may be used in order to hide the active agent whilst maintaining authority and credibility. The police, for example, utilised this in their statement regarding the Occupy Melbourne protests when they remarked that "several protesters were injured," misleading the public by not acknowledging that the police (the agents and omitted subjects of that sentence) were responsible. Likewise, the double-negative may be used to confuse, as the audience needs to process two negatives that negate one another. A prime example is Gillard's response to an attack on her proposal on asylum seekers, which was to say that she "will not leave undisturbed the impression that I made an announcement about a specific location." The negating lexeme 'not' and the prefix 'un-' needed to be computed by the audience as cancelling out. As displayed by the above examples, the syntax can be manipulated in vast number of ways to create confusion.'

Besides manipulating individual subsystems of language, a whole new register can be adopted to mislead, and that is the register of jargon. Being the specialised register of a specific profession or interest group, jargon is highly effective in the process of misleading, as a public audience does not possess the lexemes in the jargon, and will thus not understand the language. In addition, jargon can be used to convey credibility, as the audience assumes that because those knowledgeable in the field are well versed with jargon, the converse is true. These two features of jargon make it highly useful for appearing to communicate information whilst communicating nothing, or in the words of Orwell, "to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind." Examples of jargon use in advertising are numerous, and are described in detail by journalist Ben Goldacre in his book "Bad Science." He describes how a detox patch was described by its producers as being "hygroscopic" and "containing hydrolysed carbohydrate," which mean "absorbing water" and "containing sugar" respectively. The audience recognises that the two lexemes are derived from chemistry jargon, and thus believes that the producers are credible and can be believed. Goldacre goes on to explain how schoolteachers in the UK were misled by the promoters of the rather dubious Brain Gym concept through the use of terms like "reticular formation" and "increased oxidation," derived from neuroscience and chemistry jargon respectively. The use of jargon evoked sophistication, and the schoolteachers were duly persuaded, despite the fact that "increased oxidation" was actually a misnomer. The producers were discussing oxygen in the blood, so the correct term was "oxygenation," and "oxidation" of blood would actually be lethal. These uses of jargon show just how potent a tool it can be to bypass reason and mislead the public audience simply through credibility.

As shown, language used for confusion and obfuscation is a craft, and its users can effectively control the public's collective mindset. Through semantics, it can mitigate the effects of a potentially inflammatory concept or create a false distinction between two identical sets of people, as per the language users' purpose. Through syntax, the public's minds can be tied up by the careful crafting of clauses and prepositional phrases, and the use of jargon can be used to sell a dubious concept whilst simultaneously instilling credibility with the audience. These are only some of a vast expanse of techniques that can be used for a confusing and obfuscating effect.

**Sample 5:****SAMPLE :**

Discuss some of the linguistic features of the language of SMS and texting. Refer to at least two of the subsystems in your response. How is the language of SMS a valid and important variety of Australian English?

- This prompt helpfully provides you with a recommended line of argument in the suggestion that the language of texting is "valid and important." In these situations, you should take the prompt's recommendation and run with that idea, rather than attempting to subvert it by instead contending that SMS is invalid or unimportant. Though you can't technically be penalised for having the 'wrong' opinion, it may harm the overall quality of your essay if you are not able to substantiate your argument, and the direction hinted at by the prompt is usually the stronger option.
- Notice how this essay smoothly incorporates examples alongside its discussion. This makes for very strong analysis, and helps to bridge the gap between evidence and ideas whilst also assisting with the explanation of this evidence. If you don't integrate your examples, you may still get marks for your knowledge of the content, but you'll likely be penalised when it comes to your essay structure, cohesiveness, and perhaps even overall argument, so make sure you know how to connect the evidence and spell out the point it's making.
- You'll note that there are some examples used in this sample that occur in others too; very rarely will your examples have a one-to-one correspondence with your ideas. The good examples will be ones you can employ for a variety of prompts, as this will cut down on the amount you have to memorise while still providing a stable and specific foundation for your discussion.

The recent advent of the short message service (SMS) available on mobile phones brings with it a unique variety of language. The language of SMS even blurs the distinction between the spoken and the written mode as, whilst it is a written mode, it contains features common to both modes. Some attitudes towards SMS language are highly negative, for instance that of John Humphrys who laments that "texters savage our sentences, pillage our punctuation and rape our vocabulary." This is a reference to the non-standard features of SMS, but these are not implicative of its invalidity. SMS is a valid variety of Australian English through its effectiveness in concise communication and its potential for conveying identity.

The linguistic features of SMS reflect its nature as a melting pot of the spoken and the written language features, despite it being a written mode. Both elision and assimilation, phonological features normally found in the spoken mode, are featured in SMS language, for instance in the lexemes "wanna" and "coz" (for "want to" and "because"). The lexicon is rife with acronyms such as "lol" and "rofl" that attempt to emulate prosodic and paralinguistic features of the spoken mode – in this case laughing and rolling on the floor. Discourse particles such as "well" and "yeah" can also be used in SMS conversations, even though they are generally confined to spoken language. However, despite its spoken language features, it still remains a written mode with characteristics such as permanence and potential for editing.

These characteristics of SMS actually make it highly advantageous, and hence valid, as a language variety. Firstly, SMS is an effective medium by which messages can be conveyed between people cheaply and concisely. The linguistic features of SMS arose through the struggle for brevity, as only a limited number of characters per text is allowed. For instance, ellipsis is prevalent as it is an omission of sentence elements, so fewer characters are used (hence the common shortenings of "through" to "thru" or "tomorrow" to "2moz"). This desire for brevity leads to concise but effective communication, relying on an appropriate level of inference to account for the omission of sentence elements. As a non-standard and hence informal register, SMS language is also effective in decreasing the social distance between the interlocutors. This is because non-standard features of language are associated with intimacy and a disinterest in maintaining face. The above are practical advantages of SMS language; this register also has a higher-order function.

Given its distinctiveness as a language variety and prevalence in Australian society, SMS language is a marker of Australia's identity as a technological nation. The aforementioned linguistic characteristics of SMS language are found in few other registers, particularly the unique acronyms. Users of this register can hence be identified as technologically savvy. In addition, these linguistic features are also found in social networking media, a technological entity, which accentuates the connection between this register and technology. Such is the potency of SMS language as a marker of identity that teenagers have even started using acronyms and abbreviations (particularly "lol") in the spoken mode for this very purpose. SMS language is one of many varieties of Australian English that convey an aspect of Australian identity.

Whilst SMS language is a register with non-standard linguistic features normally found in the spoken mode, it is indeed a valid and important variety of Australian English. Not only do its features make it conducive for practical functions such as concise communication, SMS language also contributes to Australia's identity as a technological nation. Irrespective of the notion that "texters are savaging our sentences" and "pillaging our punctuation" SMS language has a different role in society to Standard English. Society should look at SMS language, not as a defilement of the English language, but rather as a contributor to the diversity, richness, and potential of our mother tongue.

**Sample 6:****SAMPLE :**

"We borrow, we adapt, we interpret, we bend things to our use ... it's probably Australian culture. The end result is still a unique Australian blend and a unique Australian view." (Susan Butler, *The Weekend Australian*, November 24–25 2001). Do you agree that, despite the influence of international, popular and technological cultures, Australian English is still distinctive?

- This prompt is more open ended than some others, so there's more room to challenge things here if you wish. However, it's also quite broad in that it calls on you to discuss 'international, popular, and technological' cultural influences. If you didn't have any evidence up your sleeve for each of these three areas, you may find it difficult to deal with a question like this.
- You would also need to define the word 'distinctive' in this sense, as you could talk about the varying degrees of distinctiveness with Australian English, as well as the ways in which it is different, but not wholly unrelated from how it was prior to the impact of international, popular, and technological cultures.
- This essay also goes out of its way to discuss the implications of these influences on Indigenous Australian English, which adds an extra dimension to the discussion (though should only be done in cases like this where it is relevant to the question.)
- Pay particular attention the metalanguage used in this essay, and the way it weaves together examples and analysis.

One could talk about Australian English as a single national variety. However, in actuality, it best seen as a melting pot of a myriad of language varieties including the aggregation of the Broad, General and Cultural varieties, the ethno-cultural varieties and Indigenous Australian English. Throughout its role as the national variety, Australian English has been subjected to a wide range of influences, including American popular culture, the waves of immigration into Australia and the advent of electronic-mediated communication through mobile phones and computers. As a result, Australian English has undergone some changes in its linguistic features. Nevertheless, this influence does not preclude the distinctiveness of Australian English; the Australian phonology has largely been unaffected, and Indigenous Australian English has been relatively resistant to such influences.

In recent decades Australians have been exposed to an enormous amount of American popular culture, particularly through music, film, and TV, and this has brought with it the advent of American lexemes to Australian English. Examples include 'buddy' (plus its shortening 'bud') and 'man' as informal greetings between acquaintances, often used instead of the quintessential Australian 'mate.' The American phrase 'no problem' is often used to accept apologies in replacement of the Australian equivalent 'no worries.' The highly versatile discourse particle 'like' is another import from America, as is the interjection 'whatever.' However, the influence of American popular culture on Australian English is largely limited to the lexicon of Australian English, and does not pervade the other subsystems (apart from perhaps discourse), hence its influence on Australian English is minimal.

Electronically-mediated communication (EMC), derived through the use of social networking media and mobile phones, has brought with it a whole new language variety that is widely used in Australian society, and is thus a core component of Australian English. This language variety, whilst used in the written mode, contains a range of spoken language features. Prosodic and paralinguistic features may be represented using acronyms and abbreviations such as 'ROFL' (for 'rolling on the floor laughing') or 'LMAO' for ('laugh my ass off'), or through non-standard orthography such as repetition of a letter (for instance in 'heeeeeey') to indicate casual elongation of a phoneme. Also, the use of social networking has led to the creative formation of words, for instance 'friend' and 'facebook' through conversion, 'unfriend' through affixation and the previously mentioned acronyms and abbreviations. Such is the pervasion of EMC into Australian society that lexemes normally specific to EMC in the written mode are being used in the spoken mode. For example, conversations between Australian teenagers are peppered with interjections such as 'LOL.' These linguistic features of EMC have been integrated into Australian English via technology, and the presence of such features in a different (spoken) mode is indicative of its entrenchment in the national variety.

International influences, namely waves of immigration in the late 20th century, have also brought with them the ethno-cultural varieties of Australian English. Also known as ethnolects, these cultural varieties of English have entrenched themselves into Australian society. Their linguistic features derive primarily from their speakers' first languages. For instance, the South Asian ethnolect is primarily characterised by the monophthongisation of the phonemes [ou] and [ei] to [ɔ:] and [e:] respectively, given that most South Asian languages are devoid of diphthongs.

Interrogative tags such as 'isn't it' are present, whilst the subject and auxiliary are often swapped in interrogatives, which explains why a South Asian person might utter 'Why you are going to school today?' Whilst these ethnolects are used primarily by first-generation immigrants who speak English as a second language, ethnolects are also sometimes used by second-generation immigrants in certain contexts, despite their fluency in Standard Australian English. A prime example is the Lebanese ethnolect, which is sometimes spoken amongst students of Lebanese or even European origin in schools of the northern suburbs of Victoria. This transcends into the non-Lebanese students at the same school; they adopt this ethnolect at times to be part of the in-group at school, given that these ethnic groups comprise a relative majority within these schools. Lexemes like 'habib' (a term for 'friend') are uttered, and the word 'doing' may be pronounced as [duən] instead of [duɪŋ]. The prevalence of ethnolects within Australia, and their use even amongst second-generation immigrants, points to the fact that immigration has had a high impact on Australian English. Also, given that immigration patterns are different for different Western countries, and that a South Asian ethnolect in Australia would most likely be different to one in another Western country, it can be argued that international influences actually increased the distinctiveness of Australian English.

Nevertheless, many identifying features of the aggregation of the Broad, General and Cultivated varieties remained in the variety and maintained the unique nature of Australian English. In particular, the Australian accent, described as 'bulletproof' by linguist Dr Felicity Cox, has been largely unaffected by the previously mentioned influences. The all-too-familiar nasalisation of back vowels, the epenthetic [r] in words such as 'drawing' (pronounced [dʒrɔ:rɪŋ]) and the lowering of front phones such as [e] to [æ] (so that 'today' would be pronounced as [tudæɪŋ]) remain characteristic features of Australian phonology. Its morphology has never lost its hypocoristic nature, with the vast amount of diminutives such as 'povo' (for 'poverty' or 'poor') and 'arvo' (for 'afternoon'). Lexemes and phrases unique to Australia are still used widely. Even Prime Minister Gillard recently greeted New Zealand rugby players with the archetypal Australian greeting 'g'day' whilst Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd proclaimed himself as a 'happy little Vegemite.' The common discourse particle 'yeah-no' is also actually unique to Australia. Finally, the semantic nature of the variety has not changed, as evidenced by the fact that 'thongs' are still thought of as a type of footwear (not a female undergarment.) These are only some of the many linguistic features that maintain the distinctiveness of Australian English.

Indigenous Australian English, also resistant to such influences, is also involved in maintaining the individuality of Australian English. The combination of its various linguistic features across the subsystems is not found in any other English variety. Phonological features include the use of the alveolar stop [d] instead of its dental analogue [ð] and the dropping of the [h]. Lexemes unique to Aboriginal English include 'monat' and 'booliman' (both terms for 'policeman'). A syntactic feature is the omission of the copulative verb in subject – predicate complement constructions, for instance in the utterance 'he good,' where the copula verb 'is' is not used. Even lexemes such as 'sorry' and 'mother' have different semantic meanings in this English variety; 'sorry' is a reference to mourning whilst 'mother' is a reference to the maternal parent and also her sisters. These features, as an aggregation, ensure that Aboriginal English remains a unique variety and in doing so, ascertains that Australian English retains its distinctiveness.

Whilst Australian English has been subject to changes to its lexicon and incorporation of other varieties of English due to various influences, Australian English retains its distinctiveness as it has retained features that characterise it. The phonology of the Broad variety has not been altered measurably, and Australian morphology and semantics have remained relatively constant over time. International influences have also increased the distinctiveness of the national variety. Finally, Indigenous Australian English has maintained its status as a unique language variety; it therefore ensures that Australian English will not converge to any other language variety. In maintaining its individuality, Australian English retains its capacity to act as a marker of national identity.

**Sample 7:****SAMPLE :**

Should the community be concerned that technology is replacing traditional forms of oral communication, such as face-to-face conversation? Provide linguistic evidence to support your response.

- For this prompt, you are called upon to take a more opinionated stance in relation to whether or not technology is replacing other oral forms of communication. As a general rule, whenever you're given a prompt that asks you whether something is true or false (e.g. 'technology is replacing oral communication – true or false?' or 'young people are less accepting of Standard English – true or false?') a good default stance is to say 'not necessarily; it's complicated.' It helps if you're still able to come to a definitive conclusion about the prompt, but you don't need to be too absolutist in your approach, and it can often be to the detriment of your analysis if your interpretation is too one-sided. As such, a stance like 'not entirely' or 'sort of, but not really' opens up the discussion without limiting you to a reductive 'yes, I completely agree' or 'no, I completely disagree' line of argument.

Recent decades have brought with them a multitude of new avenues of communication. Initially, dialogues were only possible in the spoken mode, and restricted to face-to-face conversations. The advent of the telephone removed the latter criterion, and the appearance of SMS messaging, social networking sites, forums and chat rooms allowed for dialogues to be held in the written mode. The spoken and written modes have distinctive features, meaning that dialogues in the two modes will be of a different nature. Telephone and face-to-face conversations have access to prosodics (and paralinguistics for face-to-face), whereas electronically-mediated communication (EMC) generally does not have access to these features. Nevertheless, this should not concern the community as EMC has developed different methods for conversational strategies that fulfil the requirements of discourse, and both EMC and traditional methods have similarities with one another. Also, one should not forget Skype, which allows face-to-face conversation through technology.

EMC and traditional forms of communication have differences as types of spoken and written mode, but this does not imply that EMC is significantly less effective. Whilst it does not have access to prosodic and paralinguistic features, it uses morphology and lexicology to emulate these features. For instance, the prosodic features of volume and syllable elongation can be represented in EMC with capital letters and repetition of the same letter; to represent a lengthened and loud version of 'hey' the expression 'heeeeeyyy' may be used. Paralinguistic facial expressions can be emulated in EMC with emoticons such as ':' or even '=' for happy and '>:' for angry. Body language can be conveyed through the uses of lexemes such as 'facepalm' or 'headdesk.' It is, however, true that intonation cannot be easily conveyed in EMC, which means tones such as sarcasm may be harder to detect in EMC and need to be derived through context. Also, whilst EMC has equivalents to these features of the spoken mode, they are not as acute, which increases the risk of misunderstandings. Nevertheless, EMC has many practical advantages over traditional forms of communication, such as facilitating cheap long-distance communication (which is handy in maintaining long-distance relationships). The lack of paralinguistics can also be an advantage; Nathan Rosenberg explains in *The Age* that 'text allows [people] to have a bit of fun and flirt and say things they wouldn't normally say.' Hence, given the fact that EMC has numerous advantages over traditional forms, and it can emulate features of the spoken mode relatively effectively, EMC can be said to be an effective avenue for communication.

Although differences exist between these two varieties of communication, EMC and traditional forms also have similarities with one another which should preclude alarm over the use of EMC. Both of these varieties prioritise communicative efficiency, although traditional forms use phonology whilst EMC uses lexicology. The spoken mode generally is rife with elided and assimilated forms such as 'wanna' and 'gonna' whilst acronyms and abbreviations such as 'ttyl' and 'sup' are the analogues for EMC. Discourse markers and non-fluency features, which allow for the effective functioning of a dialogue, are also found in both modes. Particles such as 'well,' 'anyway' and 'so' are uttered in the spoken mode and written in EMC to establish and focus topics, facilitate in turn taking and hedge. Voiced fillers such as 'um' and 'err' (spelt that way too!) are used both in EMC and the spoken mode to hold the floor whilst thinking about what to say. In

addition, backchannels and adjacency pairs feature in both modes, which convey cooperation. In essentials, both forms of communication have similar discourse features which enable cooperative conversation to be undertaken among others. They are not too dissimilar to one another; either form has access to communicative efficiency and conversational strategies, so the question of EMC becoming too prevalent in society is effectively a moot point.

Notwithstanding, technology has been able to combine long-distance communication and face-to-face-to-face communication, where the two were previously mutually exclusive. The advent of Skype, MSN video chat and webcams has allowed people access to paralinguistic features and the advantages that come with it. Emotions and attitudes can be conveyed more acutely through facial expressions and body language, although emoticons and lexemes such as 'facepalm' can do so sufficiently. Hence, not only is technology quite similar in discourse to the spoken mode, but technology can also facilitate communication through the spoken mode. Therefore, those concerned about the decline of face-to-face communication should embrace technology as facilitators of such communication.

The increasing prevalence of technology in society should be no cause for alarm. EMC does have its advantages over the spoken mode, and is able to emulate the prosodics and paralinguistics unique to the spoken mode sufficiently. Even then, it is not particularly different to the spoken mode; the two share very similar discourse features. Finally, it may even interact constructively with the spoken mode in the form of Skype. Essentially, EMC should not be considered a travesty to society, rather a rich and powerful combination of the spoken and written mode.

**Sample 8:****SAMPLE 8:**

Who upholds the standards of language in modern Australian society? Discuss with reference to the use of Standard Australian English and other varieties.

- This prompt is also quite broad and would require you to pave some clear direction in your introduction to ensure your assessor knew which key elements of the topic you were going to explore.
- This essay endeavours to begin most of its discussion with a theoretical outline of some relevant elements of language sub-systems before commencing with an analysis of evidence, which can be a good option for discussions that you feel are more grounded in the conceptual side of linguistics.

The standards of language refer to the notion of each feature of language to hold the same meaning to its users. In terms of phonology, the pronunciation of each word is standardised; there are very few variants of pronunciations of each word, and these variants are known universally by society. There is a standardised spelling system; there is only one way (sometimes two) to spell a word. Society uses the same basic rules for syntax. For instance, when a noun is placed at the start of the sentence, it is known universally as the subject of that sentence. In the semantic domain, the meaning of each word is also standardised. The primary factor that maintains standards of language is the requirement of mutual intelligibility in society. However, there are other factors that maintain these standards, which include society's attitude towards non-standard forms of English, the action of educational institutions such as schools and the dictionary.

Standards of language are upheld by the fact that mutual intelligibility is essential for any function of language. In order to communicate information effectively, the communicator must use language in a way such that the audience receives the ideas that were to be communicated. For instance, if an Australian wanted to refer to a friend, the word 'mate' would be used; the audience must interpret the lexeme 'mate' to mean 'one's friend.' Suppose that the communicator believes that the lexeme 'hate' to mean 'to like someone,' and that the audience takes it to mean 'to dislike someone.' Suppose the communicator likes the audience and wants to convey this, so 'I hate you' is uttered. As the audience associates the word 'hate' with dislike, they assume that the communicator dislikes them. This is an example of how mutual unintelligibility is deleterious to the function of language users – to communicate and convey information and ideas. If both the communicator and the audience associate the word 'hate' with liking someone, then the phrase 'I hate you' could be used in this scenario without any form of miscommunication. This principle applies to all forms of language, whether it be Standard Australian English or Aboriginal English or ethnocultural varieties of Australian English. For instance, the Aboriginal lexeme 'monatj' is taken to mean 'policeman' by all Aboriginal English speakers in Western Australia. One could not use another lexeme that was not associated with 'policeman' by wider society, or miscommunication would result. Finally, in society there is a struggle for mutual intelligibility as the conveying of information and ideas is essential for the normal functioning of society; this societal struggle leads to standardisation of language.

Aside from mutual intelligibility, society upholds language standards through its attitude towards non-standard forms. This applies particularly to Standard English, where deviations from it are looked down upon by society in certain contexts as Standard English is seen as a benchmark of credibility. This attitude is seen particularly in the context of job applications, where establishing one's competence for an occupation is essential. The use of any deviation from Standard English is associated with a lack thereof. An article from The Sydney Morning Herald entitled "Mistakes can Spell Disaster" quotes a study in which when CVs with only one typographical error (interpreted as a spelling mistake and hence a digression from Standard English) were sent into potential employers, it 'reduced the applicants' chances of being shortlisted by 50 per cent.' The employers here assume that scripts with typographical errors (and non-standard syntax for that matter) are those from incompetent or careless applicants, and hence those scripts are unceremoniously thrown into the bin. Every individual in modern Australian society is required to at some point establish their credibility, whether it be in an academic paper, a job application or a formal letter. In order to not be associated with a lack of reliability there is a pressure for all of these individuals to write according to the same set of rules – those as dictated in Standard English. This is another way society holds language standards – in this case Standard English.

Educational institutions, including schools and universities, also play a hand in maintaining the standards of Australian English. Individuals in society learn the rules of syntax, orthography and punctuation in schools, and each individual learns the same rules. Educational institutions dictate what correct use of language is and what incorrect use of language is. In addition, students at schools and universities generally desire high scores in their written work. In order to attain that goal, students need to write according to what their examiners deem correct. There is hence a struggle to adopt the rules of the examiner in order to score highly. This is partly responsible for the standardisation of syntax and orthography. For instance, orthography in Australia follows the British model, with very few American spellings. Teachers in schools deem the spellings 'organize,' 'omelet' and 'color' as incorrect, and 'organise,' 'omelette' and 'colour' as the only correct ways of spelling these words. Students are pressured to follow this model due to the desire for high scores. The breaking of specific rules of syntax are also penalised by examiners, so students write according to these rules. Since they are communicating according to the same rules, this leads to standardisation of the language.

There are various forces which maintain and uphold language standards in modern Australian society. The most potent forces come from society itself. One way is through its struggle for mutual intelligibility, which is essential for the functions of language, including communication of ideas and information. The other way society does this is through its judging of non-standard language, and the association of such language with a lack of competency, particularly in relation to educational institutions who have a hand in upholding the standards of language in teaching young Australians correct usage of Standard English. If language were not standardised, miscommunication between individuals would be rife, and society would likely be unable to function properly, so standardisation can be seen as having positive consequences in this regard.

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