



A-level
ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 2 Language diversity and change

Insert

Texts for Section B

Text A

Text A is an article about teaching standard English. It was published by *The Guardian* in 2021.

Opinion
Language

Ever-changing dialects keep English moving - but grammar is its north star
Simon Jenkins

I say *tomahto* and you say *tomayto*. My wife says *dahrling* and I say my dear. We all speak differently, and some of us speak different. Does it really matter?

Last week the Dutch/Lancastrian linguist, Willem Hollmann, gave a new meaning to levelling up. He declared that teaching standard English and “received pronunciation” or London RP in schools **discriminated against** the majority of English children who did not use them at home. This should stop, he argued. There should be no such thing as correct diction because “children who do not speak received pronunciation might struggle and may feel marginalised”.

Hollmann believes they should not be encouraged to think their home dialect is “incorrect” and somehow inferior to standard English. If they prefer the northern “I were” for “I was”, that is their choice. If they fail to get posh jobs as a result, so be it. They should sue for unfair discrimination.

This is a classic case of an argument with a grain of truth in it. In the last century the BBC used to ban regional accents on air and there was a justified outcry. It no longer does. Standard English grammar and pronunciation are no longer upper-middle class English. Linguists have long traced the permeation of RP with “estuarial” English. Privately educated children now drop their consonants.

Where Hollmann is on more difficult territory, I believe, is over grammar. As he has pointed out in his other writings, **grammar holds the key** to understanding in all forms of communication. I cannot see virtue in refusing to teach children standard English as “correct”, just to protect supposed regional sensitivities. How to say tomato does not matter. What does matter are the clarities embodied in singulars and plurals, tenses and conditionals, qualifiers and determinants. Clarity of language is crucial to the presentational skills now so important to a young person’s career – and so rarely taught while time is wasted on algebra and geometry. Protesting that “bad” grammar should not hold someone back will not stop it from doing so.

No one wants to see the demise of English dialects. Like the landscapes and townscapes of which they form part, dialect is rooted in ancient customs and cultures. Of course, it should be honoured and studied in schools and colleges. Indeed, all children should be “bilingual in English”. The accents in which these various Englishes are spoken will always be alive and changing.

Grammar is different. English is full of irregularities handed down over centuries, and its “correctness” is a reasonable topic for argument. Its spelling is diabolical. But as long as English is the nation’s language – as well as much of the world’s – its communality, its grammatical accuracy is in everyone’s interest. Accent we can leave to the diversity of the human marketplace. But the gods of grammar we should surely respect.

Text B

Text B is an article about the need for standard English in university assessments. It was published by *MailOnline* in 2021.

What Grade A nonsense! JOHN HUMPHRYS hits out as universities say correct spelling and grammar may be seen as ‘white, male and elite’

Thirty years ago nearly half of university vice-chancellors were so concerned about their students’ literacy, they had decided to introduce special lessons to help them express themselves more clearly.

Today’s vice-chancellors and professors are worried about the same thing, but their response has been rather different. It has been: if you can’t spell or use punctuation accurately or write basic, simple, reasonably grammatical English, don’t worry about it. You won’t lose any marks in your exams because tutors are being told to adopt a policy called ‘inclusive assessments’.

The reason is they’re afraid that insisting on students expressing themselves in clear English could be viewed as ‘homogeneous North European, white, male, elite’.

Do I detect the influence of the all-powerful Woke Brigade somewhere here?

At first glance, it might seem a commendable policy.

They want, quite rightly, to narrow the gap between white students from more privileged backgrounds, and black, Asian and minority ethnic students who may not have had their advantages.

Hull University warns tutors against ‘imposing your own idea of “correct English” on student work’.

But it takes about 30 seconds to realise that, whatever language you use to express it, this is Grade A nonsense that will achieve the opposite. And what in heaven’s name is ‘your own idea’ of correct English? We get a clue to that from Nottingham Trent University, which wants their academics to give a ‘clear message about whether spelling and grammar are considered important’ when they’re setting an essay.

Perhaps I can save them the trouble. They are not just ‘important’. They are vital.

Clarity is the enemy of ambiguity and ambiguity is the friend of every politician who has ever tried to pull a fast one on an unsuspecting public.

Clarity of communication – enabled by grammar – empowers us. Which takes us back to the woke warriors with their own approach to empowerment.

But universities are not the street or the AstroTurf. They teach knowledge. That’s the point of them. And there is a real danger of creating ghettos. We have a universal language. It’s called English and it’s been pretty successful for a very long time. It would be a grave mistake to abandon it to the ‘woke’ and ultimately meaningless notion of ‘inclusive assessment’.

We rely on our great universities for the new ideas, theories and analyses that will help us create a better world – and they need to be articulated with clarity and precision. We need, in every sense, to be able to speak the same language.

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