

# A LEVEL

*Transition Guide*

H470

Accredited

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Theme: Historical varieties  
of English

April 2015



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## Welcome

Welcome to the KS5–First year at HE transition guide for **English Language**.

Key Stage 5 to Higher Education Transition guides focus on how a particular topic is covered at the different key stages and provide information on:

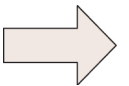
- Differences in the demand and approach at the different levels;
- Useful ways to think about the content at Key Stage 5 which will help prepare students for progression to studying the subject in Higher Education;
- Common student misconceptions in this topic.

Transition guides also contain links to a range of teaching activities that can be used to deliver the content at Key Stage 5 to Higher Education and are designed to be of use to teachers of both key stages. Central to the transition guide is a Checkpoint task which is specifically designed to help teachers determine whether students have developed deep conceptual understanding of the topic at Key Stage 5 and assess their 'readiness for progression' to Higher Education content on this topic. This checkpoint task can be used as a summative assessment at the end of Key Stage 5 teaching of the topic or by Higher Education lecturers to establish their students' conceptual starting.

Key Stage 5 to Higher Education Transition Guides are written by lecturers at named Higher Education Institutes.

This Transition Guide has been developed in collaboration with David Read from the University of Southampton.

[Go to topic comparison](#)



## A Level criteria content

### Adapted from published GCE AS and A Level Subject Content for English language

A Level specifications must require learners to show broad knowledge and understanding of the language levels [essentially, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics and discourse] and how these can be applied to a range of contexts for language use, including:

- historical, geographical, social and individual varieties of English

The contextual study of language must be based on sound theoretical knowledge developed through a coherent course of study.

This resource focuses on **historical** varieties of English which are compared in Question 3 of Component 2 of the A level



## First year at HE Content

Typically, the study of the history of English at HE will go beyond what is taught at A Level in terms of both the time span covered and the focus on systemic change. Students are more likely to study the earlier stages of English in more detail (that is, they will learn more about Old and Middle English); they are also more likely to look at the recent history of English as a global language, linking the earlier historical developments to contemporary sociolinguistic situations of language contact, including the formation of pidgin and creole languages in which English is the so-called lexifier, i.e. the dominant language, which is the main source of the vocabulary of the emerging pidgin/creole. As a result, the social context of language change will usually be considered in more detail.

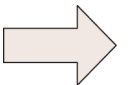
KS5



HE

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Explore the Guide



KS5



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Possible Teaching  
Activities (**KS5 focus**)

Checkpoint Tasks

Possible Extension  
Activities (**HE focus**)

## Comment

### Differences in demand and approach at the different levels

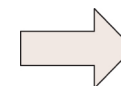
The treatment of the history of English will vary considerably at different universities. Often a 'textual' approach is adopted, using edited or unedited versions of earlier texts as evidence for the restructuring of the language, and for demonstrating variability in earlier stages of the language, before exploring the sources of that variability. This is often combined with a general narrative of the history of the language, which allows for greater connections with the social context of language use and change. This narrative typically begins in the pre-Old English period, and continues to include changes that occurred in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Connections with sociolinguistics and dialectology are often highlighted. Some courses will also adopt a more 'general linguistic' approach, using evidence from the history of English to explore mechanisms and motivations for language change more broadly, often in conjunction also with examples from other languages.

### Useful ways to think about the content at A Level which will help with comprehension of the topic at the next level

Understanding the history of English allows students to consider in detail the relationship between language use and language structure. Typically, the focus at A Level is on the language levels (often previously known as 'frameworks' in various A Level qualifications, which was slightly confusing from an HE perspective, where this term is usually reserved for specific theories of language) as tools for talking about how language is used. At HE, the focus is sometimes on whether – and if so, how – language use can tell us something about language structure. This is particularly relevant in cases of language change, where different uses may reflect new structures.

Furthermore, the 'level' at which change operates should also be considered. Often, discussion of language change at A Level and early on in HE may focus on lexical change. This may include the creation of new words (or loss of old words), as well as changes in the meaning of various lexical items. While not without their own complexities, such changes are typically easier to grasp than other changes (e.g. phonological change), and as a result, provide a good entry point for thinking about the nature of change more generally, both at A Level and at HE.

Next



KS5



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Possible Teaching  
Activities (**KS5 focus**)

Checkpoint Tasks

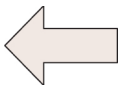
Possible Extension  
Activities (**HE focus**)

## Comment

### Misconceptions

There is a prevalent misconception that knowing about language use is somehow more interesting, relevant or valuable than knowing about language structure. This may be reflected in the view that the language levels are seen as the 'tools' to be employed to enable students to discuss how language is used. This practice may continue at some HEIs, but not at all of them. This is particularly the case for students going on to degrees in Linguistics rather than in English Language, though even courses in the latter at some HEIs consider knowledge of the language levels to be not simply important tools, but rather a proper subject of enquiry. In this way of thinking, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics are things to be investigated in their own right. For the history of English, this means that the textual analysis may be used to provide evidence for the way in which the phonological (or morphological, and so on) history of English has evolved over time. As a result, it is very important for A Level students to show a good and detailed command of the levels when answering a question on language use.

Previous



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Possible Teaching  
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## Possible Teaching Activities (KS5 focus)

There are three resources currently available via the British Library website. These are free, though some link to Teachit which may require registration or subscription.

One option would be to use the resources below in the order in which they appear. This would mean that the students first work with a general overview of the history of the language, getting a broad picture of how English evolves from the Old English period to the present (English timeline). They would then look in more detail at a particular topic – lexical change, including changes in the spelling and meaning of words, and how dictionaries were used as a means of codifying English (Dictionaries and meaning). Finally, they would look more generally at textual variation and the role of context in language change (Books for Cooks). This final activity would allow for a broadening of focus beyond the lexical change discussed in the second activity.



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### 1. English timeline

<http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/evolvingenglish/accessvers/index.html>

This resource allows students to look at the chronological development of English from the late Old English period to the twentieth century. It is interactive and contains embedded images of original manuscripts, including a page of the Beowulf manuscript, a thirteenth century song, and a Sherlock Holmes story.



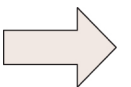
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### 2. Dictionaries and meanings

<http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/dic/meanings.html>

This resource provides data from a range of books from the sixteenth century onwards. In addition to the original printed version, transcripts are provided. Apart from canonical texts such as Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, and the *Oxford English Dictionary*, there are extracts from books which show how other languages have functioned as the source of English loan words.

Next



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Possible Teaching  
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## Possible Teaching Activities (KS5 focus)



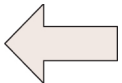
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### 3. Books for Cooks

<http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/booksforcooks/booksforcooks.html>

This resource provides data from a range of books associated with cookery, from the Middle English period onwards. In addition to observing the different lexical items, students could explore how other aspects of the language of this instructive genre have changed – or stayed the same – over time, by considering grammatical patterns, for example. The texts could also be used to look at more general issues of language change, such as changes in inflectional morphology, and could be used to build on knowledge of lexical change acquired by using the *Dictionaries and meanings* resource. Looking at changes in lexical items, grammar and morphology helps students to understand something about the nature of language itself.

Previous





# A LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE

KS5



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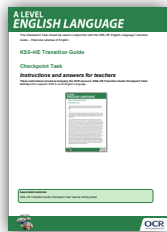
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Possible Teaching  
Activities (**KS5 focus**)

**Checkpoint Tasks**


Possible Extension  
Activities (**HE focus**)

## Checkpoint Tasks



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The checkpoint task involves a comparison of two instructional texts, one from the eighteenth century, and one from the present day. Since the aim of these tasks is to check whether or not the students have a deep conceptual understanding of the topic, the focus is on getting the students to do detailed comparisons between the texts in terms of language levels, and to encourage them to seek out systematicity in the variation. The tasks also incorporate some work on orthography (not specified as one of the language levels, but nevertheless important for understanding some of the changes in written language), to provide an additional challenge which befits work intended to prepare students for transition from A Level to HE. In particular, students who are confident about comparing different texts available from the Books for Cooks website mentioned in the Possible Teaching Activities (KS5 focus) tab will be well prepared to undertake the checkpoint task. Students should aim to be as detailed as possible in their description of linguistic forms, but they should also be encouraged to think about the purpose of the texts, and why certain linguistic choices may be favoured when writing for a particular purpose. All of this should be contextualized in terms of changes in social practices and contexts of use over time. Discussion of the means of production of the texts (here printing vs. online publication) would also be relevant.

**Topic:** Historical varieties of English

KS5



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## Possible Extension Activities (HE focus)



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As extension activities, we would recommend viewing some of the Virtual Linguistics Campus lectures on the history of English and language change, available on YouTube. This channel can also be useful for student research when undertaking the first NEA task, the language investigation.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/LinguisticsMarburg>

There are a number of lectures on different periods of English, and these are probably more immediately accessible to students. However, we recommend the lecture on reasons for language change too as it provides a more general overview on motivations for linguistic change.

### 1. Lecture on reasons for language change

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vjt3g37SuQg&list=PL2A32854721F7AF63>

This lecture concerns the complexity of reasons as to why language change occurs. It considers both external and internal factors associated with change, and as a result will provide a good bridge between A Level studies and HE. It has clear links to sociolinguistics and dialectology, both of which are often incorporated into HE lectures on language change.



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### 2. Lecture on early Modern English

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bciUXRAUpHk&list=PL2A32854721F7AF63>

This covers aspects of the external history, some central linguistic changes, and some discussion of early Modern English literature. It combines a discussion of the social context of language use and changes in the language itself. There are separate lectures on changes at particular levels (phonology, syntax and so on). Similar lectures give an overview of the earlier periods (Old English and Middle English), and there is also a lecture on pre-Old English.

### 3. Lecture on late Modern English

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJYZq4DMBAA&list=PL2A32854721F7AF63>

This focuses primarily on English as a global language, but there is some discussion of internal changes too, looking at some aspects of morphology and syntax, but with a primary focus on sound changes and lexical changes.



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