

A LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Introduction

Delivery guides are designed to represent a body of knowledge about teaching a particular topic and contain:

- Content: A clear outline of the content covered by the delivery guide;
- Thinking Conceptually: Expert guidance on the key concepts involved, common difficulties students may have, approaches to teaching that can help students understand these concepts and how this topic links conceptually to other areas of the subject;
- Thinking Contextually: A range of suggested teaching activities using a variety of themes so that different activities can be selected which best suit particular classes, learning styles or teaching approaches.

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KEY



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Curriculum Content

This Delivery Guide is for the Compulsory Question 1 in the F653/01 paper *Culture, Language and Identity*.

The question requires the application of a range of linguistic methods to communicate relevant knowledge using appropriate terminology and coherent accurate expression **(A01)**. It will require a critical and illustrative understanding of the concepts and issues related to the construction and analysis of meanings in spoken English **(A02)**. It will require analysis and evaluation of the contextual factors associated with the production and reception of spoken English **(A03)**.

Students will engage in a variety of analyses, descriptions and reactions to the features represented in a range of textual extracts. Furthermore they will show some understanding of the range of debates, controversies and the cultural implications thereof which surround the formal study of Language and Speech.

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Thinking Conceptually

Students will need to have some understanding of how speech and accents have both changed and are continuing to change. However, it is not necessary for them to study a *detailed* social history of language change over the centuries. To appreciate changes in speech they will need opportunities to listen with care to, and reflect upon, a wide range of speaking voices.

They need to listen to some examples of *modern* RP and some examples of *modern* alternative speech sounds. This is a *crucial* activity and it should be an ongoing part of the teaching of this Section of the Specification. They will need explicit guidance over the basic use of the phonemic alphabet—they will have met some phonemic representation already, in some passages in F651. This guidance should concentrate upon *vowel* sounds in particular. They should be given considerable opportunity to practice using a few

symbols when engaged in relevant class-room activities, as well as in more detailed written analyses.

A final and important activity is to give students clear guidance about interpretation and response to the stimulus passages, which they will meet in the examination. Remind them of the *primary* need for empirical responses, drawing upon some kind of technical resources. Remind them, also, that while some basic sociological interpretation of the data is acceptable, it should not predominate over the phonemic.

The guide lines which follow are not prescriptive. They can be followed as outlined. They can be modified to meet specific interests. They attempt to give advice and guidance, drawing upon some of the issues and discussions which have arisen in past examinations.

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ACTIVITIES

Terminology and Received Pronunciation

The Linguistics of Speech is dominated by a very daunting range of terminology. Before basic features of this technical language are addressed, it is important to give students the chance to discuss their own experiences of speech, both from an educational and a personal background.

This can be developed as a topic by asking students: 'What kinds of speech do they find difficult to understand?' 'What types of speaking voices do they find appealing?' 'Does it really matter how we speak?' Can they think of any reasons why social backgrounds might affect the way people speak? This preliminary approach can be illustrated by drawing up features' lists, which could cover some simple aspects of regional identity in terms of speech sounds. At this stage accept some simple sociological generalities and assertions.

Using a similar type of exploratory session, the importance of Received Pronunciation (RP) can be introduced. To introduce this it can be helpful to distribute the following extract: *Crystal D. Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language. Section 21 on **Social Variation**.*

This gives a wonderfully crisp and readable introduction to the position of RP as a prestige accent. This should lead to discussion of the student's own experiences of the spoken English language. More contextual information about the status of RP might relate to its origins from the work of phoneticians who based their ideas about RP on examples drawn from 'the professional classes, largely in the Southern regions of the UK'.

Further discussion could include the fact that RP itself has changed over time. The model of RP which is often called mainstream is the one now used in drama colleges and for 'improve your speaking voice' training. These mainstream sounds are the ones associated usually with correctness in speech. One valuable technical issue which could be raised with a group, is the fact that the actual phonemic sounds of RP are often produced by relatively few vowel sounds.

To introduce this kind of material should help to extend the conceptions about speech and social background. In adopting, or modifying this approach, a few important technical terms can be introduced.

Additional Guidance for Teachers

The Book *Talking Proper: The Rise and Fall of The English Accent as a Social Symbol* Lynda Mugglestone OUP-especially Chapter 8 The Rise (and fall?) of Received Pronunciation-is strongly recommended.

Useful websites RP:

www.teachit.co.uk/armoore/lang/rp.htm

www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/wells/rphappened.htm

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Listening Practice

To repeat the comment made earlier about daunting terminology, it is also necessary to be cautious of over-emphasis on technical terminology. The suggestions about RP above are probably containable and can invoke some thoughtful discussion.

The next stage for most students is the importance of actually listening to and noting down a few specific features of speech. This is one of the best ways to help develop both analytical and illustrative skills, when responding to the specific stimulus passages in the examination paper. These notes need not be phonemic; just as valuable are simple orthographic comments like: 'drops g endings'; 'pronounces cloth like clorth' etc.

However, do not discourage students from trying to experiment with simple phonemic illustration, should they wish. This approach helps confidence building. It also leads to valuing their individual findings, opposed to trying to submit often very dated examples learnt at random from textbooks.

An introductory Approach to Introducing Phonemic Symbols forms the basis of Lesson Activity 1.

Having grasped a system of annotation, students should then follow the suggestions for Lesson Activity 2

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Estuary English

The rise of Estuary sounds and the technical arguments about them make the topic a significant field of linguistic study in its own right. Estuary speech is seen, by some analysts, as a real challenge to RP. By others, merely a new name for what is, essentially, adaptations in the traditional London regional accent. Such sounds emerged originally from down the social scale. Students will need to appreciate some of the basic controversies which inform the topic. A very good introduction to this phonological field is:

www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estuary_English-note: dropped dash between Estuary and English

A more scholarly, but still helpful site is:

www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/estuary

The Soap Opera *Eastenders* on BBC1 offers some illustration of the Estuarine sounds. If available the original Rosewarne article, which launched the whole debate, is can be found in *English Today* 10/1 1994.

Students could be introduced to several of the features which are supposed to illustrate the advance of this sound across social boundaries. The two major ones are: increasing use of glottal stops and the feature called yod coalescence. This second phonic feature states that younger RP speakers, adopting Estuarine sounds, are saying *sout* rather than *sjuit* for the garment noun; and *dispoot* for *disputit*. Ask Students if they can think of any similar examples. According to the more orthodox supporters of the traditional RP model, these sounds are considered to be 'bad/incorrect speech'.

If it is the fact that these sounds, deriving from the South East/London regions, are spreading across the UK among younger speakers, then students themselves could be socially familiar with the sounds. This could be the basis of group discussion. Such discussion might be supplemented by illustration selected from the sources suggested above.

For more practice see Lesson Activity 3.

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Possible Further Work centred on Regional Accent

Since the students need considerable guidance into what is a complex field of language study, they might want to look beyond RP and Estuary and study the many other different sounds of speech-regional and city-specific sounds outside of London/SE- tend to be overlooked. Centres who have specific regional speech sounds within their boundaries-Birmingham; Newcastle; Glasgow; the S.West of England for example, could adapt their teaching, if they wish, to look more closely at the phonology of their particular localities, and where it deviates from the RP model; giving minimal attention to Estuary sounds.

In other centres, students could be encouraged to look in more detail at several further features of basic phonology. For instance: *schwa vowels (medial sound); diphthongs; the aspiration or pronunciation of the letter h*. The articulation of such is important in both RP and Estuary. Or they could be shown the use the vowel quadrilateral to illustrate, in simple diagrammatic form, how specific vowels can be identified by their precise position in the mouth. This helpful in more precise exemplification of speech sounds. For teachers who have speech interests, in terms of voice production for instance, technical terms like *stress* could be included in the technical approaches to phonology. The importance of where stress is placed on syllables is one specific aspect in the teaching of elocution.

For teachers seeking further inspiration or guidance about alternative aspects of the technicalities surrounding varieties in speech the following website can be commended: www.universalteacher.org.uk

Whilst it shows a propensity to use the AQA Specification as a model, there are some secure sections on Language at A level which are of definite value. These especially helpful for teachers working on the OCR Specification for the first time.

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Thinking Contextually

Activities

The Issue of Contexts

A starting place for this discussion could be to use Lesson Activity 4 which discusses Sociolects and Dialects. This work links back to work on Regional Accents and also begins to consider context.

Since the Topic area does involve some clear wider knowledge about speech variety and speech sounds, most learners can mix the demands of A03 with those of A02. Looking at and listening to a range of materials, in terms of broadening understanding, is certainly an important contextual feature, not least in the way it develops aural skills, which can be applied to a variety of textual and *regional* situations.

Comparisons of different speech sounds give rise to awareness about the social dimensions of language. An elementary knowledge of phonemic symbols/the IPA can improve general levels of critical and cultural understanding and make the wider reading of some text books easier.

There is contentious contextual debate in publications like ***Language is Power*** and ***The Story of Standard English and its Enemies***. Both these books, by Professor Honey, could be stimuli for slightly more advanced class-room discussions. The Topics which follow all offer a potential mixture of the conceptual and the contextual. They also invite some kind of basic illustrative phonemic exemplification.

Topics for Written Work (drawn from past materials used in the Examination Papers)

- What is happening to RP?
- How far is Estuary spreading across the UK?
- Why are some accents more popular than others?
- What is 'good spoken English'?
- What is the value of elocution in teaching English?
- What makes some kinds of regional speech sounds popular?
- Are there occupational differences in speech?-link here with Section B of F651.
- Is digital technology affecting the way people speak?

This kind of work encourages both the conceptual and the contextual commentary. It also should be a valuable stimulant to all students encouraging them to apply some basic phonemic illustration in supporting their answers. Some clear elementary illustration, of supportive and relevant phonemic sounds, combined with basic knowledge about the debates and arguments generated by data about speech and its contexts, produces the more accomplished examination responses to this Section of the Specification.

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Lesson Activity 1

Introducing Phonemic Symbols.

Those provided on past examination papers are suitable. The following tasks increase awareness of the value of symbols in simple transcription and illustration. The examples below focus on the essential elements of *pure vowels* and *diphthongs*. For the purpose of this task the model of speech is RP.

Class work in pairs. The vowel sounds of the following words are to be transcribed into phonemic symbols: **Bath/ Laugh; Here/Hear; Dear/Deer; Drag/Dreg; Court/Caught; Soup/Pour; Spear/Sheer; Perm/Firm; Laugh/ Cough; Loot/Moor.**

After task completed do a whole class plenary on any problems encountered in the activity.

Factors such as time taken with unfamiliar symbols, uncertainty about how the word should be pronounced, the possible sound of a diphthong, could be problems encountered.

www.universalteacher.org.uk/ offers useful guidance on phonology. Further development could be students looking to research the *Schwa* vowel sound. This is very common in English. Ask them to find several examples of it in spoken passages.

If the teacher has suitable knowledge, this could be an opportunity to introduce the vowel quadrilateral. This is diagrammatically excellent in showing the position of certain vowel sounds in the mouth. Students can be given blank quadrilaterals for basic research and illustration practice. Set two sentences from any available speech source. Ask students to test each other on chosen words, using the IPA. This could be just vowels; or it could include some consonantal sounds.

Remind them that the focus of the set question in Part A of the examination is upon understanding and using particular terminology; and passages should not be addressed from a purely socio-linguistic viewpoint. This could provide a teaching opportunity to give a brief outline upon the general constituents of socio-linguistics and where some reference to this aspect of linguistics could be helpful in addressing speech questions.

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Lesson Activity 2

Practice Task for Listening and responding to speech

As an activity it is best undertaken in pairs. Do not apply any rules over responses. Excellent sources for such activities can be taken from TV broadcasts.

Good examples could be taken from: **Chat Shows; Reality Broadcasts; Dragons' Den** and some **Documentaries**. Avoid dramatisations where professional actors are speaking. Avoid professional broadcast voices like announcers.

The outcomes should allow students to gain confidence in picking up some of the sounds which will encourage basic illustrative rather than over-generalised comment. Findings could be fed back to the rest of the class. It is likely there will be digressions in responses to the sounds. This is not important; since the task is to gain elementary phonemic understanding. Disagreement over a particular pronunciation helps to foster greater attention to the specific voice under analysis.

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Lesson Activity 3

Estuary Sounds

Teacher will give out some notes/white-board guidance/some recording(s). These should raise points about the sounds of the Estuary. If available, the original Rosewarne article is very useful. It is important that students appreciate some of the basic features connected to this ever-growing phonological subject area. Do not spend too long on raising issues about the social dimensions of the topic at this stage.

In pairs, ask the students to work through some of the chosen data recommended above. Get them to highlight particular points about the actual Estuary sounds which have generated a very large topic of study. This should help with refining note-making; to include setting up further questions to be researched. If examples have been heard, it should encourage further research in listening. If students can hear some of the sounds it is invaluable. The recordings need more than one airing for even basic aural appreciation. The next step could include looking up Estuary on the web. There are quite a number of sites which address the topic. Make notes of any key points.

This task could be extended to investigate to what extent the students are aware of these sounds within their own speech communities. Are they confined within their own peer groups? Or are they heard in the wider community? This could help them map out, in a very simple way, just how embracing this accent is. This might be an opportunity to give basic illustration of some specific vowel sounds common in Estuary speak. Remind them that some linguists feel it is sweeping the country and challenging RP as the dominant accent of the C21st. Do they agree?

Should time permit, using combinations adapted from above, Aspects of Estuary Sounds could be written up in preparation for a web-based language forum on the effects of Estuarine upon younger speakers. This could embrace both a socio-linguistic and a phonemic appraisal and could be used as guidance for future classes.

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Lesson Activity 4

Sociolects and Dialects

Teachers should explain what is **sociolect** and what is **dialect** and try to provide examples of speech sounds from a reasonably wide variety of contexts, which, if possible, should include regional speech sounds, both urban and rural. As far as possible these should cover age; class; gender; occupation. If possible, avoid spoken dramatised speech and overtly RP speakers.

The BBC Voices Project is particularly helpful for this task: www.bbc.co.uk/voices. Some passages from past examination papers could provide print back-up. Students should make notes upon the selected voices, attempting to see how far individual language choices construct sociolects and dialects. This task can be quite time consuming. If available one or two broadcasts of speakers with specific features of dialectical or sociolectal speech can be used. The notes should be discussed in a class forum and teachers should write up the findings.

This task allows some latitude in developing knowledge about dialectical and sociolectal variation across communities. This can be linked to cultural issues and culturally specific urban dialects like Black Vernacular English (BVE) and other spoken forms of English, produced within particular ethnic groups. It would also encourage a more technical appraisal of specific regional sounds. Students can be asked to research which are the most popular dialects in the modern UK. An outcome of this work could be an article suitable for presentation to a language forum about both sociolects and dialects. Or it could be a more focused exposition of sounds in one particular area, supported by some basic phonemic illustrations. Teachers might like to note that a topic like this can be adapted quite effectively for a multi-modal piece, suitable for the F654 Coursework.

More useful guidance on topic can be found on: www.universalteacher.org.uk/

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