Hanging on the telephone

KS5 > Language library > Language variation

How it works

This resource is really a mini unit covering all of the data types that could be set for AQA ENB2 Language and Technology i.e. written actuality (text messages), represented data (Soyinka poem), and transcripts (Camillagate); the Guardian article on literacy and texting, and the related questions, cover studies of language and language attitudes. In addition to close analysis of context and language, the resource also builds in an internet research and editorial writing task. It’s hefty stuff that will keep students out of mischief for several weeks, but it keeps clearly focused on textual analysis, which is the priority for the exam.

In the mixed ability class this unit was designed for, all students enjoyed researching the history of telephones but found the wallchart activity challenging. No matter, it’s good to get editorial writing practice going as early as possible, and the discussion that arose about changes in the technology and use of telephones was genuinely illuminating. They LOVED the text message/Camillagate comparison. In addition to the teacher pleasure to be had in grossing out your class, it also produced great discussion as they were stunned to find adult Guardian readers and future monarchs using very similar language features to their own. They all found the Soyinka poem activity difficult. I set it as homework, so in future I’d do this in class in order to give a bit more support as they were completely confused by the prospect of ripping a poem apart and playing with its pieces, never having been encouraged to commit such barbarous acts of literary vandalism before. The Guardian article task was straightforward as we had already done a mini-investigation so they were starting to get a bit more familiar with ideas about research.

Try this!

Develop this unit further by combining it with the mini-investigation into text messaging language and age: Teachit resource title ‘The joy of text’. Or create one of your own (using this format if you find it helpful) that gets students whipping out their mobiles and transcribing their text messages for analysis. How to become Top Teacher in one swift move.
A brief history

Your task is to produce an educational wallchart showing how the design and technology of the telephone has changed the way we communicate. This is primarily for AS/A2 English Language classrooms, but also as a resource of general interest to parents at open evenings.

You will need to explore the design and technology of the telephone first. These websites provide some useful starting points.

- [http://oldphones.com/StoreFront.bok](http://oldphones.com/StoreFront.bok)

Then think about how this has affected the way we communicate. Explore some or all of these questions, and any others that you can think of.

- What design and technology changes have been made?
- How do you think these changes may have affected the way people use the telephone, and the way they use language on the telephone?
- What changes have been made in the last 5 years?
- How have these recent changes affected the way people use the telephone, and the way they use language on the telephone?
- What design and technology changes are predicted for the future?
- How might these predicted changes affect the way people use the telephone, and the way they use language on the telephone?

Now you need to plan your educational wallchart. An educational wallchart is designed to tell an instructive story about a topic. Remember that stories have a shape – at the very least, a beginning, middle and end, but try and think about other features that make narratives interesting. Is there an interesting character in the story of the telephone? Are there exciting events, twists and turns, surprises or mysteries? There are many ways of thinking about this. The key point is that it’s not just about visual presentation – there is also an art to telling a non-fiction narrative. Remember, also, that this is about language and communication, not just colours and shapes of phones.
**Contextual factors shaping the language use**

Consider the key contextual factors which influence the use of specific types of register and patterns of discourse in the two main types of telephone use, conversation and interaction by texting. Record your ideas in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Telephone conversation by landline and mobile</th>
<th>Interaction by texting</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Settings</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Participants</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Activities</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The range of variations you identify here should be the basis of your own wider reading and investigation during the course of our work on this topic. Aim to record and/or transcribe examples of as many different of telephone conversation and texting interaction as you can.
How the social context and the technology shape the language use

We are going to look at two sets of data involving people in telephone interaction about their romantic relationships. The first is an extract from a transcript of a telephone conversation between Prince Charles and Camilla Parker-Bowles that was recorded in 1989. The second is a selection from a set of Valentine’s Day messages that Guardian readers sent in by text messaging for publication on the newspaper’s website on 14th February 2005.

1. Carefully consider the nature of the context shaping each of these specific examples of telephone interaction: the settings, the participants, and the activities.
2. Then analyse how specific features of language are shaped by both the social context and the use of the technology.
3. Record both your observations and examples in the table below. Note that not all frameworks will necessarily apply to each set of data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lexis</th>
<th>Telephone conversation by landline and mobile: Charles and Camilla</th>
<th>Interaction by texting: The Guardian readers’ Valentine’s Day txts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
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<td>Semantics</td>
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Hanging on the telephone

<table>
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<th>Pragmatics</th>
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<td>Graphology</td>
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<td>Phonology/features of spokenness</td>
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<td>Discourse patterns and structures</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

What conclusions can you draw from this analysis?
The Camillagate Transcript

This extract is the closing sequence of a conversation which took place during Charles' visit to the Cheshire home of the dowager Duchess of Westminster. Camilla is at her home, Bolehyde Manor, in the West County.

Charles: Night, Darling.
Camilla: I love you.
Charles: I love you too. I don't want to say goodbye.
Camilla: Well done, for doing that. You're a clever old thing. An awfully good brain lurking there, isn't there? Oh, darling, I think you ought to give the brain a rest now. Night-Night.
Charles: Night darling, God bless.
Camilla: I do love you, and I'm so proud of you.
Charles: Oh, I'm so proud of you.
Camilla: Don't be silly. I've never achieved anything.
Charles: Yes, you have.
Camilla: No, I haven't.
Charles: Your greatest achievement is to love me.
Camilla: Oh, darling easier than falling off a chair.
Charles: You suffer all these indignities and tortures and calumnies!
Camilla: Oh, darling don't be so silly I'd suffer anything for you. That's love. It's the strength of love. Night-night.
Charles: Night darling. Sounds if you're dragging an enormous piece of string behind you, with hundreds of tin pots and cans attached to it. Night-night, before the battery goes. (Blows kiss) Night.
Camilla: Love you.
Charles: Don't want to say goodbye.
Camilla: Neither do I, but you must get some sleep, Bye.
Charles: Bye, darling.
Camilla: Love you.
Charles: Bye.
Camilla: Hopefully talk to you in the morning.
Charles: Please!
Camilla: Bye, I do love you.
Charles: Night.
Camilla: Night.
Charles: Night.
Camilla: Love you, forever.
Charles: Night.
Camilla: G'bye. Bye, my darling.
Charles: Night.
Camilla: Night-night.
Charles: Night.
Camilla: Bye-bye.
Charles: Going.
Camilla: Gone.
Charles: Going.
Camilla: Gone.
Charles: Night.
Camilla: Bye, Press the button.
Charles: Going to press the tit.
Camilla: All right darling; God—I wish you were pressing mine.
Charles: God, I wish I was! Harder and harder!
Camilla: Oh, darling!
Charles: Night.
Camilla: Night.
Charles: Love you.
Camilla: (Yawning) Love you. Press the tit.
Camilla: Night.
Charles: Night.
Camilla: (Blows a kiss.)
Charles: Night.
Camilla: G'night my darling, Love you.

The phone call is finally ended.
Guardian Readers’ Valentine’s Day text messages

Monday February 14, 2005

to wonderwoman from dadblog thx for sharing yr teasmade with me! Love u more than ever xxx

squiggle monkey bum bum from bingle bongle party squidge squodge (er...your husband)

socks reunited! love you always - from your dirty angel xxx

to my amazing husband, on our 1st married Valentine’s day! U make me happier than ever b4 and i love u so much. From yr snow puma xx

to my pink blancmange, am just a spoon away.. Your viking.x

HOT STUFF, KEEPING THOSE COLD-TOOTSIES WARM FOR YO. LERV, BOYSEY.

Cring-la oh Cring-la where are you taking me? So suscited! Swans x x x

(All my pinecones).

cris cole thanks 4 10 great years love always giniaxxxxxxxx

There s no better pillow on which2fall asleep while Im watchingJazzBritannia or the PowerpuffGirls.Yours4ever.

TO THE FINEST BIRD IN THE LAND - FOREVER BE MINE. THE MOO FATHER

: Dearest Melteser - you fill up my senses, come fill me again!! Love, hugs, kisses, misses, your FoXXXy Yam-Yam

Jules, finally this SOCK has found its missing pair. Please, don't get lost in the wash now! xxxx

My gorgeous little gecko. I love your cute zombie face, your poorly pancreas, your obsessions and compulsions. I adore you. I always will. X

LUSM.CW2BWU4E.KIR - Squirel

. Irene H. Heres to a few more years of pointless arguements! Thanks for always being there. Love, Rob. X

Ginny Perkins I love you & always will xxx sean

Wintersolsticebaby: this love is for all time. R x.

To Clare - keep taking the tablets, Angel Egg (oh, go on, you know you want it ;-) ). N xxx
dear lambie i love you and your air guitar tennis racket with all my heart, your littool jigsaw girl.xx
Representations of telephone interaction

Read a copy of the poem ‘Telephone Conversation’ by Wole Soyinka, published in 1962. This has been frequently anthologised, or is easily found by using a search engine. It represents a telephone conversation between a West African man who is looking to rent a room in Britain, and a landlady.

1. Read the poem carefully.

2. Reconstruct a “transcript” of the telephone conversation from the evidence in the poem. Make it as realistic to natural speech as you can.

3. How does the poem compare with your reconstruction?

4. What does the poet achieve by conforming to or departing from the conventions of real telephone conversations?

5. What issues does the poem raise about the relationship between language and technology?

As part of your wider reading and investigation during this unit, you should try to find as many examples as you can of representations of telephone conversations or texting interactions. These can be in ‘real’ contexts, such as text messaging in advertising material, and in fictional contexts, such as telephone conversations in novels. See how many different types you can find.
Research into language and telephone technology

Read the article “Texting ‘is no bar to literacy’” on the Guardian’s website, at http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/story/0,5500,1378951,00.html. This discusses a piece of research into the effect of texting on children’s literacy.

Read the article carefully and consider the following points:

1. Who did the research and how much credibility s/he has.
2. What the aim of this research was.
3. What research method was used.
4. How many participants took part in the research.
5. What specific aspects of language use were analysed?
6. What were the key findings of the research?
7. What conclusion did the researcher(s) come to?
8. What do each of the other experts/authorities cited in the article think of the findings/conclusion?
9. What do you think of the research method/findings/conclusion?
10. How do you think parents, teachers, and young people might react to this conclusion?

As part of your wider reading and investigation during this unit, you should try to find some interesting research studies into language and telephone use (conversation and text messaging). You should also explore popular attitudes to language use and this type of technology. To do this, you could start by using the “search the site” function on the Language Legend website http://languagelegend.blogspot.com. You could also look for relevant articles in daily newspapers. Try to collect a variety of different viewpoints and opinions.