Contemporary language change

**Examples**

**GAY**

**Process** = semantic change - pejoration and broadening

**Connotations and attitudes** = recent additions to meaning might be considered offensive

**Reasons** = reflection of disapproval / changing attitudes towards homosexuality

**Denotations** = Happy, bright or lively (adj); sexually licentious (adj); homosexual (n); rubbish (slang adj)

**Examples**

**WIGGER**

**Process** = Neologism or coinage. Blending of 'white' + 'nigger'

**Connotations** = white person 'acting black'; some people find offensive and borderline racist - others might laugh

**Reasons** = influence of Black English and hip-hop culture on white youth culture

**Denotation** = 'white nigger' (n)

**Examples**

**TO TEXT**

**Process** = conversion of noun (a text) to verb (to text)

**Attitudes** = mostly neutral, but prescriptivists might object to the past tense not having an -ed ending, e.g. 'I text you yesterday'

**Denotation** = to send a text message using a mobile phone (v)

**Examples**

**FAGGOT**

**Process** = semantic change - pejoration and borrowing

**Connotations and attitudes** = many people object to it as a derogatory term; political correctness would argue it's offensive and demeaning

**Reasons** = influence of American English on British English (slang imports) and culture. May be adoption of archaic, abusive term for women (such words are often applied to gay men, e.g. bitch)

**Denotation** = meatballs (n); bundle of sticks or iron rods (n); an archaic term of abuse for a woman (n); gay man (American slang n)

**Other types of lexical and semantic change**

- Many words have been **borrowed** from other languages (although maybe not as frequently as in the past):
  - Recent imports include: sudoku, burkha, halal, sushi.
- **Affixation** also occurs, in which prefixes and suffixes have been added to existing root words to create new words
  - Recent examples include: ghettoisation, studentification, intertextuality, homophobia.
Media – influence of TV, film and internet on language and speed of change

Contextual factors to lexical and semantic change

- Technological, social and cultural change – new technologies, ideas, processes and things require new words
- Immigration and social impact of multicultural society on language
- Social change - new words for new lifestyles and attitudes
- Influence of youth culture, American culture, subcultures and communities of practice
- Media – influence of TV, film and internet on language and speed of change

Why does language change?

- Language has been changing throughout history (think of examples)
- Language is not static; it changes to reflect our changing lives
- Language is a tool that we use to suit us - as the world changes our language evolves
- Language is used by billions of people; it evolves organically
- Language can be influenced by government and authority, but does it work? Linguistic engineering, political correctness etc.
- Language is deeply connected to our own individual and group identities.

Exam approaches

In the exam, you might encounter similar examples of contemporary lexical and semantic change. You need to explain:

- how = processes
- why = reasons
- denotation = what the word means
- connotations and attitudes = context

Every answer needs examples, some sense of context and a line of argument.