A level Language: Summer Transition Task

Dear new A level Language students,

We are very much looking forward to meeting you and are looking forward to helping you get started with your journey to becoming Linguists. We're creating a weekly task bank that will introduce you to a range of topics from the course; we hope you'll submit these in September as the completion of the tasks will provide you with a basis for the introductory work we'll be doing.

General Reading before starting the course:

The great David Crystal is really the oracle when it comes to English language and
David Crystal, The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of the English Language
David Crystal, Rediscover Grammar

are both great resources for new A level Language students. You can access previews of these digitally on 'Google Books' and these are often readily available second hand on Amazon

The following are great reads or additional reference books

- Bill Bryson, Mother Tongue
- David Crystal, A Little Book of Language/ How Language Works
- Jean Aitchison, The Language Web
- **AS and A2 Revision Expression Study Guide – Pearson**

'X' follows before starting the course:

Start following these sites to keep up to date with the latest debates in English Language.

@haggardhawks - etymology of interesting and long dead words
@EngLangBlog – fantastic resource, loads of great articles

Lexis Podcast

Linguistics is something that always sparks a great debate. The following podcast produces regular episodes with named linguists and guests about a range of topical issues. This is well worth a follow and is available on Spotify.

Lexis: A podcast about language and linguistics for A Level English Language students, teachers and anyone else who's interested in language.

Week 1: An introduction to identity and society

One of the most important concepts to get your head around for A level Englis Language is that language and language use is a fluid, ever-changing entity. It's also useful to understand that the language we use impacts our identity and the way we communicate in society. We all contribute to this body of language with our own, mostly, unique way of speaking ourselves (Idiolect). Make a **language profile** of yourself by writing a short response to the following questions:

1. What's your earliest language memory? Can you remember a nursery rhyme, song or picture book from when you were very little?
2. Have your family or extended family kept any records – video, audio, family memories – of any of your earliest words?
3. Have you kept any old school books from when you were learning to read and write? Has your writing style changed?
4. Where were you born and where in the UK, or the wider world, are your family from? Go back a few generations if you like and think about any other languages that your family members might speak, or other places your family members might have lived.
5. Are there any words or expressions only you or your family use, which others don't really understand?
6. Do you or your friends at school use language in any ways that you notice as being different from other people around you? These could be other people in your year, your teachers, your family, whoever.
7. Do you listen to or watch anyone on TV, online or in films or music videos who uses language in a way that interests or annoys you?
8. Do you ever look at or hear someone else using language in a way that you find is totally new or strange to you?
9. Have your teachers or family ever talked to you about the way you speak?

Week 2: An introduction to Language Investigation

One aspect of our course is to investigate an area of the course based on the exam board recommendation, to learn about the history of this topic area, and analyse how it works in the real world. An Investigation topic a few years ago was: **Fake News**

In preparation for the investigation unit, we'd like you to do the following things:

1. Read the article below, and summarise:
   a) *What is fake news?*
   b) *How has it changed?*
   c) *What's its influence in the modern news world?*

A brief history of fake news

In 2017, 'fake news' became Collins Dictionary's word of the year and it's remained in the headlines ever since. Although the phrase might appear to be a modern invention, examples of it can be found throughout history.

From ancient Rome up to the present day, stories that are not true or are meant to be misleading have been used to make money, change people's views and opinions and make us question who we can trust.

Now, with the explosion of the internet and social media, it seems to be everywhere and travels faster than at any other point in history.

Ancient history

Around 2000 years ago, the Roman Republic was facing a civil war between Octavian, the adopted son of the great general Julius Caesar, and Mark Anthony, one of Caesar's most trusted commanders.

To win the war, Octavian knew he had to have the public on his side – winning important battles helped, but if the people didn't like him, he would not be a successful ruler.

To get public backing, Octavian launched a 'fake news' war against Mark Anthony. He claimed Anthony, who was having an affair with Cleopatra, the Egyptian Queen, didn't respect traditional Roman values like faithfulness and respect. Octavian also said he was unfit to hold office because he was always drunk.

A statue of Augustus Caesar. Octavian rebranded himself as Augustus when he became the first Emperor of Rome.

Octavian got his message to the public through poetry and short, snappy slogans printed on to coins. It was a bit like an ancient version of a politician today releasing a book or sending out a social media post. Octavian eventually won the war and became the first Emperor of Rome, ruling for over 40 years.

18th century

After the invention of the printing press in the 15th century, news (both real and fake) was able to spread faster than ever before. This technology meant books and other documents could be produced much quicker than any handwriting.

In the mid-1700s, the printing press helped to spread fake news about George II, who was the King of Great Britain and Ireland at the time. The King was facing a rebellion, and relied on being seen as a strong leader to make sure the rebellion didn't succeed.

Fake news about the King being ill was printed from sources on the side of the rebels. It didn't take long before these stories were seen by other printers who then republished them. This harmed the King's public image, and although the rebellion wasn't successful, showed how fake news can be used to try and change people's opinions.

The same thing happens today when a fake story is published on purpose to harm someone else. Unfortunately, if it isn't fact-checked and gets shared by people or organisations thinking it is true, some of whom might have large followings, it starts to be taken seriously and the more it is shared the quicker it spreads… unchecked.

Creatures on the Moon

By the 19th century, newspapers were an easy and cheap way of getting news out to the public. In America, printing became so cheap that some papers could be bought for just a penny.

One of these papers, The New York Sun, published a series of articles in 1835 about life on the Moon. They described how there were fantastic animals such as unicorns, two-legged beavers and even flying bat-men!

Ian Hislop investigates the truth behind the Great Moon Hoax. From 'Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True History' (BBC Four)

They wrongly claimed the discoveries were made by a well-known astronomer at the time, which helped people to believe the story was true.

These made-up stories were very popular, and sales of the paper shot up as readers all wanted to find out about this amazing 'discovery'.

The writer of the articles knew the story wasn't true and had meant for this to be *satire*. This is when a writer uses humour and exaggeration to make fun of silly ideas, in this case that there were creatures living on the Moon.

It still happens today a lot on social media. Sometimes comedy and *satirical* accounts will publish a made-up story supposed to make us laugh, and people share it thinking it's true. This is another form of fake news.

Fake news and war

Propaganda has been used in wars throughout history to try and change people's views. This is a type of fake news where false information is used for political gain. It can help change public opinion by persuading people that their country should go to war, or convince them the other side is their enemy.

In 1898, a United States Navy ship called USS Maine sank in Cuba. Some of the newspapers at the time blamed the Spanish for the sinking, and used artist's illustrations of a dramatic explosion to convince readers that this was true. However, there was no real evidence of this being a fact.

Americans now saw the Spanish as the enemy. A few years later the Spanish-American war broke out. The false reports had worked.

The story of how a fake news headline led to war. From 'Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True History' (BBC Four)

Closer to home, in 1917 during the First World War, British newspapers such as the Times and the Daily Mail ran a gruesome story claiming that the Germans were extracting fat from the bodies of dead soldiers on both sides of the war to make soap and margarine.

The story came from an official British government department and was spread to the press. The officials knew that this story wasn't true, but it helped persuade readers that the Germans were a barbaric enemy and convinced many that they had to be defeated.

Fake news now

In recent years, there has been an explosion of fake news as false stories are shared widely on social media without being fact-checked. Cheap and portable access to the internet across the globe means stories can spread in a matter of seconds and minutes rather than days or weeks. Many of these stories are completely made up and can make money from advertising - the more clicks a website gets, the more money it makes.

This often leads to *clickbait*, eye-catching but misleading headlines, designed to get people to click on links. Its purpose can be to generate clicks and advertisement money, but it can also be used to influence public opinion with headlines that appeal to our beliefs. This happened a lot during the 2016 US presidential election, where fake news about the candidates spread and could have influenced the public on how they voted.

As fake news became more widespread, the term itself began to change. Politicians began to use the phrase to attack news organisations they disagreed with, accusing them of being the ones who spread fake news. By calling real news 'fake news', it allowed real 'fake news' to get more attention as people didn't know who to trust – very confusing!

Find out how the term 'fake news' has changed over the years. From 'Ian Hislop's Fake News: A True History' (BBC Four)

The future of fakes

Over the years, the development of technology has helped fake news spread through inventions like the printing press, photography and social media.

Videos were usually a fairly reliable source of news, as they can't be faked as easily as a photograph or headline. However, the reliability of video sources is now under threat from *deepfakes*. These are videos that use computer software and machine learning to create a digital version of someone. Normally it's used to put the face of a celebrity or politician on to someone else's body.

As the technology improves, *deepfakes* will become more realistic and harder to notice, but many amateur *deepfakes* can be spotted by unusual flickering or blurring around the face, so keep an eye out for that if you're suspicious about a video you've seen.

Task 2 Fake News

The article below is an example of Fake News about the dangers of eating Reeses' Peanut Butter Cups – please complete the following tasks:

1) Annotate the article – what persuasive/ informative techniques do you notice?
2) What impact does it have on the audience? Does it create fear? Does it inform (misleadingly!)? How would a reader respond to this?
3) Write a short analytical piece based on the following question:

How does the example of Fake News misleadingly persuade its audience about the dangers of sweets?

3 REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD STOP EATING PEANUT BUTTER CUPS!

FAMILYFEATUREDFOODHEALTH & LONGEVITYRECIPESRESEARCHSAFETYSELF-HELP 27

If you're reading this, I'll assume you've had a Reese's peanut butter cup at least once in your lifetime. I mean, who hasn't? Not only are they available year round, they also come in fun shapes around the holidays. Do Reese's trees and Reese's eggs sound familiar? If you're a fan of the popular peanut butter cups, your mouth is probably salivating right about now. Unfortunately, a deeper look into Reese's ingredients might make you question that last minute purchase at the checkout line. As delicious as they are, Reese's peanut butter cups can be detrimental to your health.

A Little Background

Reese's peanut butter cups were invented in 1928 by Mr. Reese. He was a farmer and a shipping foreman for Milton S. Hershey. After inventing the sweet treat, Mr. Reese decided to quit the dairy farming business and start his own candy company in his basement. And the rest is history.

Reese's peanut butter cups come in many different shapes, sizes and varieties. Although the chocolate to peanut butter ratio seems like perfection, the other ingredients in the popular candy are cause for concern.

Ingredients In Reese's Peanut Butter Cups

Ingredients include: Milk chocolate, (milk, chocolate, sugar, cocoa butter, chocolate, no fat milk, milk fat, lactose, soy lecithin, PGPR), peanuts, sugar dextrose, salt, TBGQ and citric acid.

The most questionable ingredients are:

1. Soy Lecithin

Research has shown that as much as 93% of soy is genetically modified. Soy lecithin has been found to have **detrimental effects on fertility and reproduction**. It can cause behavioral and cerebral abnormalities. It has also been linked to breast cancer.

2. PGPR

PGPR is short for polyglycerol polyricinoleate. The manufacturer of this popular candy replaced cocoa butter with PGPR to lower the cost of production. **PGPR comes from castor beans** and it's used to reduce the viscosity of chocolate. It has been connected to gastrointestinal problems and allergic reactions in children.

3. TBHQ

TBHQ stands for tertiary butylhdroquinone. It's derived from petroleum and can be extremely toxic. **Side effects of ingesting TBHQ** include nausea, vomiting, ringing in the ears, delirium and collapse. Research has shown that TBHQ can damage the lungs and umbilical cells in humans. It can also cause stomach cancer. Children who are exposed to this chemical may show anxiety, restlessness and intensified ADHD symptoms.

Make Your Own Organic Peanut Butter Cups

There's no debating the delicious taste of Reese's peanut butter cups. But do you really want to risk the potential health effects by eating them, or feeding them to your children? If peanut butter cups happen to be one of your favorite treats, there are safer ways eat them without putting your health at risk! Look for **organic peanut butter cups** at health food stores, or **make your own!** Here's how:

Ingredients

- 12 muffin tin liners
- 12 ounces of organic dark chocolate
- 1 cup of organic peanut butter
- 1/4 cup of raw honey
- 1/4 teaspoon of organic salt

Directions

1. Make the muffin cups more shallow by trimming them.
2. Using a small saucepan, melt the chocolate on low heat while stirring continually. Leave it on for 1-2 minutes and be careful not to overcook.
3. Using a teaspoon, put chocolate portions into the muffin cups.
4. Place the whole muffin tin into the fridge to solidify.
5. In a medium bowl, mix the organic peanut butter, raw honey and salt.
6. Once the chocolate in the fridge has hardened, heat the peanut butter in a small saucepan over low heat to soften it.
7. Put a small portion of peanut butter into each of the chocolate-coated cups leaving some room at the top for another layer of chocolate.
8. Store the cups in the fridge for 10 minutes, then spread and flatten the peanut butter.
9. Put the cups back in the fridge for 1 hour or until the peanut butter hardens.
10. When the peanut butter is ready, rewarm the remaining chocolate and add a layer to the top of each candy.
11. Cool it once again in your fridge until the chocolate hardens.
12. Enjoy!

Watch the video to learn how to make a vegan-friendly version!

Taken from: 3 Reasons Why You Should Stop Eating Peanut Butter Cups! - David Avocado Wolfe (davidwolfe.com)

Week 3: An Introduction to Child Language Acquisition

When we look at Child Language Acquisition, we consider how a child learns to speak, how they are influenced by the world around them and how linguists explain their development through the use of theory. We'll also consider wider debates around the nature of language acquisition. So in preparation, we'd like you to read the article and be ready with opinions on this topic by completing the tasks below:

Poor children a year behind in language skills

Reading to children and taking them to libraries can limit effects of disadvantage, Sutton Trust study shows

Warwick Mansell, guardian.co.uk, Monday 15 February 2010

The vocabulary of children from the poorest backgrounds lags more than a year behind that of their classmates from richer homes by the time they start school, a major new study showed today.

The Sutton Trust, the charity which sponsored the research, said the divide was a "tragic indictment of modern society", showing how educational inequality starts young and leaves children from the most disadvantaged homes struggling to keep up throughout their school years.

The poorest children face multiple challenges, being less likely to be born to well-educated parents, have a regular bedtime or live with both their biological father and mother, the study found. However, it also concluded that "good parenting can triumph", with families able to limit the effects of poverty by, for example, reading to their children daily.

Researchers from Bristol and Columbia universities analysed the performance of a representative sample of 12,644 British five-year-olds in a "naming vocabulary test" during 2006 and 2007. They then produced a "developmental age" score for each child, comparing their test results to the average achieved in the study.

The gap between rich and poor children, and even between middle-income and poor, was striking. Those from the poorest 20% of homes had an average developmental age of 53.6 months. The comparable figure for those from middle-income families was 11 months ahead. Children from families in the richest 20% were a further five months ahead. Income itself accounted for only around a third of the differences in test scores, with some 48% caused by differences in parenting; reading to a child every day was found to improve performance, while regular library visits improved performance by 2.5 months. But only 45% of children from the poorest fifth of families were read to daily at the age of three, the study found, compared to 78% among the richest fifth.

More than a third of children from the poorest fifth of families were born to parents without a single GCSE A-C grade, while four in five of the richest families had at least one parent educated to degree level.

Now,

i) annotate the article's **key features** - what MAKES it a non-fiction news article?

ii) Summarise the **arguments** that are being made about children's literacy

iii) Using this as a **style model**, write your **own article** about your view on the way literacy is taught in schools.

Week 4: An Introduction to Language Change

Language Change is a key topic area in English Language. English itself is interesting as it is made up from words that have been adopted from other world languages. It is also so ancient, you might be using words that are hundreds of years old alongside words that are just a few weeks old. Have a look at these ***redefined*** words and complete the activity.

Word	**Definition**	**Heard/seen this word being used?**	**Used it myself?**	**How has this word changed over-time?**
Savage	An insult given about something that is deemed to be socially embarrassing.			
Shadowbanned	Being banned from a social media platform, in a way that your content is invisible to everyone			
Influencer	An influencer is a person who is regarded as an expert within their field that also has a steady following.			
Blended learning	a way of learning that combines traditional classroom lessons with lessons that use computer technology and may be given over the internet			
Capping	In modern-day usage, "cap" is often used as a verb or an adjective to describe something as fake or dishonest.			
Brain rot (Word of the year 2024!)	The term is used to describe a deterioration in someone's focus and is used to capture concerns about the impact of consuming excessive amounts of low-quality online content, especially on social media. However, it was first used in 1854 by Henry Thoreau in *Waldon!*			

Once you have finished, pick two words that you think are pointless or unnecessary. Write a sentence or two about what you think the problem is with these words and why you think they should disappear!

When you have done this, make a list of other new words you have heard of and pick two that you think will have the staying power to still be used in 20 years' time! Be ready to share in class.

Finally, prepare any questions you might have about the subject before we start in September. See you then!