

Language change

[Linguistics](#), [Language](#)



English Language Section B Language Change - Practise Essay 4. Texts I and J both provide advice about dancing etiquette. Text I is from *How To Dance. A Complete Ball-Room and Party Guide*, published 1878. Text J is from an article, 'Dancing to Romance', from *The Boyfriend Book*, a girls' annual published in 1965. Referring to both texts in detail, and to relevant ideas from language study, discuss how language has changed over time.

Language is a fluid and flexible phenomenon which experiences vast change on a regular basis.

Theorists such as David Crystal have taken an open-minded approach to such change, explaining that "there is no predictable direction for the changes that are taking place. They are just that: changes. Not changes for the better; nor changes for the worse; just changes, sometimes going one way, sometimes another." This statement articulates the prescriptivist view that language is an organic part of life which evolves and grows to suit the needs of its contextual time, just as living organisms do.

Texts I and J show a distinct journey of change in the English lexicon between 1878 and 1965, ranging from graphological features through to the individual lexical choices and even the ways in which the audience of each of the texts is addressed. In exploring these texts, conclusions will be drawn as to the extent of the change that language has undergone, and what the causes, and indeed the impacts of these changes may have been. One of the most notable differences between these texts is their graphological presentation.

Text I is composed in an expressly simple way, using a serif typeface which was likely to have been produced on a printing press, given that the text

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itself appears to have jagged edges, implying that ink had been applied to a block or stamp in order to produce the text - something uncommon to contemporary means of printing. It is also interesting to note the complete lack of images, and the justified alignment of the text throughout. The text is not split up at all, other than into paragraphs and here is no use of italics or bold text at any point in the text. Text J, conversely, uses a graphologically complex structure, with an image to text ratio of around 1: 1. Three blocks of text are accompanied by three images of men and women together, two of which display a dance scene and the last of which displays the onset of intimacy - the desired goal of the text which was written as an instructional piece, seemingly aimed at the female gender.

The images supplied are directly photograph, rather than illustrations, representing the development of technology and the availability of photography cameras and digital arrangement of photographs and text to create such a publication. Text J also makes use of italicisation in order to emphasise the lexical items “ those” and “ your. ” The use of the lexical item “ those” here is a deictic expression, implying a shared pragmatic and contextual knowledge between the producer and the reader of the text.

This is echoed throughout the text, where an informal and friendly tone is adopted throughout. This is confirmed by the consistent application of elision, forming contractions of lexis such as “ do not” to become “ don’t”, showing the adoption of a primarily informal register. The method of address can be considered in terms of Norman Fairclough’s theory of synthetic personalisation, where first person pronouns are used to directly address the

reader and indicate a kind of relationship between the writer and reader, where some shared understanding and common-ground can be found.

This personalised and informal approach to writing is another area of particular development from the older text. Text I, in stark contrast to text J, adopts a formal register throughout, using Latinate lexis to imply an ascendant status to the reader. This is connected to gender theories, where men are often considered to be more direct, and to write with a stronger tone of authority. Some of the lexical choices made in this text show the lexical development of language specifically, as archaic Latinate terms like “effrontery” are found throughout the text.

This is indicative of the broadly formal approach to this text, in opposition to the relaxed, informal approach within text J. Text I appears to adhere to the rules of the oppositional table in regard to written and spoken discourse, where a predominantly objective approach is taken, other than a single reference with the pronoun “your” is made to the reader. Other than this instance, the text remains entirely objective, referring in the third person to entities for the purpose of explanation. Text J, on the other hand, uses the interpersonal approach which is more common to spoken discourse to address its audience.

In terms of the oppositional table, a further consideration can be made as to which side these texts sit more appropriately. This observation is made specifically in regard to the grammatical complexity of the texts, for which text I is more advanced. The use of more advanced punctuation such as the regular application of the semi-colon is exclusive to text I, where the aim is to extend the length of sentences in many places. The semi-colon is

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accompanied by regular use of commas, where sentences often run to such lengths that they dominate entire paragraphs.

This shows the direct intention of the producer to create an undoubtedly written piece of text which was designed to be a basis of authority on a subject of which the producer holds superior knowledge to the reader. When examining text J for the same reasons, the opposing side of the table can be identified, where a grammatically simple text uses exclamatory sentences to deliver impact, and keep a short and chatty tone to convey the points at hand. Text J also uses some unusual starters to sentences, even using conjunctions to begin not only sentences, but paragraphs too.

The purpose of these texts display an underlying social and contextual development over the time between the production of each of the texts, where an audience shift from the male to the female appears to take place, showing growing levels of egalitarianism among genders. The growth of significance of the female gender in the establishment of relationships has caused the male tone to be muted somewhat, opting for a more gender-neutral tone, even in a text which was principally written for the female gender, given its contextual location of appearance.

While a focus on politeness in the content of the texts remains the same, the way in which this message is conveyed has undergone vast and wide-ranging development. A growth in the status of women through social and political development has given the female gender a more equal position in the audience position of writing such as this. Further to the contextual factors, the means of production of text has also undergone vast development with the advent of digital technology, increasing the ease of

production of such texts, and expanding on the flexibility of presentational and graphological features.