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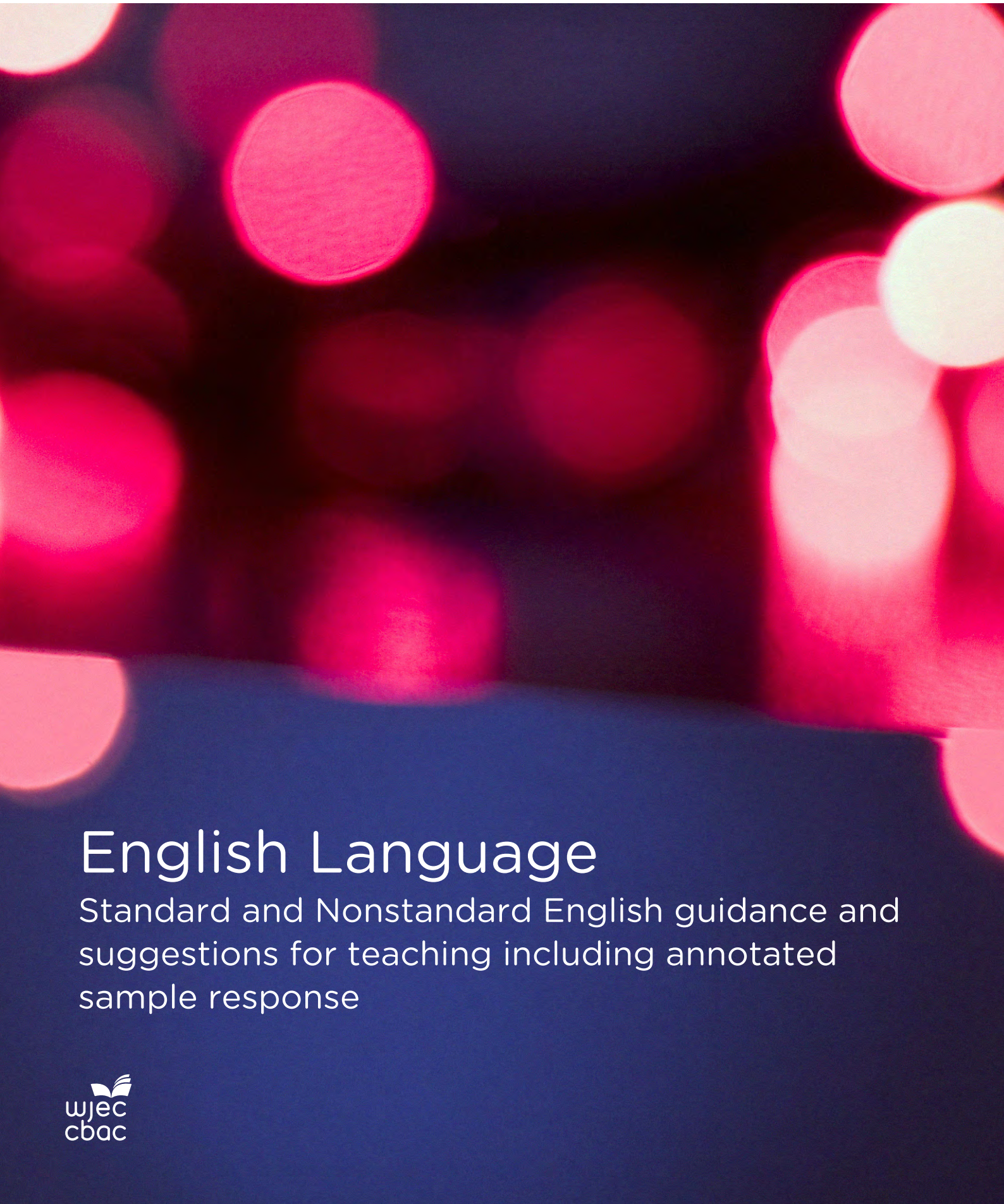

English Language

Standard and Nonstandard English guidance and suggestions for teaching including annotated sample response

wjec
cbac

Standard and Nonstandard English

The following extracts discuss the concepts of standard and nonstandard English.

Read through each one and identify:

- any facts that are presented
- the point of view
- the contextual factors (e.g. the date of the text, the writer, the intended audience, the purpose).

Make a list of the points raised about Standard English and nonstandard English. You could use a table to categorise the information.

Discuss the opinions put forward and decide what you think about the issues raised.

Standard and Nonstandard English

TEXT 1

This is an extract from a chapter called ‘Standard English: what it isn’t’ written by Peter Trudgill in *Standard English: The Widening Debate*, edited by Tony Bex and Richard J. Watts (Routledge, 1999). It is also available on the University College London website (http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/dick/SEtrudgill.htm). The writer is a well-known sociolinguist.

> Standard English is often referred to as "the standard language". It is clear, however, that Standard English is not "a language" in any meaningful sense of this term. Standard English, whatever it is, is less than a language, since it is only one variety of English among many. Standard English may be the most important variety of English, in all sorts of ways: it is the variety of English normally used in writing, especially printing; it is the variety associated with the education system in all the English-speaking countries of the world, and is therefore the variety spoken by those who are often referred to as "educated people"; and it is the variety taught to non-native learners. But most native speakers of English in the world are native speakers of some nonstandard variety of the language …

TEXT 2

This is an extract from an article entitled “It’s time to challenge the notion that there is only one way to speak English” posted on the *Guardian* website by Harry Ritchie (http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/dec/31/one-way-speak-english-standard-spoken-british-linguistics-chomsky). Ritchie is a journalist and author of *English for the Natives: Discover the Grammar You Don't Know You Know* (John Murray, 2013).

> Non-standard English is linguistically the equal of the standard version – in fact, dialects tend to be more sophisticated grammatically than standard (as in the plural "youse" of many non-standard dialects where standard has just one confusing form). Yet standard continues – even now – to be prized as the "correct" form, and any deviation is considered to be wrong, lazy, corrupt or ignorant.

TEXT 3

This is an extract taken from the Preface of *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762) by Robert Lowth. The writer was a bishop and his book on English grammar was very influential.

The principal design of a grammar of any language is to teach us to express ourselves with propriety in that language; and to enable us to judge of every phrase and form of construction, whether it be right or not. The plain way of doing this is, to lay down rules, and to illustrate them by examples. But, besides shewing what is right, the matter may be further explained by pointing out what is wrong.

TEXT 4

This is an extract from a letter sent home to parents by a primary school (2013).

If you hear your child saying the following phrases or words in the left hand column please correct them using the phrase or word in the right hand column. I'm sure if we tackle this problem together we will make progress.

INCORRECT	CORRECT
I **done** that.	This should be, I **have done** that or I **did** that.
I **seen** that.	This should be, I **have seen** that or I **saw** that.
Yous	The word is NEVER plural e.g. we should say, '**You** lot come here!'
Dropping the '**th**'	"School finishes at **free** fifteen," should be, "School finishes at **three** fifteen."
Gizit ere.	Please **give** it to me.
I **dunno**.	This should be, I **don't know**.
It's **nowt**.	This should be, **it's nothing**.
Letta, **butta** etc.	**Letter**, **butter** etc.
Your	"Your late" should be "**You're** late" (You're is the shortened version of you are).
Werk, **shert** etc.	I will wear my **shirt** for **work**.
He **was sat** there.	He was **sitting** there.

TEXT 5

This is an extract from the introduction to *Introduction to English Language* by N.F. Blake and Jean Moorhead (Palgrave Macmillan, 1993). The writers are both linguists – Blake is a Professor of English Language and Linguistics, and Moorhead teaches and examines A level courses.

Because of the position of Standard English it is often taken subconsciously as a norm in discussions of language acquisition, change and varieties. Thus discussions of past forms of English are based on a comparison between that form and modern Standard English. Similarly, in discussions of language acquisition, it may be assumed that a child is moving towards the acquisition of the elements of Standard English rather than of another variety. Discussions of language varieties will frequently involve comparisons between a given variety and Standard English.

TEXT 6

The following extract is taken from an editorial in the London *Evening Standard* (1988) written by John Rae, former head of Westminster School and a commentator on education. He is commenting on proposed reforms to the way English is taught in schools.

It is argued that the accurate and grammatical use of English is no better than what the report calls “non-standard forms of English”. So that, if a child uses phrases such as “we was”, “he ain’t done it”, “they never saw nobody”, there is nothing “inherently wrong”. Standard English turns those phrases into: “we were”, “he has not done it”, “they never saw anybody”, but standard English, the report tells us, is just a dialect like any other. It should not be mistaken for correct English.

You could have fooled me. I thought it was correct to write “we were” and incorrect to write ”we was”. I did not realise it was just a question of dialect; I thought it was a question of grammar or, if you do not like that word, of logic. You cannot use a singular form of the verb with a plural pronoun.

The idea that children can be persuaded to learn standard English when they are told at the same time that it is no better than any other type of English is a typical intellectual conceit. Children want to know what is right and what is wrong.

TEXT 7

This is an extract from *The Vulgarisms and Improprieties of the English Language* (1833) by W.H. Savage. It was an etiquette book telling readers how to avoid 'bad' grammar and pronunciation.

> Let every young man strive to indue himself with correct language : the first step to which is to discard all mean and vulgar expressions : destitute of this important advantage, however otherwise well informed, he will put his auditors to suffering : he will resemble a creaking wheel which although very useful, is also very tormenting.

TEXT 8

This is an extract from the opening chapter of *May I Quote You on That?: A Guide to Grammar and Usage* (OUP, Sept 2015) written by Stephen Spector, an American Professor of English.

> Using non-standard forms isn't lazy, immoral, or inherently wrong. Most of us do it in informal contexts. And non-standard language can be rich, creative, and eloquent. Does that mean that it's okay to say a sentence like "I ain't hungry"? Well, I'm a stuffy English professor and I wouldn't say that, of course. But many linguists will tell you that it's not wrong if the people you're talking with say it in casual conversation. It's a question of context—and, strangely enough, of history.

TEXT 9

This is an extract from a letter sent home to parents by a primary school (2013).

> We want children in our school to have the best start possible: understanding when it is and is not acceptable to use slang or colloquial language. We value the local dialect, but are encouraging children to learn the skill of turning it on and off in different situations. Using the right language for the right context—Formal English in the classroom and slang in the school playground.

TEXT 10

The following extract is taken from a *Mail Online* newspaper article written in 2012 with the headline “School bans slang! Pupils ordered to use the Queen’s English in the classroom ‘to help children get jobs’” (http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2101097/Sheffields-Springs-Academy-bans-slang-Pupils-ordered-use-Queens-English.html). The quoted words below were spoken by the deputy chief executive of the educational trust which runs the school.

'We want to make sure that our youngsters are not just leaving school with the necessary A to Cs in GCSEs but that they also have a whole range of employability skills. We know through the close relationships we have with business partners and commercial partners that when they are doing interviews with youngsters, not only are they looking at the qualifications, they are also looking at how they conduct themselves. What we want to make sure of is that they are confident in using standard English. Slang doesn't really give the right impression of the person. Youngsters going to interviews for their first job need to make a good impression so that employers have confidence in them. It's not difficult to get youngsters out of the habit of using slang … When youngsters are talking together they use text speak and that's absolutely fine, that's what you do in a social context, but when you are getting prepared for life and going for interviews you need to be confident in using standard English.’

TEXT 11

This is an extract from *An Essay upon Projects* (1697) in which the novelist Daniel Defoe proposes the creation of an academy to “refine and correct language”.

The work of this society should be to encourage polite learning, to polish and refine the English tongue, and advance the so much neglected faculty of correct language, to establish purity and propriety of style, and to purge it from all the irregular additions that ignorance and affectation have introduced; and all those innovations in speech, if I may call them such, which some dogmatic writers have the confidence to foster upon their native language, as if their authority were sufficient to make their own fancy legitimate.

By such a society I daresay the true glory of our English style would appear; and among all the learned part of the world be esteemed, as it really is, the noblest and most comprehensive of all the vulgar languages in the world.

Read the following sample sentences. Do any of the sentences seem linguistically unacceptable to you?

a. Underline any examples of language use you find unacceptable.
b. Try to explain the reason for your decisions.
c. Describe the nonstandard language features you have underlined using your knowledge of the language levels.
d. Re-write any sentences you picked out using Standard English.

1. Julie got off of the bus in town.
2. I ordered some shoes online and they came really quick.
3. The committee has raised an ask about the ongoing system of micromanagement in the office.
4. It wasn't Jack who done it.
5. She got the ticket off her friend and paid four pound for it.
6. The next station stop will be London Paddington.
7. The teacher showed the class.
8. I seen the film last week with Katie.
9. My driving test was much more harder this time so I failed again.
10. He ain't coming over here again.
11. Give it to Mark and I because we don't mind finishing it.
12. They took selfies with all the politicians when they came for the election.
13. Mary's gotten a certificate for helping in the community centre.
14. You and me, yeah, could go down the shops later, innit.
15. Professionals then went on to emphatically insist that standards have fallen.
16. If somebody believes in you, then they will boost your self-esteem.
17. I've left a real mess in my room, but they can't do nothing about it.
18. What are you looking for?
19. I've got to get back by like six tonight.
20. When it comes to athletics, we're frenemies I suppose—unless we both medal.

Define contexts in which the sentences would be appropriate, and contexts in which they may be inappropriate. What influenced your response to the sentences?

Using the extracts on standard and nonstandard English and the sample sentences above, analyse and evaluate the situations in which speakers and writers may be judged for their use of standard or nonstandard English.

In your answer, you should consider: the tenor and function of an interaction; the relationship between participants; lexical and grammatical choices; the contextual factors.

Some notes on the grammatical features of the sample sentences.

1. Use of two prepositions (*off of*) – the second preposition can be seen as superfluous since 'of' is implied within the meaning of 'off'. Associated with informal language use, particularly in AmerEng. (cf.' out of').
2. Use of an adverb (*quick*) without the *–ly* suffix. Associated with informal usage (colloquial SE). In many dialects, the adjectival and adverb forms are not distinct.
3. Use of the verb *ask* as a noun. Typical means of creating new words. OED lists examples of 'ask' as a noun from 1000 to 1886; Wiktionary records more up-to-date usage from 2005 and 2008. Jargon - typical of business speak.
4. Use of the past participle form (*done*) instead of the past tense ('did'). Typical of dialects which tend to reduce the number of forms for irregular verbs (levelling) i.e. bringing irregular verbs into line with regular verbs so that the past tense and past participle have the same form.
5. In formal SE, the preposition 'from' is used when something is transferred from one person to another – the use of *off* is nonstandard, typical of informal spoken English. Noun (*pound*) unmarked for plurality when preceded by a cardinal determiner.
6. An example of 'railspeak' – some critics see the noun phrase *station stop* as tautological i.e. 'the next station' or 'the next stop' (though trains do not stop at all stations). The modifier could be seen as redundant since trains have to stop at stations.
7. The verb 'show' is usually transitive i.e. it takes an object (e.g. the teacher showed the class the map).
8. Use of the past participle form (*seen*) instead of the past tense ('saw'). Typical of dialects which tend to reduce the number of forms for irregular verbs (levelling) i.e. bringing irregular verbs into line with regular verbs so that the past tense and past participle have the same form.
9. The comparative inflection *-er* (used for mono/disyllabic adjectives like *hard*) is used in addition to the adverb *more* (used with polysyllabic adjectives e.g. 'more intelligent'). Common in many nonstandard dialects.
10. A common feature of negation for the present tense of 'be' in some dialects and sociolects i.e. aren't, isn't, am not. Also used for 'have' i.e. hasn't/haven't
11. The object pronoun 'me' should be used following the verb in the object site. In colloquial informal speech, 'I' is frequently used when the pronoun is in a coordinate phrase with another noun. It is a kind of hypercorrection, which has led to the assumption that 'Mark and me' (the grammatically correct form) is less polite. It is easy to check which form is grammatically acceptable by removing the noun (i.e. *Give it to … me …*rather than *Give it to … I …*).
12. The noun *selfies* could be described as a neologism – though it is now accepted as part of the English lexicon and was added to the OED in 2014. It was named 'Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2013', http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/press-releases/oxford-dictionaries-word-of-the-year-2013/). When niche words become mainstream, they are added to dictionaries to reflect current usage. Language 'purists' often complain about the inclusion of such informal words.

13. The past participle *gotten* is common in AmerEng, but is considered nonstandard in British English (i.e. SE 'got') - although it was common pre-eighteenth century. In AmerEng, there is a semantic basis for the choice of 'gotten' (i.e. obtain) vs 'got' (i.e. possess) e.g. she's gotten a new dress for the party; she's got curly hair. In SE, the form should be avoided in formal contexts.
14. The subject pronoun 'I' should be used preceding the verb in the subject site. In colloquial informal speech, 'me' is frequently used when the pronoun is in a coordinate phrase with another noun. It is easy to check which form is grammatically acceptable by removing the noun (i.e. *I … could go …*rather than *Me … could go…*). The interjection *yeah* and the sentence modifier *innit* are often used in informal conversation when seeking agreement with a statement. They can also function as general fillers.
15. Rules about split infinitives emerged in the nineteenth century, and prescriptivists still object to the use of an adverb between the preposition *to* and its linked verb in the infinitive form e.g. *to emphatically insist*. However, split infinitives are common in spoken language and can be used to place semantic emphasis on the adverb. Style guides often advise writers to avoid using split infinitives in formal writing wherever possible e.g. see Bristol University Faculty of Arts 'Improve Your Writing' site http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/exercises/grammar/grammar_tutorial/page_28.htm
16. There is a lack of concord (agreement) between the singular pronoun *somebody* in the conditional *If* – clause and the plural subject pronoun *they* in the main clause. This is common in cases where writers/speakers wish to avoid a gendered pronoun such as 'she' or 'he' (the use of 'he' to reflect both genders is now seen to be unsatisfactory). Language purists, however, object to the non-agreement. See Guardian article about the use of Taylor Swift's lyrics on a Princeton text paper: http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2015/mar/26/taylor-swift-grammar-marked-incorrectly-princeton-review. Discussion of possible gender-neutral alternatives has been going on for more than 150 years (see Guardian article: http://www.theguardian.com/media/mind-your-language/2015/jan/30/is-it-time-we-agreed-on-a-gender-neutral-singular-pronoun).
17. Multiple negation was common in Middle English, but is now seen as nonstandard. The main clause in the example could be framed in two different ways to communicate a negative meaning e.g. they can do nothing (pronoun with a negative denotation) OR they can't do anything (the use of an adverb particle to negate the verb). In dialects, both forms are often used together.
18. Language purists have always criticised the use of prepositions at the end of sentences, but final position prepositions are often the most natural way to organise a sentence. In the example, here the alternative would sound very formal: 'for what are you looking?' Style guides often advise rewriting sentences to avoid final position prepositions in formal writing where the end result is not too convoluted. For more information see: http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2011/11/grammar-myths-prepositions/.
19. In this example, the use of *like* could be described as a particle (a grammatical class which cannot be inflected e.g. interjection) or as an informal filler. As a colloquial interjection, it indicates approximation or uncertainty; as a filler it acts as a voiced pause. It can also be used as a quotative, introducing direct speech or an

impersonation. For an article on Emma Thompson's criticisms of teen slang see: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-11426737.

20. The neologism *frenemies* is a blend (or portmanteau word) of 'friend' and 'enemy' i.e. in this context, friends who are enemies when they are competing against each other. The creation of verbs from nouns is a common process of coining new words. The first use of the verb 'to medal' is identified in the OED as 1860, but it has become increasingly common since the 2004 Athens Olympics. See: (http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2012/08/meddling-with-nouns-whos-medalling-now/).

Standard and Nonstandard English

Extract from a sample response to Component 1 Section B style question

Read the following extract from the article 'It's time to challenge the notion that there is only one way to speak English' by Harry Ritchie, a Scottish writer and journalist.

> Non-standard English is linguistically the equal of the standard version – in fact, dialects tend to be more sophisticated grammatically than standard (as in the plural "youse" of many non-standard dialects where standard has just one confusing form). Yet standard continues – even now – to be prized as the "correct" form, and any deviation is considered to be wrong, lazy, corrupt or ignorant.
>
> (*The Guardian Online,* 31 December 2013)

Using this extract as a starting point, analyse and evaluate the situations in which speakers and writers may be judged for their use of standard or nonstandard English.

Selects apt quotation from sample material – develops point using wider knowledge

Ritchie argues that Standard English is "prized as the 'correct' form" and it is certainly closely associated with official institutions like the law, education and government, and with writing. This gives it and the people who use it prestige. Trudgill describes it as a "purely social dialect" selected as a standard because it is the variety used by the most influential social groups. Written and spoken SE conform to the established rules of grammar and have no regional or slang words. As Trudgil points out, however, colloquialisms and informal lexis are common in informal SE.

References linguist – demonstrates wider knowledge

Shows understanding of key term – should also define non-SE

Argument develops, but examples needed to support point

In certain formal situations, it does seem more acceptable for users to adopt the standard form of language. A candidate writing essays in an English Language exam or an interviewee speaking in a job interview for a post in a service industry where they will be in contact with high profile clients, for instance, may be judged negatively if their language choices are non-standard. The use of a double negative (e.g. 'I haven't had no complaints about my work.'), replacing a relative pronoun with 'what' or using a non-standard past tense for an irregular verb (e.g. 'The tone

Personal engagement with issue

Explores specific contexts re. question focus – could have discussed relationship between participants

Provides examples and uses appropriate terminology (though 'past tense' should be past participle)

in the article what was writ by a survivor was emotive.') may be considered too informal. Language users need to choose language forms that are appropriate for the situation they are in, their purpose and the participants. This is why it is important to have a range of linguistic repertoires.

In the extract, Ritchie is critical of traditional attitudes to Non-Standard English. He sees the two forms of English as equal and implies that it is misguided to use judgemental language such as "wrong, lazy, corrupt or ignorant" to describe non-standard language. He does not seem to distinguish between using different forms of language in different situations. For him, both forms of English should be judged as acceptable.The author and broadcaster Lindsay Johns, on the other hand, disagrees. In his speech on 'Language and Power', he suggests that young people will be judged for using street slang and "ghetto grammar". This kind of language may be appropriate when used in informal situations with friends, but Johns believes it alienates society and restricts the opportunities open to those who use it.

Johns argues that young people should be encouraged to speak "proper English" because it will give them access to social mobility. They will be in a better position to break social and linguistic stereotypes, and to express themselves more articulately in situations where they will be judged for their linguistic choices (e.g. education and employment). He mentors young people of African, Caribbean and mixed-race heritage in Peckham, South London, and describes himself as having a zero-tolerance for street talk such as the tags "innit" and "y'get m'blud", fillers such 'yeah and 'like', and the Jamaicanised metathesis "aks". This kind of non-standard language is often linked to a strong sense of personal and social identity, but it can cause problems in communication where other participants are not familiar with it …

Some awareness of tenor

Valid point – could have been developed with reference to code-switching

Link to prescriptive/ descriptive points of view would be useful here

Highlights key point from extract

Again, missing opportunities to discuss code-switching

Broadening argument with reference to another language commentator

Links to question focus

Examples needed to support point

Addressing language issues

Lacks comment on quotation

Returns to question focus

Suggesting contexts, but examples needed to support point

Knowledge demonstrated

Providing examples and using terms

Addressing language issues

Language blogs challenging Johns' attitudes to urban slang:

http://www.urben-id.org/thoughts-on-lindsay-johns-and-ghetto-grammar/
http://englishlangsfx.blogspot.co.uk/2013/10/a-culturally-relativist-academic-speaks.html
http://englishlangsfx.blogspot.co.uk/2011/08/ghetto-grammar.html