



## GENERAL COMMENTS

The 2007 English Language examination consisted of three sections. Section 1 had seven questions worth a total of 23 marks and Section 2 had nine questions worth a total of 22 marks. Students had to choose one of three essay topics in Section 3, which was worth 30 marks. There was one text for analysis in Section 1 and one text in Section 2; students were not required to compare the texts in Sections 1 and 2. The number of intonation units in the transcript of spoken text for Section 2, 107 units, was similar to that in past years. Students seemed to manage their time well this year, with the vast majority of students having enough time to complete the essay question and the questions in Sections 1 and 2.

### General advice to students

- Students need to read and analyse the questions carefully to ensure that their response is appropriate. This was particularly evident in Question 15, where an understanding and recognition of the context of the dialogue (a television broadcast) was crucial. It was also evident in Question 17, with a number of students confusing speaking with speech-making.
- If a question requires examples or examples with line numbers, then this information must be provided for full marks to be awarded.
- It is important to read the essay question carefully so that an appropriate response can be crafted. Students should take note, for example, whether a position is sought, an example required, a reason requested, etc.
- Stimulus material for the essay topics provides guidance for students to engage with the topic. Students are encouraged to use this. However, essays which draw only on this material and do not contain any other material that the student has contributed are limited in their scope and are marked accordingly.
- Students are reminded that the essay topic should be written in an appropriate tone, ensuring that the style of writing is not colloquial or informal.
- Students need to refer to the subsystems of language and use appropriate metalanguage in responses when necessary.

## SPECIFIC INFORMATION

**Note: Student responses reproduced in italics herein have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information. Unless otherwise stated, the samples provided are examples of good student responses.**

For each question, an outline answer (or answers) is provided. In some cases the answer given is not the only answer that could have been awarded marks.

### Section 1 – Written Text

This section contained a written speech on the topic of buying Australian produce.

#### Question 1a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	20	43	37	1.2

Examples that could have been used included:

- Dick Smith's Aeroplane Jelly
- bush fire
- Big Kev
- Hills Hoist clothes line
- hard yakka
- the sheep's back.

Students were required to identify noun phrases as examples, therefore answers that copied complete sentences, without highlighting the noun phrase, received no marks. Two examples were required for two marks.

#### Question 1b.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	71	29	0.3

C. Cliché

# 2007 Assessment Report



## Question 1c.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	35	65	<b>0.7</b>

B. Metaphor

## Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	46	31	23	<b>0.8</b>

Many students were able to identify the semantic patterning, but failed to link this to the function of the text – to promote the buying of Australian produce. In this context, the patterning reinforces the persuasive function. Some of the better answers drew material from the previous questions.

The following student response was succinct and clear.

*Using idioms, such as 'short-changing ourselves' (11) and metaphors such as 'full cup of coffee' (41) add variety to the text and catch readers' attention. They are memorable, and ensure the audience will continue listening, and be more likely to start buying Australian goods.*

## Question 3a.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	52	31	18	<b>0.7</b>

Features which are characteristic of spoken language included:

- contractions ('I'm', 'That's', 'Let's'); morphology, lexicology
- sentence fragments or incomplete sentences ('And even today.');
- slang ('yakka'); semantics, lexicon
- questions directed to the audience ('Why should we buy Australian?'); discourse.
- use of 'and' and 'but' to begin sentences; syntax.

Both the correct feature and subsystem needed to be identified for one mark to be awarded for each part.

## Question 3b.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	43	34	23	<b>0.8</b>

For this response it was important to state how spoken features can engage the attention of the young Australian audience and help to lessen social distance. For example, contractions help to create an informal tone, as does the use of slang.

## Question 4a.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	57	43	<b>0.5</b>

Acceptable answers included:

- '...the invention. The retractable syringe.'
- '...the inventor...Bruce Kiehne.'

Many students understood the concept of cataphoric referencing but, for the mark to be awarded, it was crucial to detail both components of the forward referencing.

## Question 4b.

Marks	0	1	Average
%	51	49	<b>0.5</b>

'...a very proud and successful Australian, Bruce Kiehne.' Bruce Kiehne being the end-focus.

## Question 4c.

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	38	38	25	<b>0.9</b>

# 2007 Assessment Report



The information was organised in this way to create a dramatic effect or to add an element of surprise or suspense. End-focus and cataphoric referencing enable the author to shift the focus and highlight what is considered important.

Following is an example of a good student response.

*The information has been organised with cataphoric references and end-focus in order to place emphasis on Bruce Kiehne and his invention when they are finally mentioned, creating a kind of suspense.*

## Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	35	21	45	1.1

One mark was awarded to students who recognised that the text required the reader/listener to know what the products mentioned were – ‘Dick Smith’ and ‘Big Kev’ are identities who sell Australian produce. Alternatively, students could mention that an understanding of the ‘Buy Australian’ slogan and its significance was required to make sense of the speech.

The second mark was awarded to students who provided a correct example of what needed to be inferred by the reader/listener.

Following is an example of a good student response.

*The student is relying on the assumption that the audience recognises the brand names, e.g. ‘Aeroplane Jelly’ and ‘Dick Smith’s Helicopter Jelly’ (both line 7) and realises that some are Australian and some are not. Because he does not explain this, the section would make little sense to an audience without this background knowledge.*

## Question 6

Marks	0	1	2	Average
%	16	33	52	1.4

Examples of repetition were:

- ‘Buy Australian’
- ‘our farmers, our land, our economy’.

Cohesion was created by making links throughout the text between the ideas mentioned. The words were repeated and reinforced, thus acting as a persuasive technique.

## Question 7

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	8	15	20	27	17	13	2.7

The speech did achieve its purpose of persuading people to buy Australian produce.

Low-scoring responses to this question often revealed a lack of understanding of the significance of providing linguistic evidence. Weaker responses paraphrased the speech’s contents or gave examples of quality of argument, but did not identify linguistic features like the extended metaphor, the repetition of key phrases, slogans (‘Buy Australian’) or the use of personal pronouns. The better answers engaged with the text and gave easily identifiable references.

Following is an example of a high-scoring student response.

*The speech does achieve its purpose of convincing the audience present to buy more Australian goods. His speech is entertaining, with humour used to keep his speech memorable e.g. ‘So let’s keep it legal’ (line 32). Coherence is achieved through the continuing metaphor of the cup of coffee (Line 4). The use of personal pronouns e.g. ‘we’ and ‘our’ (line 2) refer to the speaker and audience directly in an inclusive sense. The repetition of the phrase ‘Buy Australian’ drives home the main contention.*

## Section 2 - Spoken text

The transcript of a television film review show provided material for the students to analyse. The discourse contained a monologue and a dialogue, the former being scripted and the latter unscripted. This was an important feature of the text and students were questioned accordingly. It was also important to recognise the context of the review. The transcript provided students with the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of the features of spoken text.

# 2007 Assessment Report



## Question 8

<b>Marks</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Average</b>
%	9	91	<b>0.9</b>

The purpose was to provide information about the film to the audience.

## Question 9

<b>Marks</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Average</b>
%	67	18	15	<b>0.5</b>

The purpose of the speaker was to include as much information as possible in the clause structures. A feature of this section is the use of subordinate clauses.

Full marks were awarded to students who recognised both of the above points. A small number of students confused sentence structure with sentence type.

## Question 10

<b>Marks</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Average</b>
%	13	19	27	40	<b>2.0</b>

The function of M's prosodics was to show her enthusiasm, passion and interest in the subject matter. M's utterances were punctuated by deep intakes of breath, fast-paced speech and elongated vowels. She also created interest for the audience by varying the intonation and pitch of her utterances. The increased pace in line 35 indicated that this information was said as an aside or personal comment.

Most students were able to discuss the use of M's prosodics in some way. Students who did not score maximum marks identified the prosodic features, but did not comment on their function.

## Question 11a.

<b>Marks</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Average</b>
%	21	79	<b>0.8</b>

Examples of jargon in the text included:

- 'director'
- 'wide screen'
- 'Venice Film Festival'
- 'footage'.

## Question 11b.

<b>Marks</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Average</b>
%	32	68	<b>0.7</b>

The function of jargon in this transcript is to create an impression of expertise and authority for M and D, who are considered to be experts on film. It also serves to convey information efficiently and succinctly. It implies that the audience has a level of expertise and knowledge about film.

## Question 12

<b>Marks</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Average</b>
%	28	72	<b>0.7</b>

From line 45 a conversation (dialogue) takes place between two experts who are sharing opinions about the film. Prior to this, the purpose of the monologue was primarily to provide information about the film.

## Question 13

<b>Marks</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Average</b>
%	10	90	<b>0.9</b>

B. Minimal response

## Question 14

<b>Marks</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Average</b>
%	15	44	42	<b>1.3</b>



M repeatedly says ‘yes’ and ‘yeah’ or ‘mmm’ in order to show D that she is listening, that she agrees with him and to encourage him to continue speaking (these are minimal responses). Also, D allows M to continue to make her point even though she is interrupting him. The two speakers agree on a score for the film.

A number of students suggested adjacency pairs as an answer. This was incorrect as the question stated, ‘Apart from turn-taking’. Mention of Grice’s maxims alone was not sufficient for full marks as students needed to work more closely with the transcript and provide a specific analysis of cooperation.

**Question 15**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	23	22	24	17	14	1.8

The context of the dialogue is a television show/broadcast, which affects how the two presenters converse in regards to turn-taking. There is no interaction with an audience so the conversation is limited to M and D, who need to make their conversation run smoothly to ensure that interest is not lost. To this end, silences are avoided and turns are brisk. The speakers cooperate by allowing each other to complete their turns, although any overlaps are quickly overcome. The use of minimal responses helps to ensure smooth turn-taking, as speakers are encouraged to continue to hold the floor.

A small number of students misread the question and discussed the monologue. It is important to read all questions carefully.

Following is an extract from a good student response.

*...turn taking is very structured and smooth; this is essential as they are on television: everything needs to run smoothly to ensure the audience do not lose interest. Only a couple of minor overlaps occur, eg line 98-99, and 75-76, however these are quickly fixed. To further ensure smooth, flowing turns, final intonation is used to indicate the end of a turn, eg 98. M also uses names to pass on her turn. Eg 45 ‘David?’ M’s initial long turn also suited the context: she filled in the audience on what they were talking about before the discussion took place. After this, turns were fairly even; with both speakers participating evenly to ensure the exchange was lively and dynamic for the audience.*

**Question 16**

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Average
%	16	7	13	10	20	9	26	3.4

The following points provided acceptable answers.

Between lines 1 and 44 (the monologue)

- M’s utterances are complex and contain many subordinate clauses.
- Many intonation units begin with a conjunction (lines 18, 24 and 27).
- There is frequent rising intonation at the end of intonation units, indicating that M expects to continue speaking without interruption.
- M’s language is more formal in the monologue as she tries to set an appropriate tone while conveying a lot of information in a short time.

Between lines 45 and 107 (the dialogue)

- M’s utterances in the dialogue are shorter (lines 69–84).
- There are examples of contractions, sentence fragments and non-fluency features (false starts and overlaps), which characterise a fairly spontaneous conversation, compared to the scripted monologue in lines 1–26.
- M’s lexis is more effusive and less formal than in the monologue.
- M overlaps with D (lines 76 and 84) in her enthusiasm.
- Minimal responses are used (line 92, ‘Yes.’). M gives feedback to the speaker that she is listening and following the points being made.
- Discourse particles (line 69, ‘you know’) allow M thinking time, thus showing that, unlike the monologue, this is an unscripted dialogue.

For this question it was important for students to use linguistic terms to identify the discourse features. It was also important to provide information that clearly identified the distinguishing features of the dialogue/monologue.

There were six marks allocated to this question. Two marks were awarded for each discourse feature with an example and line number. Most students included examples and line numbers in their responses.



Following is an example of a high-scoring student response.

*The monologue has clearly been scripted, as there is a lack of non-fluency features. Once the text becomes a dialogue the non-fluency features are frequent. (Pause filler 'ah' line 66) (Repetition 'I think it's' line 103/4). The monologue contains many subordinate clauses e.g. 'who's trying to.' (line 21) where as the dialogue contains simple sentences. Back-channelling/minimal responses ('Mmm' line 50 and 'yeah' line 81) are used by the speakers to encourage each other and provide support. These are common in dialogues only.*

### Section 3

Marks	None	17	18	19
%	1	11	27	61

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	1	1	2	4	5	7	11	13	14	12	9	7	5	5	3	2	7.9

Section 3 of this year's paper contained three essay topics, all with stimulus material that could be used by students in their responses. The stimulus material provided cues as to the types of issues or features that could be addressed in the essay responses. Question 19 was by far the most popular topic, followed by Questions 18 and 17.

Students who scored highly in this section were those who combined a broad, yet detailed, knowledge of the topic with a confident use of metalanguage. It was evident that these responses were not pre-prepared essays. Questions 17 and 18 stated explicitly that evidence and examples were to be drawn from contemporary Australia. Therefore, in order to achieve a high mark for this section it was important that this request be followed. Students needed to actually address the topic, not try to use pre-prepared responses that did not relate directly to the question. Students who demonstrated accurate use of the conventions of written discourse, such as coherence, cohesion, wide vocabulary, good spelling and accurate punctuation, were appropriately rewarded.

#### Question 17

This topic required an understanding of speech-making and its role in today's society. A small number of students misinterpreted the topic and focused on the qualities of spoken language (when compared to the written mode of communication). It was necessary to write a sustained, detailed response to this topic that incorporated the student's own thoughts and knowledge; a number of students relied solely on the stimulus material without introducing their own material or they ignored this material completely and wrote very short responses. Students who were awarded high marks appreciated that speech-making is a valid and valued form of communication and were able to provide many different contexts and examples in which speech-making is valued.

The validity of speech-making can be ascertained by identifying the many contexts in which speeches are heard. These include:

- personal contexts; for example, birthdays, weddings and funerals
- in the community; for example, the openings of buildings, Australia Day and school speeches
- in the media; for example, award winners
- in politics; for example, election campaign speeches and speeches in parliament.

The value of this form of communication can be seen in a number of ways, including:

- the social expectation that, at certain events such as weddings, a speech will be given
- the media frenzy surrounding the retirement speeches of both Shane Warne and Ian Thorpe
- the existence of speech-making competitions and the prestige often attached to these
- the requirement in VCE English for oral assessment of an outcome
- the fact that we remember speeches, be it a famous/historical/literary speech or a speech made by a close friend or relative. ABC Radio National's list of 'Unforgettable Speeches' is testimony to how strong speeches are not forgotten.

The reasons why speech-making is a valued and valid form of communication could include recognition of the importance of storytelling in our culture. Speeches personalise information and give credence to it. One of the strengths of speeches is that they include paralinguistic and prosodic features, thus enabling the speaker to show emotion, suspense, dramatic effect and/or humour.

Although it can be argued that speech-making continues to be a valued and valid form of communication in contemporary Australia, it was also necessary for students to consider whether it has undergone any changes. According



to Don Watson in *Death Sentence*, political speeches lack substance and rely on spin to persuade audiences. Has the advent of the PowerPoint presentation meant that we rely more on visual images and reinforcements that give short, snappy bullet points rather than relying on the skills of rhetoric? Geraldine Doogue's quotation suggests that speech-making has lost some status in an era which is characterised by speed and dominated by technology and its influences. Also, there is the question of whether the suggested decline in standards of language has affected the power of speech-making.

The following student response shows an appreciation of how speeches can move people, but also recognises that changes have occurred.

*Speechmaking has always been a very important part of communication in Australia (and everywhere else). It has the functions of exhorting, arousing, moving, informing, expressing, convincing and throughout history it has provided a means of communication between and among people. However, the advent of modern communication has changed the nature of speechmaking in many contexts, but while the rhetorical and dramatic political speech has become a thing of the past, the 21st speech, the wedding address, the intellectual or cultural presentation on Radio National or at a 'learned gathering' are still valid and valued.*

*Because the political pronouncements of politicians are now not listened to, or read, in their entirety these days – unlike the past where policy speeches would be delivered, and reported on, as an integrated whole – the speakers must now encapsulate their message in the short sound bite; eschewing reasoned argument and logical presentation and development, for a snappy, reportable utterance that will suit the requirements of the media. This ultimately leads to the 'dog-whistle' phenomenon, where the form of the words, or the connotations of the chosen lexis or idiom, communicates to the key audience members, and the 'glittering generalities' and 'weasel words' which sound impressive, and 'push the intended buttons' in an emotional response, but which are vague and only succeed because they appeal or refer to some wholesome or positive thing. The double-speak of politicians and the military similarly allows a lot of attitude, inference and concealment to be transmitted easily, without the necessity of explanation, support or justification. So the political speech in contemporary Australia, has been reduced to the sound-bite, and only those who have nothing better to do would listen to the parliamentary broadcast or read Hansard. The substance of the utterance is often more about the way it is presented, the paralinguistic aspects, the instantaneous appeal of the short and snappy catch phrase.*

*However, the speech as an intellectual endeavour, as one would hear on Radio National's 'Reith Lectures' or 'Ockham's Razor' are important activities. Here a point of view is put in a well reasoned, well developed way, in a context which requires the listener to participate over a long time interval. Although the masses of the general public would be largely unaware that such things are available (and possibly would not be interested) these presentations have an important function in intellectual life. Similarly the lectures given by writers and critics (for example Germain Greer's talk on the 19th century writers at Uni of Melb) are looked forward to by many as a chance to hear opinions, rather than reading them in a journal for example.*

*The more small scale speech, at the 21st, the wedding, the retirement dinner or the coach at half time at the footy are institutions that have not suffered at all in the way that political speeches have. In these situations, one might say they are 'occasional' speeches, the immediacy of the communication, supported as it is by paralinguistic features such as prosody, gestures etc which give increased intensity and meaning to the words, is valued and extremely valid. The public nature of these activities – the mother of the bride telling her daughter and the whole assembled company, of her pride, her pleasure, her feelings at her daughter's nuptial; the coach publicly praising x, y and z and exhorting through carefully chosen syntax, metaphor, image and expletive – gives them a significance, and a role which could have not be otherwise attained. This community participation in being moved, or angered or convinced is a very important part of the solidarity of the group involved. Everyone has heard the reaction of the retiree to the speech from the boss, everyone has heard the unexpected response of the father-of-the bride to the son-in-law, and this information is vital for the health and security of the community. The fact of everyone hearing it together is crucial here. If Elizabeth had sent an email or letter to her soldiers and sailors on the eve of the engagement with the Spanish Armada, the effectiveness of her words would have been next to minimal, but delivered in person an entirely different effect is made.*

*Speech making in contemporary Australia is still valid and valued – it is important for solidarity in the community and it is important for the maintenance of culture. In politics its importance has waned – no one much is listening.*

### Question 18

This topic was quite popular. Students were required to discuss how language can shock, offend or incite emotion, relating their responses to recent media stories. A wide range of examples was provided by students, many of which arose from television programs viewed in the past year. Students also referred to reports of abusive language heard on the sports field or in rap music. Newspapers' negative portrayals of certain social groups also figured in some responses.

By referring to taboo language and dysphemisms students were able to highlight how language can be so powerful in its effect on people. Better answers did this, but also pointed out how the subtle use of language can also have an effect. For example, the Department of Immigration and Citizenship dropped its former title, which included the word multicultural, causing offence to groups within Australia. Often, implied language or language with negative



connotations can have as much force as a dysphemism or swear word. The principle of appropriateness allowed students to show how different contexts and audiences are crucial in determining whether certain words or phrases will have an impact. An exploration of political correctness enabled students to consider how society views offensive language. Better responses used relevant and real examples. Students were required to refer to at least two subsystems of language in the response.

A number of relevant examples found in the media included:

- The Chasers' eulogy song
- language used by some of the characters in the Summer Heights High television series
- Alan Jones' comments on the Cronulla disturbances, which the media labelled as 'riots'
- Julia Gillard labelled unfit for office by Bill Heffernan because she was deliberately 'barren'
- Tony Abbott's recent comments about Bernie Banton or his swearing at Nicola Roxon
- offensive language being used by an AFL player when referring to another player's tattoo
- euphemisms of war being used to mask the real force or intention; for example, the surge for invasion.

The extract below from one student's essay showed an awareness of recent media stories, but also grasped how language can 'shock, offend and incite emotion'.

*Other stories in the media which illustrate the power of language and its ability to offend relate to the contextual usage of lexis with particular connotations. The presumptuous 'barren' and the loaded 'black' have caused media attention. Like the discriminatory 'illegals' and 'queue jumpers', 'barren' creates judgements and has implied meanings. This incident involved Hugh Heffernan calling Julia Gillard 'deliberately barren'. Once again the sexist attitudes of society are reflected in the language. A successful, strong woman, who shares high status with men, but has no children 'must be barren'. Other offensive usages include Age newspaper headline (24/6) 'Black aid can do more harm than good'. The gratuitous usage of 'black' to refer to Australia's indigenous society shocked those readers who find language based on race offensive. The semantic interpretation of particular lexis can have shock value.*

The following extract from another student's response included a discussion on both the semantics and morphology of language.

*Slurs against other minority groups have also come under fire, including the Gay and Lesbian community. A Family First candidate was in November 2007, forced to publically apologise after he challenged his Liberal opponent on the basis of her sexual identity, claiming the voters 'have a right to know which side you bat for'. The use of this colloquial idiom sparked much anger in equal rights groups. The controversy surrounding slurs against homosexuals has led to the creation of the 'LGBTI' abbreviation, used to refer to those who identify as 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Intersex'. The abbreviation has been variously extended to refer to other groups in an attempt at inclusive language which is free of the negative semantic connotations associated with such words as 'queer' or 'fag'. The abbreviation in its longest form, 'LGBTQQASAITPO', for 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transsexual, Queer, Questioning, Asexual, Straight Ally, Intersex, Two-spirit, Pansexual and Other' has not achieved popularity and is considered by many to be an example of overtly politically-correct speech.*

### Question 19

This essay topic was the most popular and provided students with an opportunity to discuss whether or not there is a decline in written and spoken language today in Australia. Many students chose to identify the changes that are occurring as language change rather than decline. However, a relatively small number of students successfully argued that language was in decline. When discussing the effect of technology on language, it was important for students to also comment on whether this was a positive or negative development.

Students who argued that language is changing, rather than declining, included examples such as:

- electronic communication can contain features of both written and spoken language, while also exhibiting its own distinct features like emoticons. People make deliberate choices in usage depending on appropriateness
- the value of technology allows users to communicate to new audiences; for example, John Howard's comments on MySpace
- SMS encourages users to write and can be very creative
- Australian's use of Americanisms is not so all encompassing; for example, we use car boot not trunk.

Students who argued there has been a decline in standards included the following examples:

- the minimal use of punctuation and standard grammar in some chat room and SMS communications
- an over reliance on auto-correction functions when using computers
- letter writing has almost disappeared
- use of non-standard language when writing; for example, 'could of' instead of 'could have'





- a perceived failure in some schools to teach grammar and parts of speech.

The following student response shows a strong grasp of the topic and considers various subsystems of language in the response.

*There have always been concerns over the standards of both spoken and written language. In contemporary Australia, many prescriptivists rail against the language changes in the written mode arising from new technological media and a perceived invasion of American English, as well as to 'errors' in spoken language such as discourse particles and teenage slang. However, these changes are not destructive to Australian English but rather broadening the scope of its use to reflect and describe changes to society, so our language is growing rather than being 'in decline'.*

*Perhaps the most radical domain of language change is technology, where the nature of instant messaging prompts changes to the written mode. Typing letters on a hand-held phone is significantly more painstaking than writing with stationery, so contractions such as 'u', 'thx' and 'l8r' increase efficiency of communication in SMS as well as allowing users to explore the phonology of numbers in their construction of words. Graphological emoticons are used as a shortcut to convey emotions, ':)' for happiness, ':@' for anger and ':o' for shock. Other non-standard forms are used to mark membership of a group on the internet, such as 'l33t sp34k' (ie. elite speak) used to show that the author has a particular interest in computer programming and/or gaming. These morphological variations from standard writing have been heralded as the downfall of the English spelling system, but such claims are unsubstantiated as users are still able to revert to Standard English when they need to address an audience outside their particular social group. Thus language in this context is not in decline but rather evolving to suit the change of medium.*

*Another area of great concern for some Australian prescriptivists is the perceived 'Americanisation' of our language. Australians have been exposed to American films, music, television and products since the 1930's, which has had due effect on our lexicon. Teenage slang such as 'dude', 'sweet', 'gay' and 'mad' have been exported through American popular culture, and many Australians today refer to 'cookies' rather than 'biscuit' due to the marketing of American products as Oreos. However, American English has had little effect on the other subsystems of language. The spelling of the suffix 'ize' over 'ise' (as in 'industrialize') is often attacked by prescriptivists as distinctly American usage, and now 'ise' is preferred in schools, despite the fact that British sources as distinctive as the Oxford English Dictionary have historically preferred '-ize'. Similarly, The Age moved back to the spelling of 'colour' from 'color' in 2001 due to popular demand, although the use of '-ur' endings goes as far back in Australia as the formation of the 'Labor' party in Federation and ever since ministers have been referred to as 'The Honorable...' Thus apart from a few lexical additions, the view that American English is taking hold of traditional Australian standards is largely a misconception.*

*Unless recorded, speech is time-bound and transient, so linguistic pessimists do not have the opportunity to peruse spoken discourse for perceived errors over and over again as they do with a written text. Nevertheless, complaints are heard from individuals such as David Campbell of verbal 'laziness', labelling discourse particles such as 'you know', 'like' and 'yeah-no' as unnecessary and detrimental to standards. Yet these features play a vital role in interaction. Due to the spontaneous nature of speech, interlocutors rely on pause fillers such as 'um' and 'ah' to maintain their turn while they compose their next utterance. Features such as 'you know' serve as an important phatic function as they elicit empathy from participants, whereas hedging expressions such as 'like' and 'yeah-no' are useful in softening the force of potentially offensive or arrogant utterances – for example, given a compliment on our efforts, we might say 'yeah-no, it's alright'. Without these features, silence would dominate conversation and ambiguities would be rife, so their popularity in contemporary Australian English reflects not a decline in language but rather our grappling with the difficulties of acting as social beings.*

*Variations in spoken syntax and phonology also provoke outrage from prescriptivists. In an effort to demonstrate their creativity and group memberships teenagers will often describe something as 'sick as', which grammarians may immediately proscribe because it ends a sentence with a proposition. This rule, along with the notion against splitting infinitives (eg. 'to boldly go') are taken from Fowler's Modern English Usage. However, this was written in 1926 and applies rules that were originally designed for Latin, so it is no surprise that they are inadequate to describe Australian English of the 21st century. Phonological 'laziness' is also targeted, such as elision 'fish 'n' chips' and reduction 'could [v]' for 'could have', especially since the later then prompts a change in writing to 'could of', which in the weak form is phonologically identical. However, prescriptivists should realise that these forms merely exist due to their relative easiness and efficiency, and rarely add ambiguity to language.*

*Language change occurs across all subsystems in both the written and spoken modes. Rather than a 'decline' in standards, these changes reflect Australians' abilities to adapt to the changing social and technological environments, and should be celebrated rather than proscribed.*