A-Level English Language Summer Work

Task 1: Investigating people's attitudes towards language change.

Ask **five subjects** what things really irritate them in people's language use. If they don't understand what you're getting at, give them a couple of examples, like:

- You should say 'different from' not 'different to'.
- You should say 'the data are interesting' not 'the data is interesting'
- You should say 'would have' not 'would of'
- Some people hate new words, e.g., 'guesstimate'
- Some people hate the way words are used for different meanings/in different ways, e.g., fudge instead of the other four letter word.
- Lots of people are extremely irritated by the misuse of the apostrophe.
- And so on…!

Ask your subjects to give a couple of examples. For each example they give, ask them why they think people say these things or use language in this way. If they say people don't understand grammar, try to push them to explain what grammatical 'error' has been made. When you have a lot of data, pick five example, and do the following things:

    1) explain how the usage deviates (or not) from standard English
    2) come up with a theory that explains why the usage occurs or exists.

For example

Your subject says:
    'I hate it when people say *should of.*

You say:
    'Why do you think people say it?'

They say:
    'I think they say it because they don't understand grammar properly.'

You say:
    'Which bit of grammar in particular do they not understand, do you think?'

They say:
    ' 'of' is a preposition.'

You write down an explanation of how it 'deviates' from standard English.
    'should have' is standard English. should is an **auxiliary model verb** and 'have' is also an **auxiliary verb**. 'should' and 'have' would both be part of the **verb phrase** and would be 'helping' the **main verb** (whatever it was), e.g., she should have RUN home. 'of' is a **preposition** and has no home in a **verb phrase!**

You come up with a plausible language-based explanation for why the usage occurs.

    'should have' is often **elided** to 'should've' in speech and so sounds like 'should of'. Children in particular seem to say it (my children do, anyway). It is therefore, probably a **phonological** (sound) feature.

    don't worry about the terminology but aim to be as specific as you can

Task 2: data collection

Find two texts that are linked through a similar theme that illustrate the use of language in an interesting way. Write a short explanation (no more than 200 words per text) of the thinking behind your choices.

This is an extract from a children's book, *The Megamogs*. The cats plan to surprise their owner, Mrs Marbletop, who has gone away on holiday.

It was on Monday afternoon that Kevin Catflap, Captain of the Megamogs, addressed the others.

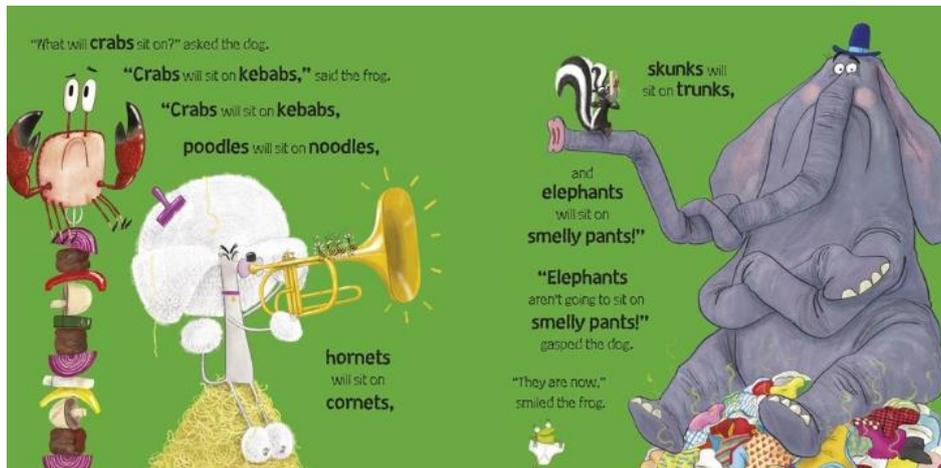'Right,' said Kevin Catflap. 'We're going to paint the house.'

'I vote we paint it pink,' said Tracy Tinopener.

'Green,' growled Fishpaste Fred.

'Puce,' piped up Phil Fleacollar.

'Red!' shouted Ginger Brownsauce and Gary Gristle.

'ORDER! ORDER!' cried Kevin Catflap. 'Never mind the colour – JUST PAINT!'

"What will **crabs** sit on?" asked the dog.

"**Crabs** will sit on **kebabs**," said the frog.

"**Crabs** will sit on **kebabs**,
poodles will sit on **noodles**,
hornets will sit on cornets,

skunks will sit on **trunks**,

and elephants will sit on smelly pants!"

"Elephants aren't going to sit on smelly pants!" gasped the dog.

"They are now," smiled the frog.

BE PREPARED TO PRESENT YOUR FINDINGS TO THE CLASS!