

**International A Level in English Language [2061]**

**Language Topics**

**EXAM PAPER – 04**

**SOURCE BOOKLET**

**Source A**

Adapted from a TED talk given by Jay Walker, May 2009

*Please note that the adaptation has included adding material from other sources and altering some of the original language. It should not be taken as necessarily representing the views of Jay Walker and is presented only as stimulus material.*

Let's talk about manias. A mania is excitement manifested by mental and physical hyperactivity, disorganisation of behaviour, and elevation of mood. Let's start with Beatlemania, when crowds roared at four young men, the Beatles, with some catchy songs. Beatlemania involved hysterical teenagers, crying, screaming, pandemonium. Or take sports mania: deafening crowds, all working for one idea - get the ball in the net. Okay, and there’s religious mania: there's rapture, there's weeping, there's visions. Manias can be good. Manias can be alarming. Or manias can be deadly, as was the case with Nazi Germany.

The world has a new mania. A mania for learning English. For example, Chinese students practise their English, by screaming it. A Teacher shouts, “Change my life!”. Hundreds of students call back, “I want to change my life!” The teacher shouts again, and the students repeat their words: “I don't want to let my parents down!” The teacher mentions country, and the learners call back the refrain: “I don't ever want to let my country down.” Then the teacher shouts “Most importantly, I don't want to let myself down!” And the mass of students shouts back with the same words.

How many people are trying to learn English worldwide? Two billion of them. In Latin America, in India, in Southeast Asia, and most of all, in China. If you're a Chinese student, you start learning English in the third grade, by law. That's why this year, China will become the world's largest English-speaking country. Worldwide, almost three times as many people speak English as an additional language as speak it as their native tongue.

Why English? In a single word: opportunity. Opportunity for a better life, a job, to be able to pay for school, or put better food on the table. Imagine a student taking a giant test for three full days. Her score on this one test literally determines her future. She studies 12 hours a day for three years to prepare. Twenty-five per cent of her grade is based on English. It's called the gaokao, and 80 million high school Chinese students have already taken this gruelling test. The intensity to learn English is almost unimaginable unless you witness it.

So, is English mania good or bad? Is English a tsunami, washing away other languages? Not likely. English is the world's second language. Your native language is your life. But with English you can become part of a wider conversation - a global conversation about global problems, like climate change or poverty, or hunger or disease. The world has other universal languages. Mathematics is the language of science. Music is the language of emotions. And now English is becoming the language of problem-solving. Not because America is pushing it, but because the world is pulling it. So English mania is a turning point.  
  
In 2020, Robert Sanders wrote in the Berkeley News “English has become the de facto language of science: International conferences are held in English, the world’s top scientific journals are in English and academics in non-English speaking countries get promoted based on their publications in English language journals. Even scientific jargon is in English — most non-English speakers use English terms and don’t bother inventing equivalent words in their native languages.” However, Sanders noted that “for much of the world — in particular, the global south, where English is not a common second language — English limits entry into the world of science and limits public access to scientific results, even when they pertain to a person’s own country.”

Like the harnessing of electricity in our cities, or the fall of the Berlin Wall, neither of which were without problems, English represents hope for a better future - a future where the world has a common language to solve its common problems. Thank you very much.

**Source B**

**The Joy of Lexicography** highly adapted from a TED talk by Erin McKean

Lexicography is the practice of compiling dictionaries. The dictionary is not carved out of a piece of granite but made up of little discrete bits: words. Being a lexicographer, I get to use fun words, like lexicographical, a double dactyl. However, people don't usually have a warm image of the dictionary. They think I’m more like a traffic cop, letting the good words into the dictionary, and keeping the bad words out.

Deciding what words are good and bad is neither easy nor fun. When parts of your job are not easy or fun, you kind of look for an excuse not to do them. I would much rather be a fisherman, throwing my net into the ocean of English and see what marvels I can drag up from the bottom.

Our idea of what a dictionary is has not changed since the reign of Queen Victoria. Computers don't do much else other than speed up the process of compiling dictionaries. The end result is a Victorian design merged with a little bit of modern propulsion. Online dictionaries replicate almost all the problems of print, except for searchability. And when you improve searchability, you take away the one advantage of print, which is serendipity - finding things you weren't looking for.

What we have here is a ham butt problem. Woman's making a ham for a family dinner. She goes to cut the butt off the ham and throw it away, but she looks at it. "This is a perfectly good piece of ham. Why am I throwing this away? Well, my mom always did this." So, she calls up mom, and asks her why she did it. Mom says, "I don't know, my mom always did it!" So, they call grandma, and grandma says, "My pan was too small!" It's not that we have good words and bad words. We have a pan that's too small! When we find a word that's not in the dictionary, we think, "This must be a bad word." Why? It's more likely to be a bad dictionary. The English language is as big as it is.

The book is not the best shape for the dictionary. When cars became the dominant mode of transportation, we didn't round up the horses and shoot them. There're still going to be paper dictionaries, but it's not going to be the dominant dictionary. The book-shaped dictionary is not the only shape dictionaries come in. And it’s not going to be the prototype for the shapes dictionaries come in.

Artificial constraints lead to arbitrary distinctions and a skewed worldview. We should study all the words, because when you think about words, you can make beautiful expressions from very humble parts. Lexicography is studying the tolerances of the materials that we use to build the structure of our expression.

How do we know if a word is real? If you love a word, use it. That makes it real. Being in the dictionary is an artificial distinction. If we've transcended paper, if we are worrying less about control and more about description, then we can think of the English language as being this beautiful mobile. And any time you touch a word, use it in a new context, give it a new connotation, or verb it, you make the mobile move. You didn't break it. It's just in a new position, which can be just as beautiful.

If only one out of every 10 of the English books in the Library of Congress had a word that's not in the dictionary, that would be equivalent to more than two unabridged dictionaries. And I find an un-dictionaried word (like "un-dictionaried”) in almost every book I read. If only one in 100 of the 58.1 million archived newspaper pages had an un-dictionaried word on it, that's 500,000 more words. So that's a lot. And I'm not even talking about magazines, blogs or polysemy, which is the greedy habit some words have of taking more than one meaning for themselves.

The Internet is great for collecting words, because it's full of collectors. The problem with some of them is that they're not scientific enough. They show the word, but they don't show any context. Where did it come from? Who said it? What newspaper was it in? What book? A word is like an archaeological artifact. If you don't know the provenance or the source of the artifact, it's not science.

People use the dictionary synecdochically to stand for the whole language. But we could make the dictionary the whole language. Online, we can put all the words in. Then we no longer have that artificial distinction between good and bad, we can really describe the language like scientists. We can leave the aesthetic judgments to the writers and the speakers.