

## MA in English Studies Final Exam Topics

In this oral exam students pick at random one item/task from group A and another from group B or C, matching their specialization track. They are expected to synthesize what they have learnt in various courses. Where there is an option the student must not choose a topic that is obviously connected with his/her own thesis, unless s/he is asked to do so.

### Group A

1. Provide a socio-cultural overview of a period in British history of your own choice.

The examinee is expected to approach the period in history using the socio-cultural method. It is recommended that a reasonably short time span is used – the lecture course used 30 years much of the time, and this would be perfectly acceptable for the exam as well. As the term has no single standard literature attached to it, it might be helpful to read pp 1-7 of *The New Cultural History: Essays* edited by Lyn Avery Hunt when preparing your approach ([books.google.com/books?isbn=0520064291](https://books.google.com/books?isbn=0520064291)), but you should demonstrate that you are aware of the more (or even less!) important social and cultural aspects of the period you have chosen, and where the two aspects come together. Don't forget: "socio-cultural" here is not a quasi-synonym for "art" or "aesthetics", but the cultural activities of groups of people, which can be as diverse as political song, religious pamphlets, agricultural innovation, all of which are treated in the course, often as applied to the history of human rights and liberty.

2. Outline how major models of modern linguistics view semantics and syntax as well as their interfacing.

Introduce major trends and models of linguistic thought from traditional-descriptive to generative, functional, and cognitive-based models. Point out the role of syntax and semantics in each type of model. Outline the concept and nature of interfacing/interaction of different levels of linguistic representation and components of linguistic description with special reference to that of semantics and syntax.

3. How can the historical study of English contribute to the understanding of Modern English grammatical irregularities? Use some data to support your arguments.

The opposition *regular* :: *irregular* is applicable only in the synchronic investigation of English because most grammatical irregularities in Modern English are residues of rules and regular changes that used to operate in or before the Old English period. Numerous irregularities that can be found in Modern English nominal and verbal morphology can be ascribed to a few phonetic rules, primarily to *i*-mutation and the medial voicing rule. These changes were further accompanied by analogical extension of suffixes in the sphere of nouns as well as in that of verbs. The relativity of the notion of 'regular' can be illustrated by the verbs which have the dental suffix and yet are listed in the group of Modern English irregular verbs.

4. Describe how the development of word meanings reflects the socio-cultural context of speakers.

Characterize the external causes of semantic change. Explain how semantic change originates in context dependent pragmatic usage and the synchronic linguistic behaviour of speakers. Explain the relationship between expressive and efficient communication and conventional and novel

usage. What is the connection between conventionalization and the emergence of culturally shared categories?

5. Outline the basic concepts and refer to the main representatives of one of the following trends in literary studies: reader-response criticism, structuralism, Marxist criticism, or feminist literary discourse.

Historical background to the emergence of reader response, structuralist, Marxist, or feminist literary criticism; major works (brief recapitulation of argument and/or ideas) and authors in the field; areas of interest, key concepts and objectives; an outline of methodology employed in reading.

6. Introduce the generic features of a distinct form of literature in a freely chosen period of its socio-cultural history.

When introducing this topic, students should offer an outline of the critical, social, and cultural aspects of their chosen period in literary history and how these aspects gave rise to the genre they wish to discuss. They should also mention the establishments where the notion of the literary forms of that genre and their cultural and national representations have appeared, and examine the different aspects of cultural discourse such as gender and society, mass literature and the individual reader, literary movements and reading- or theatre-going practices.

7. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of quantitative and/or qualitative approaches in applied linguistics research by referring to examples from your thesis (for students specializing in English applied linguistics).

You can also choose two studies from each paradigm to point out the pros and cons.

Elaborate on the relevance of literary history and biography, as well as critical theory for the research related to your thesis topic (for students specializing in English literature).

Students will give an outline of the successive phases of individual work related to their research projects: examining their research topics in context, working with the theoretical apparatus of literary studies, using criticism related to their topics, deciding upon a thesis statement, and developing an argument on the basis of primary, theoretical and critical material. They are requested to illustrate these phases with examples from their own research.

### **Group B for students of the specialization track in English applied linguistics**

1. Discuss possible applications of vocabulary profiles in applied linguistics research.

Describe the rationale and process of vocabulary profiling. Explain the theoretical and practical background of it. Discuss specific ways of applying this technique. Discuss how this area can be researched.

2. Discuss affective, cognitive and linguistic benefits of using narratives in the classroom.

Present and discuss theories that support the importance of narratives for learners' cognitive, affective and linguistic development. Explain how these theories are relevant for the foreign

language classroom. Discuss empirical studies and your suggestions of how this area can be researched.

3. Discuss how methods of discourse analysis can be used in the interpretation and application of narratives.

Introduce key terms and modes of discourse analysis. Elaborate on how various approaches to discourse analysis can be applied in the interpretation and classroom application of narratives. Discuss how this area can be researched.

4. Select two individual differences and discuss their role in second language acquisition.

Describe what characterizes the individual differences you have chosen. Discuss critically what impact they have on the process of SLA and to what extent they determine ultimate attainment. Elaborate on how this area can be researched.

5. Discuss the interactional opportunities and limitations of two electronic media of your choice.

Discuss ways of interacting with the media. Explain the connections between print and electronic media. Describe the content, audience and main genres of the two media. Discuss how this area can be researched.

6. Discuss the issues of plurilingualism or pluriculturalism in language education and assessment.

Define the terms in this question and relate them to your experience of language education and assessment. Discuss how this area can be researched.

7. Evaluate the relevance of individual differences in sociolinguistics.

Discuss how age, gender, aptitude, attitudes, motivation, anxiety and willingness to communicate interact in how languages are used in various contexts. Elaborate on how this area can be researched.

8. Compare pragmatic and cognitive approaches to metaphor.

Students have to demonstrate that metaphor is not only an efficient figure of speech as the traditional (rhetorical) approach suggests, but also, in line with contemporary pragmatic and cognitive approaches, an all-pervasive mode of mental representation and processing new information. In Searle's pragmatic approach metaphor is viewed as a matter of speaker (or utterance) meaning governed by different principles. In cognitive semantics, on the other hand, notably in Lakoff's conceptual metaphor theory, metaphor is viewed not merely as a matter of language (a trope, a figure of speech) but as one of the fundamental ways of how the human mind processes information.

9. Describe pragmatic parameters of language use facilitating social cognition (deixis, contextual cues, knowledge types and inferential mechanisms).

This question deals with the consequences of the major difference between linguistically coded meanings and the knowledge of language on the one hand and contextually determined meanings

that require active mental processing of deictic relations (spatial, temporal, social and personal), contextual prompts and clues activating intended meanings, and inferences based on different knowledge types together with assumptions, presuppositions and implicatures on the other. Common ground and shared inferential mechanism facilitate social cognition based on socialization and the intentional-stance between interlocutors.

10. Discuss the universal tendencies of language change that can be observed in the emergence of “new Englishes” and explain how these trends contribute to the globalization of English.

The speakers of extraterritorial Englishes have to tackle various problems in their attempt to approach a standard (RP, General American or some local variety of English that can be considered standard). Some problems of pronunciation (e.g. the realization of interdental spirants) are (re)solved and some grammatical paradigms (e.g. the use of 3rd pers. sing. -s) are analogically levelled in the same or similar way by speakers of various new varieties of English. These general deviations transpire into a globalized form of English.

11. Discuss the vertical and horizontal dimensions of human categorization with reference to the classical and prototypical views as well as to the importance of basic level categories.

Explain the relevance of sufficient and necessary features for the classical view of categorization. Explain the relevance of the probabilistic occurrence of features for the prototypical view. How are these views reflected in linguistic categorization? Explain basic level categorization and the relevance of such categories in language development and language use.

12. Describe and characterize figurative, idiomatic and metaphorical uses of language in everyday discourse.

This question deals with the “literal – loose – figurative continuum” in the mental lexicon, only to demonstrate that in everyday language production literal meanings (with their lexical meanings acknowledged) get used in non-literal contexts in which collocations, constructions, idioms and idiomatic expressions, formulaic expressions and different types of figures of speech acquire additional or modified meanings. The analysis can show that metonymic and metaphorical meaning structures are part of the everyday procedure of meaning extension.

13. Explain possible applications of corpora in applied linguistics.

Discuss the unique features of corpus linguistics. Describe corpora that you are familiar with and relate them to the question. Discuss how this area can be researched.

### **Group C for students of the specialization track in English literature**

1. Describe the nature, significance and social context of oral literature in Britain.

When preparing for this question you should remember that it would be hard to establish a case for the continuing existence of purely oral literature, in the interpretation of scholars like Ruth Finnegan. The exam question is really asking you to show knowledge of the various ways in which such literature can be said to take on form. It will be helpful to remember the full title of the course, which refers to orality in the pure sense investigated by Ruth Finnegan in your course literature, to orally delivered literature (Queen Elizabeth I’s speeches, pulpit sermons, comic monologues) but also to popular literature – song texts, field recordings, story-telling, etc.

2. Provide an overview of the development and most salient characteristics of either Elizabethan or Jacobean drama and illustrate your account with examples from appropriate primary sources.

Elizabethan drama in its historical context (reign of Elizabeth I). Medieval and classical antecedents that influenced the development of English Renaissance drama. Major Elizabethan dramatists (Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, William Shakespeare). The characteristics of dramatic genres of the period: tragedies, comedies (pastoral, romance, problem play), history plays. OR Jacobean drama in its historical context (reign of James I). Characteristics of dramatic genres of the period with a focus on domestic tragedy and revenge play. Shakespeare's Jacobean period, Thomas Heywood as a master of Jacobean domestic drama.

3. Provide an overview of one major trend in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century lyric poetry and illustrate your account with examples from representative primary sources.

Poetry under Henry VIII and Elizabeth I: Wyatt, Sidney, Shakespeare, Spenser. The importance of the sonnet and sonnet cycle. Adaptation and development of the sonnet form in England. OR Metaphysical poetry and its most important characteristics. The reception of Metaphysical poetry. A sketch of the oeuvre of John Donne or George Herbert. OR John Milton's early lyric works (select sonnets, *Lycidas*) Milton's ambition to create the great English epic. Features of the epic poem in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. OR The Cavalier poets. Their definition as a political and artistic group. Themes of love and loss in the poetry of Robert Herrick, Richard Lovelace, John Suckling.

4. Discuss how the form of the novel represents the cultural and national status of the rising reading public.

Recent approaches of Cultural Studies to the genre of the novel. The evolution of book trade into a profit-making machine. The subversion of the novel: parodies of the novel form. The Gothic novel. Characteristic features of the literary market and the professionalization of literature in the early modern period: readers, writers, and reviewers. The history of education, literacy, and the role of novel reading in the Victorian period. The eighteenth-century novel as a forerunner of modernist fiction.

5. Identify trends in the development of British and Irish drama along with changes in the discourse of theatre before WW II. Introduce one of these in some detail by focusing on experimental techniques in a major play.

Identify different trends in the history of British and Irish drama from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to WW II, distinguishing them with regard to their aesthetics as well as socio-cultural and theatrical context. Introduce one of them by providing more details. Choose a representative author belonging to that particular trend and discuss subject matter and dramatic technique in one of his/her plays.

6. Identify trends in the development of British and Irish drama along with changes in the discourse of theatre after WW II. Introduce one of these in some detail by focusing on experimental techniques in a major play.

Identify different trends in the history of British and Irish drama after WW II, distinguishing them with regard to their socio-cultural and theatrical context. Introduce one of them by

providing more details. Choose a representative author belonging to that particular trend and discuss subject matter and dramatic technique in one of his/her plays.

7. Discuss how postcolonial theories reflect the undermining of the narratives of British imperialism.

Outline the historical context of British imperial expansion. Give an overview of postcolonial theories by identifying the most important theorists and their concepts. With the help of a concept of your choice provide examples of the subversive critical elements of postcolonial thinking.

8. Discuss a representative piece of British literature in the context of empire and identity.

Outline the historical context of British colonisation and explain the concepts of empire within Britain, in the Scottish and Irish contexts, and outside Britain in relation to its overseas territories. Choose a canonical piece of British literature from the 18-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and discuss how it represents the different forms of post/colonial identities in the context of empire.

9. Discuss a representative piece of postcolonial literature in the context of empire and identity.

Outline the historical context of British colonisation and explain the concepts of empire within Britain, in the Scottish and Irish contexts, and outside Britain in relation to its overseas territories. Choose a canonical piece of postcolonial literatures written in the 19-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and discuss how it represents the different forms of post/colonial identities in the context of empire.

10. Identify and discuss the most important characteristics of the Gothic mode by referring to some relevant theoretical approaches.

Define the concept of the Gothic. Introduce the history and the different phases of the Gothic mode; the birth of the Gothic, shifts in the meanings and connotations in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, connections between the Gothic and romantic, Victorian Gothic, imperial Gothic, postmodern Gothic etc.

11. Introduce a representative piece of British or postcolonial Gothic literature in its socio-cultural context.

With the help of a representative piece of Gothic literature of your choice introduce the most important characteristics of the Gothic mode and relate them to the socio-cultural context of the period. In relation to the literary piece, point out the typical gothic themes and topics like haunted castle, monster, vampire, paranoia, the female Gothic, the uncanny etc.

12. Introduce a British canonical author by giving an account of his/her literary significance in its socio-cultural and artistic context. Refer to some major works and the possible critical approaches to them.

Choose a British canonical author and discuss his/her literary significance in its socio-cultural and artistic context. Introduce some major works by the author and identify the possible critical approaches to them. Applying the insights of one of the critical discourses, discuss a work of the author in some detail.

13. Discuss aspects of the reception of a chosen British writer in Hungary by referring to translations and critical works.

Students who choose this topic should first enlist the most influential historical and theoretical approaches in the field of reception studies. Next, they are expected to give an outline of the history of the Hungarian reception of a freely-chosen author including the discussion of translations and the critical reception of that author. They should also be able to evaluate some of the definitive translations made from the main works of the British writer in Hungary.