11. Information leaflet (45 minutes)

The material shown below has been adapted from the Longman AS/A2 English Language Revision Guide. Your task is to write the text of an information leaflet based on the material. The target audience are members of a young mothers’ group whose children are not yet old enough to speak. The purpose of the leaflet is to explain to them in simple terms what they can expect from their children when they begin to speak, and to give them a rough idea of the stages that children pass through when they acquire vocabulary. You should aim to write about 450-500 words.

LEXICAL AND SEMANTIC DEVELOPMENT

This section focuses on a child's acquisition of words (lexical development) and word meanings (semantic development).

Rate of acquisition
- The average child begins speaking at the end of its first year and by the age of 18 months has a vocabulary of about 50 words. By the age of two, a child usually has command of about 200 words.
- After this, there is a remarkable explosion in the child's vocabulary. Figures can only be very rough estimates, but it has been said that an average child is using around 2000 words by the age of five, and twice as many as this at seven.
- All of these figures refer to words actively used by the child. The number of words that is understood is higher at each stage - e.g. it has been estimated that at 18 months a child understands about 250 words, five times as many as it uses.
- When a word is added to a child's vocabulary, the child is not of course immediately aware of the word's full range of meanings. Further time is needed to acquire this additional knowledge.
- Children do not all develop at the same pace or in exactly the same way. There will always be differences in the ways that individual children develop.
- Acquisition of vocabulary does not 'end' at a certain age. Human beings continue hearing and learning new words throughout their lives.

First Words
- Studies have shown that there are predictable patterns in the words and types of words first acquired by children.
- A large proportion of a child's first words refer to people (mummy, daddy), familiar objects (shoes, ball) and social interaction (hello, bye).
- Nouns make up the largest class of words, followed by verbs, then adjectives. Nouns are concrete rather than abstract. It is only later, usually between the ages of five and seven, that a child begins using more general, abstract nouns.
- The first verbs the child uses are action words such as go and eat.
- Noticeably absent are words which serve only a grammatical function, even though these are very frequent in adult language (e.g. the, of, to).

Underextension
Underextension is a common semantic error made by children. It occurs when a word is given a narrower meaning than it has in adult language. An example is using the word cat for the family pet but not applying it to other cats.
Overextension
- Overextension, the opposite of underextension, is also a feature of children's early language. This occurs when a word is given a broader, more general meaning than it should have.
- Common examples include using the word daddy not just for the child's father but for other men as well, and using dog to refer to other four-legged animals (cows, horses etc.).
- Overextension occurs more frequently than underextension and is the main semantic error made by young children (when a child has a vocabulary of 50 words, it is estimated that about a third of these are likely to be over-extended).

(25 marks)

FIRST WORDS

Hearing a child begin to utter its first, hesitant words is one of the most exciting and memorable experiences a parent can have. This leaflet aims to prepare you for this key stage in your young child's life by telling you what you can expect. We will be outlining how a 'typical' child's vocabulary usually develops. Of course, as we all know, no two children are exactly the same and there is no such thing as a completely 'typical' child. Whether acquiring language skills or other social skills, individual children's learning progresses at different rates. So if your child seems to be developing more slowly than described here, don't worry - you'll almost certainly find that they'll soon start to catch up!

WHEN WILL MY CHILD START TO SPEAK?

The average child starts to speak at the age of about 12 months. As time passes, more words are steadily acquired: by 18 months typical children have a vocabulary of about 50 words and by the time they are two this has increased to 200 words. After that there's a positive explosion of knowledge: it's been estimated that the average five year old uses about 2,000 words and the average seven year old twice that number. If you try to imagine learning that many words from a foreign language you'll realise how impressive this is!

WHAT KIND OF THINGS WILL MY CHILD SAY?

Researchers have found predictable patterns in the first words spoken by children. Often they will be words that refer to people ('mummy', 'daddy'), familiar objects ('shoes', 'ball') and simple actions ('eat', 'sit'). They're also likely to use words that help them to interact with others: 'bye', 'yes', 'no'. Of course, as has been said every individual child is different and you may well be surprised and delighted to find that your child comes out with some very unusual and unexpected words!

HOW MUCH OF WHAT I AM SAYING CAN MY CHILD UNDERSTAND?

So far we have been talking about words that are actively used (that is, actually spoken) by a child. But at each stage the number of words that is understood is higher. For example, it has been estimated that at 18 months a child understands about 250 words - four times as many as it uses.

WHAT KINDS OF MISTAKES WILL MY CHILD MAKE?

As with many things in life, learning to speak is a kind of trial-and-error process. Mistakes are inevitable, and often they can be very amusing. Two kinds of mistakes are especially common. Sometimes children limit the meaning of a word, only using it in certain situations: an example is using the word 'cat' for the family pet but not applying it to other cats. The other mistake is doing the opposite - giving a word a broader meaning than it ought to have. We've all met children who call every man they see 'daddy'!
WHEN WILL MY CHILD STOP ACQUIRING NEW WORDS?

Never! We continue hearing and learning new words throughout our lives.

(Total marks 25)