12. Writing a commentary (45 minutes)

Write a commentary on your answer to the previous question, explaining the language choices you have made and the changes you decided to make to the original text. In your answer you might refer to such topics as: organisation and presentation of material; address to reader; vocabulary; grammar. (25 marks)

In adapting the material I was given, my most important considerations were audience, purpose and genre. The audience for the original text were A level English Language students. My audience were young mothers, who could not be expected to have any pre-existing knowledge of linguistics. It was therefore necessary to simplify the text and to avoid difficult technical terms wherever possible. I also needed to remember that my audience would be most likely to appreciate a text that was informative, but which succeeded in presenting this information in a lively and interesting way. This was linked to my thoughts about genre. I am aware of some of the conventions associated with leaflets, and wanted to make sure the content of my leaflet, and the way it was presented, were interesting, accessible and useful. Finally, the purpose of my leaflet was to inform young mothers about aspects of children's language acquisition that would be relevant to their own experiences.

The comments that follow address in turn the four topics referred to in the question.

**Organisation and presentation of material**
I have given the leaflet a simple title ('First Words') and have then divided the material that follows into a series of short sections. The opening paragraph is an introduction to the leaflet as a whole, and would be in bold print. I would also use a larger font size for this section. Each of the remaining sections is headed by a question, which is then answered in the paragraph below. I think this makes the material more accessible to young mothers than the more formal headings ('Underextension', 'Overextension') used in the original text. The order of the topics loosely follows the original text, though the point about people continuing to learn a new vocabulary throughout their lives is moved to the end. I think this is sensible as this section looks forward to the future adult life of children. The change also means that the leaflet ends with a short, memorable point.

**Address to reader**
The original text adopts an impersonal approach and is in the third person throughout. I have addressed the reader more directly, with frequent use of the second person pronouns 'you' and 'your'. I have targeted the individual reader even more specifically in the references to 'your child'. This makes the approach more personal and more friendly. The use of the first person pronoun 'we' (as in 'we've all met...') has a similar effect, and encourages a feeling of solidarity between writer and reader. Each of the section headings is in the first person, as if the reader is asking each question (e.g. 'When will my child start to speak?'). This is again a way of involving the reader.

**Vocabulary**
Here the main requirement was to simplify the original text. I have avoided technical terms such as 'underextension', 'overextension', 'semantic', and 'grammatical function'. I decided to omit the discussion of abstract and concrete nouns. I tried instead to use vocabulary that was both simple and relatively informal. Occasionally the language is quite conversational ('don't worry') and the use of contractions ('don't, 'you'll', 'they're' and so on) also prevents the tone becoming too formal. At the same time, as the purpose of the leaflet is to give information about quite a complex topic the vocabulary is in some places inevitably quite formal: 'vocabulary', 'limit the meaning' and 'acquired language skills' are examples of this.
Grammar
I have generally tried to keep the sentences quite short, and have avoided long, complex sentences. In order to achieve this I have occasionally begun sentences with connectives (as in 'But at each stage…') rather than combine the sentence with the previous one. As the text is an information leaflet, it is not surprising that most of the sentences are declarative sentences. As explained above, each section is headed by an interrogative sentence. I have also included several exclamatory sentences, which contribute to the lively, informal tone (e.g.'We've all met children who call every man they see 'daddy'!

(Total marks 25)