

AS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Component 2: Language Varieties
Report on the Examination

7701
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General

This was the first sitting of 7701/2 and examiners reported a range of successful approaches to the different questions on the paper and a wide base of knowledge.

The assessment objectives on this paper are important for students and teachers to understand, and while AO2 ("Demonstrate critical understanding of concepts and issues relevant to language use.") is the main AO on this paper, with 40 of the available 70 marks, AO1 and AO5 are also important as they frame this understanding and help to present it to readers in different forms.

AO2 appeared to be taught effectively in many centres, with students drawing on a range of studies, theoretical models and wider ideas about language study. One particularly pleasing element of many students' work was the willingness to draw on their own local studies or class work (particularly when addressing Question 2) and when presented academically and linguistically these were given due credit. AO2 is not just about named theorists and studies, however, so wider understanding about how language works (e.g. in terms of power dynamics, mode and situation, social expectations and interaction in communication) all proved useful in many of the stronger responses.

AO1 on 7701/2 is less about language analysis (as it is on 7701/1) and more about accuracy of writing, the ability to use an academic and linguistic register (including the appropriate use of linguistic terminology) and - crucially for Questions 1 and 2 - how well a student can focus on the question and structure a logical and coherent line of argument. Answers which failed to address the "Discuss the idea that..." prompt or which just focused on the stimulus data were unlikely to score very highly on AO1.

AO5, which is only assessed at AS on this component, is about "expertise and creativity in the use of English to communicate in different ways". For Question 3, which asked students to write an opinion article, this AO required students to make their linguistic knowledge accessible and engaging to non-specialist readers. If the audience for Questions 1 and 2 is an academic one where displaying technical understanding of language, a grasp of key terms and knowledge of research are important, then the audience for Question 3 requires these same ideas but transformed in a way that allows non-specialists to understand it. For many students, this was perhaps the toughest AO and the one that might require the most preparation for the next series.

Question 1

Assessment objectives for Question 1:

AO1:

Apply appropriate methods of language analysis, using associated terminology and coherent written expression (10 marks)

AO2:

Demonstrate critical understanding of concepts and issues relevant to language use (20 marks)

Question 1 asked students to "discuss the idea that language can affect people's view of social groups" and provided Text A which was an editorial introduction to Girl Talk magazine, aimed at young girls.

Students responded in a variety of useful ways to this task. Some looked at a representation angle and considered the ways in which language shapes perceptions of groups, drawing on the data to

discuss how young girls were being represented in the text before moving on to other social groups. Others concentrated on the language used by different social groups and how perceptions of those groups might be affected by their language use. There was also some really interesting and well-supported discussion of youth sociolect, the in-group language of online gaming and musical subcultures, occupational groups and the language used to express group identity. Some students were less successful in their approach to this question and saw the gender element of the Girl Talk text as a chance to offload everything they had revised about gender and interaction. Where this was relevant to how language affected people's views of female or male groups, this was credited, but in many cases such an approach led students into unproductive territory.

Successful answers:

- Addressed the task and defined 'social groups' in a way that allowed them to open up different areas for discussion
- Considered how language is important in creating and shaping perceptions of individuals and groups
- Considered how the language used by different groups often shapes perceptions of those groups
- Saw the potential in Text A to address issues of social group-related language use (young girls, pre-teens/teenagers, young feminists, social media users as social groups, for example)
- Drew on studies about attitudes to language use, such as matched guise experiments
- Referred to research such as William Labov's Martha's Vineyard study which examined how language use expresses different aspects of identity and choices over group allegiances and solidarity
- Considered aspects of social class and background
- Understood social stereotypes and challenged them
- Discussed how language can be used to express allegiance to, or distance from, social groups
- Explored performance and choices in language styles, referring to style-shifting and/or code-switching
- Made reference to examples from the text (or their own examples) where language was used to address a particular group and identify with members of it (eg an abbreviation such as GT, or the prominent use of the hashtag in Text A)
- Used linguistic terms such as direct address, pronouns, adjectives, synthetic personalisation, accommodation, sociolect, convergence and divergence to describe language use
- Understood the voice being created in Text A and how it was designed to empower a social group.

Less successful answers:

- Analysed Text A as if it were a Paper 1 text, with no reference to the "Discuss..." task
- Described the graphology of Text A without reference to details of language
- Struggled to define what they meant by 'social groups'
- Treated the question as an opportunity to discuss gender and interaction without reference to the wider task

- Made non-linguistic references to 'chavs' or 'road men' and the perceived deficiencies of these groups' language use
- Recycled popular stereotypes about language use without linguistic comment
- Applied a deficit model to the language of different social groups, describing such varieties as 'incorrect', 'improper' or 'wrong'.

Question 2

Assessment objectives for Question 2:

AO1:

Apply appropriate methods of language analysis, using associated terminology and coherent written expression (10 marks)

AO2:

Demonstrate critical understanding of concepts and issues relevant to language use (20 marks)

Question 2 offered a task that asked students to "Discuss the idea that where someone comes from affects the language they use". The data in Figure 1 was a form, filled in by someone from Teesside, used to find out words a person uses when talking about people.

The examples on the form gave students opportunities to discuss regional dialect lexis (and in a few cases, phonology and grammar). Many students also referred to examples from their own localities, which is to be encouraged in questions like this.

Successful answers:

- Addressed the "idea" in the task, not just the data in Figure 1
- Defined "where someone comes from" as being related to one or more of the following: region, locality, nationality, social class, family background
- Focused primarily on one or more of these areas before moving on to wider variables
- Were clear in their understanding and use of key terms such as dialect, accent, idiolect, Standard and non-standard English, Received Pronunciation, sociolect, famillect, slang and jargon
- Were able to spell the key terms above accurately
- Commented on a range of lexical, phonological, grammatical and discourse-pragmatic features of language variation
- Used accurate descriptions of word classes (eg adjectives, nouns and possessive determiners), grammatical features (eg multiple negation, subject – verb agreement, plural marking), phonological features (eg glottal stops, long and short vowel sounds, th-fronting/ stopping)
- Considered language users' own choices about language styles and speakers' performance of their identities
- Examined convergence and divergence (communication accommodation theory) and considered whether the form being used for the data gathering task might have encouraged more deliberate divergence from Standard English
- Made reference to other variables, such as class, age, gender, social group, ethnicity, sexuality and individual identity as potential factors in affecting language use
- Made use of studies and research, including the following:

- Malcolm Petyt – Bradford
 - Peter Trudgill – Norwich
 - William Labov – New York and Martha’s Vineyard
 - Jenny Cheshire – Reading
 - Sue Fox, Jenny Cheshire, Paul Kerswill & Eivind Tøgersen – Multicultural London English
 - David Rosewarne – Estuary English
 - Gary Ives - Bradford schools study
 - Howard Giles – matched guise capital punishment experiment
 - Dixon, Mahoney and Cocks - matched guise Birmingham accents
 - Kevin Watson – Liverpool English
 - Universities of Cambridge, Zurich and Bern - English Dialect App (and associated news stories from 2016)
- Made use of students’ and centres’ own local and personal case studies
 - Showed understanding of how accents and dialects are changing, due to the influence of migration, media and technology.

Less successful answers:

- confused accent, dialect and slang
- conflated Standard English and Received Pronunciation
- used deficit models when discussing varieties of English, talking about 'incorrect', 'lazy' or 'broken' English
- were imprecise in their descriptions of particular varieties
- failed to use examples from either Figure 1 or their own studies
- talked about other variables without addressing the actual task
- spent too long discussing attitudes to variation without looking at variation itself.

Question 3

Assessment objectives for Question 3:

AO2:

Demonstrate critical understanding of concepts and issues relevant to language use (20 marks)

AO5:

Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English to communicate in different ways (20 marks)

Question 3 required students to discuss the issues surrounding claims that women and men use language differently, in the form of an opinion article. As discussed above, the marks for AO5 are awarded for expertise and creativity here, so central to a good AO5 mark is the ability to shape material for a non-specialist audience, making language ideas accessible and understandable to those who have not studied English language or linguistics.

Examiners reported many excellent responses to this task, with some witty, fluent and thoroughly engaging writing. Many students had obviously made use of effective style models and were able to convey their understanding of the appropriate form and style in their work for the exam. However, examiners also reported that a significant minority of students wrote essay-like

responses here and appeared to have been under-prepared for a task of this nature. Some examiners also reported whole centre approaches to this task where nearly all students produced very similar pieces to a pre-prepared template. While this approach can support some students, it can also disadvantage more able students who would benefit from a more individual approach.

Where students produced really strong responses, these were often characterised by sound and detailed knowledge of language, informing the reader with clarity and skill of the main claims about female and male language styles and not assuming prior knowledge of the topic (or the stimulus text). Structural devices such as an overarching narrative (a train journey, a family meal, a work incident) or an extended metaphor often helped, as did well-chosen scenarios, anecdotes and cultural reference points. Some of the very best work was characterised by wit and wordplay in the headline ("Barack Obam**err** versus Kim Kardashi**um**") while the weakest work misjudged the register entirely ("What a Load of Sh*t" - our asterisk).

Many examiners reported students writing fluent, accurate and well-crafted pieces, but many also reported students who struggled with basic spelling, punctuation, sentence construction and coherent expression; students would be advised to allow time to proofread and re-read their piece for meaning, and perhaps consider whether or not a non-specialist reader (their dad, their older sister, a friend not studying English Language) would hope to make sense of what they have written.

Successful answers:

- Wrote in the form and style of an opinion article
- Stated an intended audience, often with a clear indication of where the text would be likely to appear (eg The Guardian *Comment is Free*, Cosmopolitan Magazine, Mail Online, Slate.com, *Indie Voices* on The Independent website)
- Showed understanding of how opinion articles often put forward clear, well-supported positions on topics rather than opinionated rants
- Showed awareness of the non-specialist reader's needs (eg glossing technical terms, introducing linguists, offering examples of language features)
- Showed evidence of a well-planned response
- Shaped material in the article to engage and address readers' needs and interests (eg using scenarios, metaphors, cultural reference points and anecdotes that allowed readers to relate to the topic and the 'voice' of the author)
- Used sub-editorial features effectively to organise and marshal material (eg headline, stand first/strapline, appropriate captions and subheadings, links to other articles, byline)
- Made use of the stimulus material in a way that did not assume prior knowledge of the text
- Wrote an effective introduction and conclusion
- Wrote accurately, with clear expression
- Wrote with a clear, sustained voice
- Varied style and structure to manipulate tone and engage the reader
- Adopted an appropriate register that was neither too academic and essay-like, nor too casual and informal
- Showed a sense of direction to the overall argument, using signposting devices and clear structural elements
- Made reference to academic research in an accessible way
- Informed as well as entertained

- Moved beyond deficit, dominance and difference to consider diversity models of communication (citing the work of Janet Hyde and Deborah Cameron, among others)
- Assessed different ideas and models
- Challenged claims about female and male speech as homogeneous styles
- Showed awareness of other factors – age, occupation, situation, power and status, for example

Less successful answers:

- Wrote essays
- Wrote essays with occasional address to the reader
- Failed to identify a target audience, or identified one that was either too broad to be meaningful (adults 18-70) or too narrow or specialist to be realistic (AS English Language students or Linguistics students)
- Adopted an extremely informal and inappropriately colloquial register (often with swear words)
- Relied solely on the stimulus material about *umm* and *err*
- Talked generally about social and gender roles, without referring explicitly to language
- Wrote extensively about how language represents gender
- Assumed too much prior knowledge on the part of readers
- Made sweeping and unsupported generalisations about female and male speech styles
- Name-dropped without any explanation of studies, concepts or research
- Name-dropped using only the first names of researchers and/or theorists
- Dismissed linguistic research out of hand and relied on “common sense”
- Struggled to articulate ideas about language study
- Lacked control of expression, sentence boundaries, spelling and punctuation

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.