
AS LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE

7701/2: Language Varieties
Report on the Examination

7701
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General Comments

It is clear that centres are generally preparing students well for this paper. Many responses showed a clear and wide-ranging understanding of a range of relevant linguistic theories and concepts, and students were aware of the skills they needed to demonstrate on this paper. There were very few missed questions or rubric infringements. Occasionally, students mis-read the paper and answered both essay questions in section A or used the stimulus data for question 1 or 2 to produce the article required for question 3.

As ever, Section A assessed AO1 and AO2. For AO1, students were rewarded for writing a discursive essay. This is assessed in terms of accuracy of expression and ability to structure and signpost an argument. While written accuracy was generally good, there was a small minority of students who struggled to produce correctly spelled, punctuated and paragraphed work, all of which hindered their attainment in AO1.

AO2 is assessed in both section A and B of the exam paper. Students are rewarded for their ability to select appropriate conceptual and theoretical knowledge and apply this to the specific question focus. For all three questions, data is provided as a springboard to access the focus of the question. Students who do not move away from the data provided were unable to access the higher levels of the mark scheme as they must demonstrate understanding of ideas and theories that move beyond the information on the exam paper.

Section B also assesses AO5, with students asked to produce lively and engaging journalistic writing on a linguistic theme. Some students wrote interesting pieces of work, but failed to include any references to language study, limiting their AO2 attainment. Conversely, a small minority of students wrote an academic essay for this question, thus limiting their AO5 attainment. One of the skills assessed here is the ability to transform academic material into a form that would be suitable for a non-specialist audience. Students who recognised this and who explicitly stated their intended audience tended to be more successful.

Question 1

In this series, students were asked to ‘discuss the idea that people speak distinctive varieties of English in different parts of the United Kingdom.’ The data provided was a dialect map looking at the three words (dinner, supper or tea) that people used to describe their evening meal.

The vast majority of students were able to move beyond the dialect map to consider wider issues relating to dialect and regional varieties of English, including accents. A range of relevant theorists were covered, with Labov’s work in New York and Martha’s Vineyard proving to be very popular. Cheshire’s work in Reading, Gary Ives in Bradford, Trudgill’s Norwich study and Rob Drummond’s study of MLE and MUBE also featured in many responses.

Some students struggled to find the balance between making a range of points and demonstrating a detailed understanding of ideas in this question. Little credit can be given for listing a series of theorists and better answers selected a smaller number of practitioners and covered their findings in more detail, linking back to the idea of distinctive varieties of English.

Most students were able to see that while the question initially directed students to consider regional varieties of English, they were also able to move beyond this to consider the impact of class and other non-regional factors such as occupational or situational variation. At the highest

level of the mark scheme, students were able to take a more conceptual approach and discuss ideas of performativity and group identity, seeing how a range of factors intermingled to create individual linguistic identities.

More successful answers:

- used terminology accurately and illustrated their argument with specific examples from study or their own experience
- selected relevant theorists and showed detailed understanding of their work, linking concepts and ideas to arrive at a conclusion about how important geography was in forming the linguistic choices of an individual
- built and developed an argument, rather than treating the ideas and concepts covered as existing in isolation from each other
- moved beyond geographical variation to consider how gender, social class, age, occupation and a plethora of other variables combine to create the ways that individuals speak.

Less successful answers:

- made vague references to language studies or miscredited findings (for example, Labov carried out work in Cheshire)
- made little attempt to develop a clear and focused line of argument
- wrote briefly and sometimes inaccurately, with answers limited to the springboard data and with no development beyond this.

Question 2

Question 2 was attempted infrequently, with only about 10% of students attempting this question. The data was an extract from a comic strip from *The Beano* and students were asked to 'discuss the idea that speech and writing are two different ways of using language.'

Students were less confident when applying their learned knowledge to this question and some struggled to move beyond the stimulus material at all.

Those who performed well on this question were able to consider the idea that speech and writing are not binary opposites, but exist on a continuum and have elements of overlap. This idea was supported with examples from the comic strip provided and then examples from their own experiences, recognising that Text A was both written and spoken simultaneously. Some considered mode in detail and linked this to ideas from their own study, considering how we live in an increasingly multi-modal world.

Occasionally, students performed a written analysis of the comic strip, something more appropriate to a Paper 1 question, and it was difficult to credit such responses anywhere other than at the lower end of the mark scheme.

More successful answers:

- clearly considered differences between speech and writing and contextual factors that might influence choices
- considered the ways in which speech is both vocal and auditory
- developed the idea that writing and speech can each take a range of different forms.

Less successful answers:

- analysed the comic strip in detail but without saying very much about speech and/or writing
- made simplistic observations about the difference between speech and writing, with little link to AS-Level study of concepts and ideas.

Question 3

Students were provided with the back cover of a book, *Himglisch and Femalese*. They were asked to write an article in which they discussed the idea that men and women speak in different ways and do not understand each other.

This question requires students to write informatively, but also to creatively adapt ideas from linguistic study into a form that would be accessible and engaging for a non-specialist audience. Students are also asked to state their chosen audience, and those who select a specific audience (an article for The Guardian or The Daily Mail tend to be the most popular) and tailor their writing accordingly tend to write more convincing pieces.

There were some commendable and creative uses of language, deploying extended metaphors to lend shape and structure to the article as a whole. Sub-editorial features such as a clear headline, strapline and other conventions of their chosen publication were often well used.

While the question initially invited students to discuss ideas related to gender difference theory, better answers moved beyond this to consider ideas such as deficit and dominance models, all supported with reference to the work of relevant theorists. While the findings of Jespersen, Tannen, Coates, Zimmerman & West and Gray featured prominently in answers, it was pleasing to see some students also consider more contemporary ideas. Some students considered Butler's ideas about gender performativity in detail and there were an increasing number of responses that engaged with and challenged the notion of gender as an important factor in creating language choices. Challenges to the ideas expressed in the stimulus material, including links to sexuality and non-binary identities were often handled well and used in interesting and thought-provoking ways.

There is still a minority of students who did not use the stimulus data well in this question, basing all their examples in the article from the material provided. While the data offers a starting point for the article, better answers were illustrated with ideas and examples that moved well beyond the material provided. As noted for question 2, there was also a small number of students who wrote an article that analysed the stimulus text, commenting on its graphology and use of language. These answers invariably restrict themselves to the lower levels of the mark scheme for both AO2 and AO5 as this is not an acceptable approach to this question.

More successful answers:

- selected an appropriate audience for their piece of writing and clearly linked their point of view to the chosen publication
- used appropriate subeditorial features
- illustrated their points with examples from outside the provided text
- offered a range of challenge to the difference idea expressed in the stimulus text, discussing the notion of gender and its place in the modern world
- made clear reference to relevant linguistic concepts and theories, suitably processed for a non-specialist audience.

Less successful answers:

- relied heavily or exclusively on the material provided
- made confused references to case studies, suggesting that Jespersen, Tannen et al were all operating at the same time
- wrote an essay-like response
- struggled to maintain an appropriate tone for their stated audience
- failed to state any audience at all and produced highly generalised writing.

Key advice to students from this series

For all questions, check you have understood the specific focus of the question and show in your answer that you have understood the complexity of the language issue.

Signal, signpost and develop your argument. Guide your reader through your ideas.

The data provided is there to offer some initial focus, but always move beyond this to consider wider ideas and implications. Better answers are always supported with a number of examples from wider fields of reference.

Plan in detail and leave time to proofread and correct.

Remember that this is an English Language exam and answers should be supported by detailed reference to relevant concepts, theories and case studies.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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