
A-LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE

7702/2 Language diversity and change
Report on the Examination

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General

The work of students in this fourth full summer series of the specification showed continuity with what had gone before in terms of both strengths and weaknesses. Questions provided students of all levels with opportunities to show what they had learned about language, their views and arguments and their skills as writers. The tasks proved to be of a similar level of demand to those that had gone before. Examiners reported seeing rather more incomplete scripts than previously.

Key messages

- Students must identify the key words in the Section A ideas for evaluation and consider carefully what they imply.
- Students need to evaluate case studies and examples of their own to access Level 5 in Section A.
- Students need to focus firstly on the actual ideas about language being conveyed in the Question 3 texts.
- Students need to use these specific ideas from the Question 3 texts for their Question 4 response and critique them.
- Students need to show knowledge of linguistic ideas and research in Question 4 and offer their reader an informative and educative, as well as entertaining, read.

Section A

In Section A students were presented with a choice of two discussion essays. Each question offered students an idea about language diversity and change which they needed to evaluate. Question 1 was chosen slightly more frequently than Question 2. Statistical analysis suggests that the two questions were of equal demand. There was little evidence of students' answers being affected by the other question. Question 2 was more prone to the influence of questions from previous papers.

AO1

In Questions 1 and 2 students were assessed on their ability to use appropriate terminology and coherent written expression. Most students wrote in paragraphs with clear topics, though a minority tended to include several unrelated ideas in each paragraph. Most referred to the key terms in the question in order to structure their answer and create a line of argument. In the most successful essays discussion of the question's key words was woven throughout as an integral part of the evaluation of case study evidence. Better responses also used skilful discourse markers to knit together their stages of thought. Less successful answers used discourse markers that did not actually communicate logical links between sections. Less successful responses tagged on a statement at the end of a paragraph to tie their knowledge to the question focus.

AO2

Students were also assessed on their knowledge and understanding of concepts and issues in language study. Most students were very well prepared with lots of case studies and theories which they could discuss in their answers. Some students could explain a variety of different views which enabled them to move into Level 4. A major discriminator was the extent to which students could use examples to explore and evaluate these different views. Many students could explain different views (Level 4) but could not assess their validity (Level 5). Another key discriminator was the degree to which students thought about the implications of the words in the questions.

Question 1

Question 1 focussed on language diversity. Students were asked to evaluate the idea that women's talk is naturally cooperative whereas men's talk is naturally competitive (AO2). They then had to express their views in a coherent argument using linguistic terminology (AO1).

Key discriminators were whether students could illustrate and evaluate different views of women's and men's talk.

Most students could illustrate the difference approach raised by the question which placed them in Level 3. Many answers were able to explore deficit and dominance views which moved them into Level 4. Fewer were able to discuss the effect of factors other than gender on people's talk and the idea that gender is performative.

More successful answers:

- identified the idea offered by the question as typical of the difference approach
- offered a range of other binary oppositions formulated by difference approaches such as report vs rapport talk
- referred to the ideas and research of Tannen, Holmes, Coates, Fishman
- exemplified precise language behaviours characterised as male and female and explored their use
- linked academic research in the difference tradition with popular linguistic texts by John Gray and others
- identified other approaches such as the deficit and dominance views of gendered talk
- cited the ideas and research of Jespersen, Lakoff, Zimmerman and West
- interrogated the word 'naturally' and the implied biological determinism
- discussed the idea that women and men are socialised differently and may even be different sub-cultures
- challenged the biological determinism implied by 'naturally'
- challenged the binary thinking, polarisation and universalisation of the proposition in the question
- challenged the treatment of women and men as heterogeneous groups
- explored how variables other than gender might affect language use, often citing the very early work of O'Barr and Atkins
- discussed Janet Hyde's gender similarities arguments
- explored ideas about the performativity of gender roles
- criticised the methodologies of early research and considered how things might have changed over time
- had an overview of the development of approaches over time.

Less successful answers:

- could only agree with proposition in the question
- conflated ideas of difference and dominance
- conflated ideas of dominance and deficit
- confused researchers and what they actually researched
- relied on anecdotal evidence.

Question 2

Question 2 focussed on language change. Students were asked to evaluate the idea that language change is a natural process that is neither good nor bad. (AO2). They then had to express their views in a coherent argument using linguistic terminology (AO1).

A major discriminator was whether students could evaluate specific examples of language use and explore how they could be seen as natural, good or bad.

Weaker answers spent a long time discussing key dates and events in the history of the English language without addressing the terms of the question. Some answers would explain an example of language change and then simply tag on a view that this was natural, good or bad. Some answers focussed on issues of the inevitability or controllability of language change at the expense of the terms of the question. There was a frequent tendency to treat inevitable and natural as synonyms. Many students rejected the idea that change could be good or bad and just needed to be accepted. War, slavery and invasion and their linguistic effects were often seen as natural and to be accepted. A minority of students challenged the idea of the analyst of language as a neutral observer and showed a detailed evaluation of the agency of human beings in the processes of change.

More successful answers:

- demonstrated a synthesised overview of the competing forces and agencies driving change
- evaluated specific examples of changes and considered the extent to which they could be seen as natural, good or bad
- characterised the process of change by using the Potential, Implementation, Diffusion and Codification model
- showed knowledge of how changes were implemented, exemplifying a range of word formation processes
- explained various models of diffusion including wave models and S-curves
- frequently used texting and the effect of technology as a case study to evaluate the process of change
- often looked at the lexical and semantic changes produced by the pandemic and evaluated these
- used Crystal's tides metaphor as an example of seeing change as a natural process, adapting to shifting circumstances
- gave lexical examples of the development of new words and the obsolescence of others to illustrate Crystal's tide metaphor
- looked at metaphors of language change as a kind of evolution which enabled some to see it as a natural process while others used it to evaluate good and bad changes in terms of the survival and longevity
- explained Aitchison's characterisation of prescriptivist worries about language change
- used a range of examples of initialisms, clippings and acronyms to illustrate arguments that changes were bad and the product of laziness
- used Deutscher's principle of economy to argue that such changes were in fact good and added to language's efficiency
- explored negative attitudes to the formation of pidgins and creoles as broken Englishes, lazy, grammatically incorrect

- offered counterviews of these varieties as optimal and creative communication systems that were the products of their social and historical contexts
- used Singlish as a case study to explore agencies of language change and the cultural contexts of their evaluation
- examined whether the spread of Americanisms and US English could be seen as cultural imperialism
- showed how worries about language were often signifiers of wider social and cultural attitudes and concerns
- contrasted ‘infectious disease’ explanations of change with wave models and looked at the receptiveness of some people to linguistic changes
- examined functional theory and the idea that language change is motivated by needs
- examined random fluctuation theory and discussed whether random changes could be seen as natural or could be evaluated
- examined cultural transmission and sub-stratum explanations of language change and evaluated changes caused and the attitudes to such changes
- examined language reform projects and examples as changes designed to be beneficial, though frequently attacked as ‘woke’ or political correctness gone mad
- considered other forms of benign prescriptivist programmes for change such as the Plain English Campaign
- challenged descriptivist views of change as natural and inevitable and challenged the non-judgemental descriptivist stance
- explored the agencies and social forces behind language change and questioned the idea of ‘natural’ when looking at the effects of invasion and slavery on language change.

Less successful answers:

- saw language change as a natural and inevitable process that just happens and is not subject to evaluation
- offered lengthy accounts of the history of English
- wrote at great length about Caxton, Lowth and Swift, often with limited pertinent discussion
- offered pre-learned and well-rehearsed explanations of prescriptivism vs descriptivism with limited discussion of examples and the issues raised by the question.

Section B**Question 3**

Question 3 focussed on discourses about standard or ‘correct’ English

Students were expected to explore the two texts systematically by describing linguistic features (AO1) and analysing how they created meanings (AO3) in order to evaluate the ways the texts represented ideas about standard and ‘correct’ English, showing connections between the texts as parts of a wider discourse about status, class and prestige (AO4).

Both Text A and B provided students across the ability range with accessible material that enabled them to demonstrate their skills in exploring how discourses work.

AO1

The large majority of students understood that they were expected to describe the linguistic features in the texts which they were analysing. Some still only got marks of 3 or 4 for AO1 and did not seem to recognise the need to describe language features as part of their method of analysis.

Generally, the features described were salient and significant for the construction of representations. In some responses linguistic features were identified every time a quotation was made but with little sense of how this feature was significant to the way representations and meanings were being created. Some answers demonstrated a language feature-led technique which was not helpful in achieving Level 4 on AO3 or AO4.

Precise linguistic terminology was often in evidence with lots of references to verb types, with useful comments on mental and material processes. Modal verbs were frequently identified and well analysed. There was good exemplification of sentence and phrase types, though the identification of the precise extent of a clause was not always clear. Issues with pronoun person were still relatively frequent. Many students did not look at sentence and clause features. Of those who did, not all were able to use such descriptions to explore how the feature contributed to the way the texts were conveying meanings and representations.

Some things students could profitably address are:

- accurate labelling of word classes
- identifying and showing the exact extent of a verb phrase
- what counts as post-modification in phrase analysis
- identifying which exact words constitute a clause
- distinguishing subordinating and co-ordinating conjunctions from co-ordinate and subordinate clauses
- clarifying what the word discourse means in the context of this question.

AO3 and AO4

Students were generally clear about the purpose of the task and there were few general textual analyses. Almost all recognised the need to compare how the texts were part of a discourse about standard or 'correct' English.

There were lots of strong responses which recognised that AO4 is at the heart of this task about discourses by looking at the repetition of ideas across texts and their construction of social identities and reader positions.

The most successful answers addressed all the AOs in an integrated way. Most did this throughout their answer, though less successful students confined their comparison to a paragraph at the end or wrote separate paragraphs about similar aspects text by text. Almost all compared the shared focus on standard or 'correct English.'

Many reached Level 3 on AO4 because they compared the use of sentence functions, pronouns and other features of language. The answers placed in Level 4 could link language with ideas about standard and 'correct' English. Often students recognised discourses about language and status, class and prestige. They also recognised discourses about correctness and superiority. Some also identified the way standard language was represented as a tool for levelling up and social equality.

There was a clear increase in the number of students looking at how the producers of the text created self-representations which affected how the text's ideas were received by a reader. There

was also a lot of work on how the texts positioned a potential reader and used language to shape their views. Modality was frequently looked at. It was clear that students were familiar with past mark schemes and the conceptual framework of this task.

However, many responses leapt to these analyses without actually engaging with what the texts had to say about standard or ‘correct’ English. They could identify, for example, that copular verbs in declarative simple sentence with parallel structures conveyed ideas with great certainty — but omitted to discuss what the actual ideas and views were.

Some students had difficulties disentangling the different views within the texts. The best answers had a clear understanding of how Garner used Hodson’s views to further his own argument and considered how far the Heffer and Kamm contributions were treated as equal.

More successful answers:

- placed the texts within prescriptivist and descriptivist discourses
- analysed discourses of correctness, status, communicability, social advancement and mobility, levelling up
- identified and compared the different views of Garner and Hodson in Text A and Heffer and Kamm in Text B
- compared the structures of the two texts: how Garner raises the argument about teaching standard English, looks at the counter-argument and then returns to his proposition; the dialogic duel between Heffer and Kamm.
- compared and analysed Garner’s definition of standard English and Heffer’s definition of correct English
- challenged Garner’s claim that ‘Most of us are born into some type of dialect’ and Heffer’s claim that correct English ‘is the English from which all other dialects and patois are derived’ for their implications about the nature of standard and non-standard Englishes
- compared and analysed Garner’s and Heffer’s view that users of standard or correct English are advantaged over those who do not use them
- compared Garner’s and Heffer’s desire to give everyone access to standard or correct English to provide professional opportunity and as a process of levelling up
- compared Heffer’s representation of people who cannot use standard English as ‘inadequates’ and Garner’s view of some people being too lazy to care to learn it for their own benefit
- analysed the metaphor of judgement and imprisonment in the description of people being ‘condemned’ to use non-standard English
- explored how Garner presented Jane Hodson with respect and authority through the noun phrase in apposition with her name as part of his own self-presentation as fair and reasonable
- examined closely the verbs attributed to her and how they represented her and her position: *insists, claimed, acknowledged, argued, attacked*
- examined the semantic field of fighting (*attacked, The Duel*) that represented the conflict between views as dramatic and significant
- compared the texts’ use of hypophora as a positioning device
- explored Heffer’s definition of correct English by its users and functions
- analysed Heffer’s use of present tense copular verbs and parallel sentence structures as a highly definite and confident statement of the existence and nature of correct English
- explored Hodson’s and Kamm’s representation of linguistic rule.

Less successful answers:

- claimed that the description of Jane Hodson as a professor meant that her ideas were to be seen as trustworthy and to be believed
- confused 'correct' English and politically correct English
- paraphrased the passages' content
- quoted very rarely
- did not use methods of language analysis
- wrote at length about linguistic research rather than focussing on the passages.

Question 4

Students were asked to write an opinion article in which they assessed the ideas presented in the texts they had analysed in question 3. These texts raised issues about what constituted standard or 'correct' English and the value of their use. Students were expected to show knowledge and understanding of linguistic concepts and issues (AO2) when writing in a journalistic style for a non-specialist audience (AO5). This task asked students to take their knowledge of English Language and engage with, and intervene in, real-world debates.

This question was generally answered less effectively than the other questions on the paper. The mean mark for AO2 was significantly below the mean marks for AO2 in Section A. Many struggled to select and deploy knowledge effectively. This was often caused by a rather imprecise focus on the actual issues raised in the texts.

Nonetheless, many students recognised the need to integrate explicit linguistic knowledge into a text for a non-specialist audience. Some of the most effective responses began by explaining to their readers what the views and arguments of Garner and Heffer were before dismantling them.

A major distinguishing factor therefore was the recognition of the need to provide a satisfying level of information about the linguistic issues. There were still a few essay-like and over-academic answers, but far more very informal responses which did not inform in a satisfying way.

More successful responses focussed on a discussion of what constituted a standard language, to what extent the idea of correctness applied in a linguistic context and the nature of linguistic rules. Less successful responses wrote rather broadly about attitudes to accents or language change and found it difficult to find a clear focus for their article and develop an argument. This problem may have been exacerbated by the frequent lack of close reading for meaning in question 3 as noted above.

Almost all students this year were prepared to write an article and provided a functional headline. Many also provided engaging sub-editorial features and arresting openings, though there were fewer really telling conclusions. Many recognised the need to link their article to having read the articles in question 3. The most common device was to have found them accidentally while scrolling through the internet on a mobile.

More successful answers:

- focussed very tightly on the issues of what constituted standard or 'correct' English and debates about their teaching
- cited the ideas of Garner and Heffer so that they could challenge them

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- followed Kamm's distinction between standard and 'correct' English
 - challenged Garner's claim that 'Most of us are born into some type of dialect'
 - discussed the relationship between a 'language' and a 'dialect'
 - challenged Heffer's claim that correct English 'is the English from which all other dialects and patois are derived'
 - explained the regional origins of British standard English
 - showed knowledge of the processes of standardisation: selection, acceptance, elaboration of function, codification
 - explored processes of standardising in new Englishes
 - explained exonormative and endonormative stabilisation
 - considered the value of standard English(es) in the context of the global development of English
 - evaluated arguments about the value of native-speaker norms vs communicability in teaching and using English in global contexts
 - examined changing attitudes to RP and regional accents
 - evaluated Garner's idea of learning to be tolerant of regional variation
 - explored ideas of having a language repertoire
 - evaluated the ability or need to accommodate one's language use
 - assessed whether code-switching is a desirable response to accentism
 - explored the prescriptivist tradition of creating and imposing arbitrary linguistic rules
 - assessed the views and attitudes of the Queen's English Society as a gate-keeping organisation
 - argued this was a method of exerting power and explored the way language use can be inclusive or exclusive
 - introduced language researchers by first and last name and indicated who they were for an unfamiliar audience
 - developed a convincing persona and voice and addressed the experiences of their imagined audience
 - deployed some of the techniques they had seen at work in the texts, shaping their syntax powerfully for effect.

Less successful answers:

- re-hashed the views of Garner and Heffer and approved the need for all to use standard English
- wrote generally about language change as inevitable and natural and a good thing
- wrote generally about language variation as a good thing and the right to speak how you want
- railed intemperately against the unfairness of accentism
- confused 'correct' English and politically correct English
- let their creation of a persona and scenario take over from the conveying of linguistic ideas
- wrote in an essay format
- introduced names of language researchers without any explanation
- introduced linguistic terms and concepts without any explanation for the non-specialist reader.

Advice to students

To improve performance on this paper:

- consider the full implications of words in the idea for discussion in Section A questions
- use detailed examples to evaluate the theories and ideas referred to in Section A answers
- understand that key question verbs like ‘evaluate’ and ‘assess’ require making judgements about ideas
- spend time clarifying the meanings, attitudes and arguments in Section B texts and identifying the discourses about language they are part of
- pay attention to what the texts in Question 3 are saying as well as looking at positioning and modality
- use knowledge of language study to evaluate the specific arguments raised in Section B texts when answering Question 4
- use argument and evidence rather than assertion when writing
- address the need to provide readers with information about language and to educate them in Question 4
- challenge the ideas offered in the texts in Section B.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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