



AS

# English Language

7701/2 Language varieties

Report on the Examination

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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 need to demonstrate on this paper. There were very few missed questions or rubric infringements. Very occasionally, students answered both questions in section A, meaning they had spent time answering all three questions and the level of detail in all questions suffered as a result. There are still some students who adopt a paper 1 style approach to this paper, analysing the springboard data in terms of language used and audience. This is unhelpful and limits their overall attainment.

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 also deploying key terminology accurately and appropriately. While written accuracy was generally good, there were a small minority of students who struggled to produce correctly spelled, punctuated, and paragraphed work, all of which hindered their attainment in this assessment objective. This year, questions 1 and 2 proved equally popular.

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 did 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. The vast majority of students demonstrated at least some understanding of key concepts and theories that they had covered over the duration of the course.

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 on this question. 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 there is a connection between a person's social class and the language they use.' The data provided was an article from *Country Living*, commenting on and offering examples of class and etiquette.

The vast majority of students were able to move beyond the article to consider wider issues relating to language and class, often supported by an impressive range of theories and concepts. The work of Petyt, Cheshire, Eckert, Labov, Ives, Trudgill, Bernstein and Giles were all very popular, but students were credited for reference to a range of case studies, including more recent references to accent surveys, MLE, MUBE and the work of Drummond and Cole, for example. Better answers considered ideas such as code-switching, convergence/divergence, sociolect and idiolect and considered how views of accents and dialects impacted on notional views of class. Some students questioned the notion of class itself in 2024.

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 name-checking a long list 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 linked to class.

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 tied to different views of class.

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 different contextual factors influence perceptions of class and language
- built and developed an argument, rather than treating the ideas and concepts covered as existing in isolation from each other
- moved beyond prejudices about class and accent to consider how it could be useful to create group identity.

Less successful answers:

- made vague references to language studies or miscredited findings
- made little attempt to develop a clear and focused line of argument, writing a series of vaguely connected paragraphs.
- wrote briefly and sometimes inaccurately, with answers limited to the springboard data and with no development beyond this.

## Question 2

Question 2 asked students to ‘discuss the idea that women play a subordinate role in conversations with men.’ The data provided was a brief transcript between two men and one woman.

A range of relevant theorists were covered, such as Tannen, Zimmerman & West, Lakoff, Schulz, Holmes & Stanley, Fishman, Jespersen, O’Barr & Atkins. Better responses did not treat theorists and case studies in isolation, but combined ideas to create a more holistic view of language and its role in creating social and group identity and considered how gender was related to ideas of individual identity. Answers that were rewarded with the very top marks sometimes questioned what was meant by the word gender in 2024, looking at the ways in which this has changed since many of these theories were initially developed. Students who could offer ideas about socialisation or performativity and who looked at reasons for subordinate roles in conversations that went beyond biological sex were highly rewarded, as were those who demonstrated a clear understanding of gender as a linguistic performance.

More successful answers:

- clearly considered a range of case studies but also combined this with conceptual awareness, considering how linguistic identity is not just linked to gender, but other ideas such as context, occupation, and a whole host of social factors
- considered the ways in which ideas of subordination can be learned as part of a process of socialisation and upbringing and consider how societal views affect use of language and vice versa
- considered how language is linked to ideas of individual performativity that goes far beyond simple ideas of gender.

Less successful answers:

- listed a number of case studies with very little evidence that they had understood or internalised the work of those theorists
- made simplistic observations about the springboard data with limited evidence that students had studied any related theories or ideas. Analysing the very short data in detail tended not to yield particularly interesting results.

### Question 3

Students were provided with an extract from a newspaper article, discussing the use of appropriate language when applying for a job. They were asked to write an article in which they discussed the idea that people should adapt their language to fit different contexts.

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. A significant number of students still do not state their intended audience, or tried to avoid the processing of complex ideas for non-specialists by stating they were writing for A Level students. These are both unhelpful approaches.

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, as were clearly planned and structured answers where the closing moments echoed and revisited ideas from the start of the article.

While the springboard data was about adapting language to fit a professional, occupational context, students did not have to limit their answers to this particular area, though many chose to do so. If this was the case, then the work of Drew & Heritage, Swales and Milroy & Milroy proved to be very popular, as was Koester, with references to phatic language and the switch from work-related talk to small talk. Many students illustrated their answer with real or imagined examples of ways in which language might be adapted to fit different contexts. Some students, however, produced very general answers that covered talk at work in very general terms without any reference to any theory or concept and some misunderstood and wrote a guide to how to write a letter to apply for a job.

There are 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 is a way into the focus of the article, better answers were illustrated with ideas and examples that moved well beyond the material provided. As noted in the general introduction of this report, there were 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 restricted themselves to the lower levels of the mark scheme for both AO2 and AO5 as this is not an appropriate approach to this question.

More successful answers:

- elected 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 a wide range of examples from outside the provided text
- 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
- wrote an essay-like response, or an essay with occasional rhetorical questions inserted in an effort to engage a reader
- struggled to maintain an appropriate tone for their stated audience
- failed to state any audience at all and produced highly generic 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, whether this be a formal essay in section A or a piece of lively journalism.

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 wide range 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.