A-LEVEL

English Language

7702/1 Language, the individual and society
Report on the Examination

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General

Summer 2022 saw the first series after two years of disruption related to the global pandemic and the fourth standard series of 7702/1. Despite the upheaval for students of the last two years, examiners were extremely impressed by the quality of examination papers seen and marked, with no one question looking less securely answered than any others. Perhaps more obviously than in previous years, students were highly attuned to the demands of each question and had clearly worked hard to demonstrate how they were meeting the requirements of particular levels of performance within the mark scheme.

Section A

Section A offered students three questions, all of which were compulsory. Question 1 took the form of a frame question in which students were asked to analyse how text A used language to create meanings and representations. Question 2 asked the same question about the older text B. For question 3, students had to explore the similarities and differences in the ways that text A and text B used language. While questions 1 and 2 assessed across both AO1 and AO3 (10 and 15 marks respectively), question 3 was solely assessed for AO4 (20 marks). Prior to the examination series, advance information had been provided about the genres of texts A and B for the section A questions. Students knew that text A would be a news article and that text B would be the opening chapter of a cookbook.

Text A took the form of a Guardian online article from August 2019 about how those students going to university in September might share a kitchen amicably with other students. The article provided light-hearted guidance about how to keep relationships positive while sharing a kitchen for the first time. Text B was the opening of a cookbook which acknowledged the physical limitations of space and facilities and offered advice about how to cook successfully in a bedsitter.

As has been the case previously, examiners noticed that those students who had a clear sense of each of the texts as a whole were far more coherent in their responses to the texts for questions 1 and 2, able to see patterns of language across a whole text and making holistic comments about how the text reflected the time of writing or contextual understanding of themes that arose. While students clearly had a strong sense of what was required for AO1 and AO3, the approach to questions 1 and 2 appeared more synthesised than in previous years, with less standalone language labelling. Instead, language features were explored in relation to contextual or representational features.

Question 1

Text A, 'Ditch the rota', was both engaging and relevant to students and the topic of sharing a student kitchen was very accessible. The text provided ample opportunity for students to respond across a range of performance levels for both AO1 and AO3. Students appeared confident in discussing the writer's language choices, audience positioning and the wide range of representations present in the text (for example, parents, stereotypical students, student kitchens and the writer himself). Students had clearly been well taught and there was an impressive range of terminology used which was applied with some confidence and assurance. Given that this is the fourth standard examination series for this paper, it was clear that students had understood some of the key words which mark out higher performance. Many students clearly highlighted where they were focusing on 'representations' and referring to 'wider social context' or 'patterns' in the data, aware that these are indicators of level 4 and 5 performance.

AO1

There were straightforward comments which could be made about the image and graphology as well as ample opportunity for lexical comments. Popular features identified in responses were the use of the second person pronoun 'you', use of verbs to create imperative sentences ('ditch', 'adopt', 'avoid'), common nouns (for example in the list at the end of the article), the superlative adjective ('laziest') and use of modal auxiliary verbs (eg might). Most students showed familiarity with linguistic labels, referring to word classes precisely and often able to label clause elements accurately. There was a wide range of more challenging linguistic features in text A, allowing students to engage with clause elements, sentence types and patterning to allow for attainment in level 5. Occasionally, students led with a focus on grammatical comment and made extensive reference to sentence types and clause types, but with some errors. The grammatical focus of level 5 should not preclude students from commenting on other valuable language features within the data. Many students drew attention to the patterns of imperatives across the data or the conditional clauses which appear repeatedly throughout the text to cater for a range of different situations the reader might be in. At the lower end of performance, quite generalised labels were sometimes used or a more descriptive approach was taken with explanation of what the text was about rather than the language labels evident. This led to inevitably weaker performance for AO1.

AO3

The topic within text A was one that was clearly relatable for students and they responded to the text in some depth. Students attempted to engage with a variety of meanings and representations: stereotypical representations of students, presentation of shared kitchens and the need for collaboration. Most students responded well to the humour where there was clear focus on specific features to mock students or present heightened exaggerated examples to illustrate the pitfalls in shared kitchens. There was occasional reference to the text being intended for parents worried about their child leaving home for university. Similarly, ideas about students approaching university after two years of pandemic related isolation, or facing financial hardship, were occasionally explored, but these representations were not frequently considered. Stronger responses engaged with writer authority and/or audience positioning as anxious and in need of guidance. Some students focused on the online dimension of Text A without engaging with the content, offering description of the webpage and navigation aspects without further discussion. On the whole, most students found some meanings to comment on and discuss, where even at the lower end, there was some understanding of purposes and intended audiences for both texts.

More successful answers

- identified the way in which humour was used to mitigate the imperatives and maintain a light hearted tone even though the article itself was actually providing quite serious guidance
- recognised that the writer positioned the reader as a peace keeping student who had to negotiate with other, potentially less reasonable, students
- explored the impact of patterning across the data to reinforce the key messages around going into flat shares with a positive and collaborative mindset
- identified stereotypes about students but also recognised the realistic view that students were often unable to afford expensive food so pragmatically valued those things highly
- considered the stereotypical representation of parents who dote on their children and send them off to university with cakes

- identified semantic patterns across the text as a whole between positive and negative abstract nouns (eg harmony and peace versus disagreement and drama) to highlight the potential for student life to realise itself in either way
- demonstrated a pragmatic awareness tied in to audience positioning; for example, some students identified how the simple sentence 'Sometimes you have to let the milk go' was presupposing that the reader might be irritated by someone using their milk but encouraging to be more relaxed about such things once at university.

Areas for further development

- Some students appeared to be adding a bracket after each word quoted to specify the word class. This type of labelling was less helpful and tended to distract from the actual analysis.
- Arbitrary language labelling with no reference to the importance of those particular elements did little to support the coherent analysis of a text, particularly in relation to connected AO3 analysis.
- Sometimes students laboured the grammatical focus to the detriment of other areas of language and there was occasional confusion over clauses and phrases.
- While students often began each new paragraph by mentioning a different representation, the comments which then followed were often more straightforward. For example, 'The writer represents himself as someone who wants to offer advice to new students' is more typical of a level two response. It would benefit students to consider carefully what is actually meant by representation.
- For level five performance, responses should 'explore analysis within wider social and cultural contexts'. While this is a more modern and potentially accessible text, students seemed to offer less of this wider cultural comment. For example, recognition of the need to be thrifty as a student and the tension that this might cause was rarely explored.

Question 2

As is often the case, students found question 2 slightly more challenging. The text came from the opening of a recipe book from 1961 so was a more recent text than has appeared on papers in previous years. The topic of the text was cooking in a bedsitter and there was some humour within the text as the writer explained scenarios which might be commonplace when trying to prepare meals in a confined space. Text B offered ample opportunity for students to identify and comment on language choices and representations but there were not as many immediately straightforward elements upon which to comment (like graphology or use of questions as seen in text A). Nevertheless, students were often able to draw attention to particular word choices and their effect. A wide number of representations were referred to, but occasionally the focus on bedsitters led to misconceptions around what bedsitting was. There were some over-generalisations or potted histories offered about gender and class representation with emerging confusion around the 'respectable' versus the 'squalid' lodgings that were described.

AO1

This text provided extensive opportunity to comment on lexical features, grammatical constructions or semantic patterning across the data as a whole. Occasionally students were distracted by some lexical features like 'slut', leading to extended discussion of derogatory terms but without clear focus on representations within the text. Whilst students were able to perform across the whole range of levels for AO1, there was sometimes mislabelling of grammatical structures (or broad labelling of sentences as compound-complex or complex without a precise example) which impacted on overall AO1 performance. The focus on grammar was sometimes at the expense of precise and detailed labels that might have been more successfully applied (for example, precise

and detailed word classes like the first person pronoun 'I', modal auxiliary verb ' will', superlative adjective 'daintiest' and abstract noun, 'imagination'). Reference to patterning across the data was often an accessible way for students to meet the criteria for level five performance (for example, juxtaposition, repeated sentence structures or contrasting semantic patterns).

AO3

Responses focused on a range of different representations: landlords and landladies, someone living in a bedsitter, women at the time of writing, the different types of house where someone might lodge, other cookbooks of the time and the representation of the writer herself. Wider social and cultural representations were explored in more depth for Text B, with some interesting comments about gender roles/expectations, post-war austerity and social class factors, recognising the status of the writer in comparison with those renting bedsitters. Some students became somewhat distracted by the gender issues, drifting from analysis of the text to personal response and comment on roles of working class women. Occasionally, students assumed that in 1961 women were extremely disadvantaged, rationing was in place and some students made reference to World War II which was not a relevant historical connection.

More successful answers

- commented on patterning, particularly at the beginning of the text with successive sentences all beginning with 'It is…'
- explored the use of the first and second person pronouns 'I' and 'you' to suggest collaboration and shared experiences of the writer and reader in attempting to cook in a bedsitter
- identified the unusual collocation of common nouns 'butter', 'hairpins' and 'razor' to indicate the chaotic (and potentially dangerous!) nature of cooking in a bedsitter
- considered the impact of repeated use of parenthesis as a means for the writer to offer some humorous social commentary alongside the primary focus of encouraging readers to use the recipe book to develop their bedsitter cooking skills
- identified the discourse structure of problem and solution being offered but recognised that the solution is hinted at but not actually given within this opening chapter extract.

Areas for further development

- Some students misidentified audience and ideas surrounding class or gender.
- A number of students misunderstood the position of the person being addressed, assuming they were employed – or cooking for a husband.
- Representation of the two types of bedsitter was sometimes confused with description of the 'better' room providing the 'worse' problem. Students found it hard to identify which bedsitter the writer was suggesting was preferable.
- Grammatical comments tended to be more often confused when identifying complex and compound sentences and subordinate or relative clauses within the text.

Question 3 – AO4

This question asked students to consider the connections across texts A and B, with a focus on linguistic concepts and methods with an AO4 mark being awarded from a possible 20 marks. Performance was seen across the whole range of levels and it was evident that there was plenty of rich comparison possible. Nevertheless, this was the most challenging question for many students. Where some students responded well to both questions 1 and 2, they often struggled to match that

level of attainment for question 3. Sometimes this was due to time pressure but it was often because the links made tended to remain focused on literal connections around date of texts, audience or topic. For level three, language comparisons focused on features like the use of pronouns, modal auxiliary verbs or lists used across both texts. When the response focused primarily on these literal or language connections then attainment tended to be capped at level 3. Stronger responses operating at level 4 or above were able to compare contextual factors, representations or different approaches to communal living (collaboration versus independence) and went on to make connections between the language choices and impact in relation to context. More prominent this year was the approach of identifying similar representations or content and then linking these to different language points. This worked to some degree but felt less synthesised as a response to the comparison question. This approach sometimes led to more of a text-by-text approach, with the potential to then lose sight of the comparative aspects of the response.

More successful answers

- not only made specific language comparisons (for example use of superlative adjectives in both – 'laziest' and 'daintiest') but then considered the impact this had on the text and reader as a whole
- compared the ways in which audience was positioned in both texts and how language had been used to achieve this particular effect
- considered how cooking is represented as collaborative or independent and the ways in which both approaches might appear negatively based on the way in which the texts present those scenarios
- made neat comparisons about how humour was created within both texts and the reasons why the writer might have chosen to use humour for different purposes.

Areas for further development

- As mentioned in previous examination reports, those responses with no exemplification to support language comparisons remained somewhat unconvincing. For example, referring to how both texts used complex sentences was not a convincing comparison in itself. Stronger responses provided brief examples to support points made.
- Whilst brief language labelling is important for clear comparisons to be made, there is no AO1 mark awarded for this question so some students spent a disproportionate amount of time focusing on precise language labelling at the expense of comparative comment.
- Occasionally, mis-reading of the tone in text B led to unconvincing comparison of the light-hearted nature of text A and the very serious and formal nature of text B.
- A comparison of how gender is represented across the two texts was not without value but often led to the focus being primarily on text B with little to comment on in text A.

Section B

Section B asked students to answer either question 4 or 5. Question 4 focused on spoken language acquisition whereas question 5 focused on writing development. The section B question offered 30 marks in total, equally balanced between AO1 and AO2. While AO1 provided 50% of the marks for this question, students did not tend to prioritise specific and precise language analysis in the way that was seen for questions 1 and 2. As a result, section B responses sometimes lacked the confidence, range or precision seen in section A. As has historically been the case, question 4 about speech proved far more popular than question 5 about literacy. There were more responses to the question about literacy than in previous years, and that was pleasing

to see, suggesting that more centres are focusing on both spoken and literacy development in their teaching of this unit.

Question 4

This question provided some rich data with a conversation between two year old Meya and her grandmother (as well as Mum and Grandfather) as they were playing together. Students were asked to use this data and relevant ideas from language study to evaluate the view that 'Child language development depends more on input than on an innate capacity to learn'. The data offered lots of scope for exploring language use in the interactions between Meya and her family members to reflect on the importance of input. There were fewer examples to support innatist views in the data but it was encouraging to see that students often successfully incorporated their own examples. Most students were able to offer some comment about language use, reflecting on relevant concepts and research to support their argument.

AO1

There was some close linguistic detail offered, but there was less range and precision than for the same assessment objective in section A. For this question, students were more likely to quote without linguistic description or offered minimal close focus on specific examples from the data using only general terms, such as 'the word'.

When students did identify precise linguistic examples, there was some application of appropriate terminology, addressing word classes, particularly nouns and noun phrases, aspects of prosody and phonology, turn-taking and sentence structures. There was a wide range of Child Directed Speech features, including recasting, repeated questioning and simplified lexical choices. Politeness features were also noted by some students, addressing ideas about pragmatics and social use of language.There was also capacity to consider patterning of sentence moods or semantic patterns across the data.

AO2

Most students showed good knowledge of relevant concepts, theories and research. Most students responded well to both these views, making close reference to the data when responding to ideas about input. Students made reference to aspects of Child Directed Speech, the More Knowledgeable Other, the Zone of Proximal Development and the Language Acquisition Support System (LASS). Theorists regularly cited were Bruner, Vygotsky, Skinner and Halliday with close reference made to the data to illustrate points. Some students also offered examples of case studies to show the value of input, for example Genie and Jim.

While most students offered some comment about innatist views, this was sometimes less developed. Students discussed Chomsky with varying degrees of success: some students elaborated on the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), Universal Grammar and the critical period, offering examples to illustrate points, such as the Wug test. Some students mentioned innatist ideas without developing points further than referring to an in-built language acquisition device.

Some students successfully navigated the debate between input and innatism, exploring and challenging ideas with reference to the data and their own examples, and also considering cognitive and usage-based approaches in detail. However, it was evident that students at the lower end of attainment struggled to move beyond basic familiarity with these views and found it hard to adapt points to refer to the data or question focus.

More successful answers

- integrated examination of the data with consideration of theories around input and innatist theories (though more around input)
- made good use of the data to elaborate on CDS and the way in which Meya's grandma exemplified this form of language
- recognised the limitations of theories on either side of the debate and pragmatically asserted that elements of both perspectives might be convincing with reasons why
- brought in specific own examples to exemplify over-generalisation which could support innatist theories (often the use of regular suffixes to irregular past tense verbs like 'runned')
- identified patterns in language use (particularly from the grandmother) across the data as a whole
- explored the importance of play in development of language, referring to Garvey and identifying how this might also be a key factor for encouraging language development.

Areas for further development

- There were often lengthy openings operating at level two that were unnecessary and outlined a brief overview of the key theories in isolation. It would have been more beneficial for students to engage directly with the question and data.
- Students sometimes used less pertinent examples to try to support the innatist theory leading to less convincing exploration of the data. For example, 's'gone' was often described as a virtuous error when it is more likely to be an example of elision.
- Referring to the child's stage of language development does not often add very much to the debate or response to the question. Students should consider what the theoretical perspective is adding as a response to the particular perspective in the question.
- Language labelling was not always precise: for example, 'y' on 'buzzy' is not a diminutive so it was better when students referred to alliterative sound association to aid understanding of the noun 'bee'.

Question 5

This question offered two texts written by Sara at 5 years and 10 months old. The two pieces were written in quick succession with the second text having had the benefit of teacher feedback to inform the writing. The question was carefully tailored to this data and asked students to think about the role of teacher feedback in enhancing writing development.

The organisation of this data was fruitful for detailed analysis beyond a more straightforward examination of features identified or 'errors' in usage which were spotted. The sense of progression from one text to the next offered scope for more sophisticated analysis of writing development. Students tended to either make close reference to the data sets with minimal focus on theories and concepts or referred mainly to concepts and research with only minimal reference to the data. It was encouraging when students were able to consider both aspects to explore the extent to which theories can explain literacy development given the data.

AO1

As with Question 4, it was sometimes disappointing to see the more limited precise linguistic description in comparison with Section A responses. However, students were able to comment on

aspects of spelling, directionality, sentence structures, use of descriptive detail, increased use of nouns in data set 3, and aspects of punctuation. Some students offered some considered discussion about spelling rules, eg over-generalisation of the 'y'/'ea' sound, and some students recognised aspects of self-correction in data set 2. Often responses offered a fairly narrow range of language labels, but there was some precision emerging. It was noticeable that there were fewer references to students' own examples than for question 4, although some students did incorporate their own examples of spelling rules/patterns.

AO2

References to research and concepts were less prominent than seen for question 4 though there were some examples of secure application of theory and links to Rothery, Gentry, Barclay and Kroll as well as Piaget. Students were able to comment on the nature (and possible impact) of teacher feedback seen within the data and it was also encouraging to see students comment on the impact of other teacher input like scaffolding to support development. In addition, there was some interesting discussion of how the child self-corrected in the data (with the spelling of black as 'blak' and then 'black'), thus adding another perspective to the question.There was also some reference made to accuracy based, genre based and creative approaches to literacy development. Students were also able to comment on the teacher's scaffolding and feedback, in the form of praise and positive reinforcement, also noting which errors had not been addressed and possible reasons for this. Spoken language theory ideas were used with mixed success: reference to input, scaffolding, the More Knowledgeable Other and positive/negative reinforcement were successfully addressed, but references to Chomsky were less convincing.

More successful answers

- made clear connections between data sets 2 and 3 to consider levels of precision versus creativity
- noticed patterns across the data (for example, sentence construction and variation from the compound sentence with repeated structure in data set 2 to the mixture of simple and compound sentences across data set 3)
- considered the data through the lenses of both accuracy and creativity, noticing what has been added (or removed) from one version of the writing to the other
- identified inconsistent punctuation use across the two texts, exploring possible reasons for these.

Areas for further development

- Comments occasionally became more speculative (for example about how the parents might have supported the child's writing development or how the teacher might have offered verbal comment) though there is ample evidence within the data of adult engagement without needing to assume involvement from other unspecified adults.
- There were still occasions when students engaged in relatively straightforward feature-spotting, identifying through a deficit approach where spelling or punctuation was 'wrong' or a 'mistake' without further consideration of the data (and writer) as a whole.
- Students occasionally made their language comments solely from the learning objectives (for example, adjectives and pronouns) and wider scope for language labelling would have demonstrated greater independent knowledge.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.