



A-level
English Language

7702/C NEA: Language in action

Report on the Examination

7702
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Overview

The basic tasks for the NEA remain the same each year, so the key messages often remain the same too. This report repeats many of the points from previous years but also reflects on a few specific examples from this year's NEA entry.

Language Investigations

It is always good to see how engaged students can be with topics close to their own hearts and every year we see some exceptional work on areas linked to the course and from far beyond it.

This year, moderators saw some really interesting investigations on the following areas:

- the representation of Greta Thunberg in the media
- code-switching among three generations of Yiddish English speakers
- representations of masculinity and femininity in fitness guidance
- the language of the powerful and powerless in protest signs from the apartheid period in South Africa
- how writers address death and loss in children's books
- the representation of South Asian beauty standards in advertisements.

Some of the most common indicators of successful investigations were:

- clearly formulated and succinctly stated linguistic aims
- research questions, aims or hypotheses that were inspired by ideas from language study, ie a question that related to a wider area of linguistic enquiry and/or a methodology that drew on earlier linguistic research
- a realistic and manageable focus for the investigation
- a methodology that reflected on the rationale for the data selection (ie why this text and not that text, why this time frame and not that one, why this respondent and not another, why these variables and not others)
- subheadings in the analysis chosen by the student for their own particular research question and analytical methods
- clear exemplification and labelling of data in the analysis section
- contextualised quotations from the data
- clustering together of extracts from the data to examine patterns
- if appropriate to the task, a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods (eg counting the frequency of certain key language features alongside close focus on how some of these were used in context)
- mini-corpus approaches that allowed students to identify patterns on a larger scale and then drill into more specific textual details in context
- well-chosen, appropriate, detailed and synthesised analytical methods
- analysis across text and discourse structures, identifying and exploring patterns, going beyond identification of just individual word classes
- reflective and evaluative analysis
- open-minded and tentative conclusions that paid attention to the contexts of production and reception of the data
- use of targeted and personalised research to support AO2

- a line of argument through the investigation
- clear conclusions and references.

Less successful investigations:

- applied theories from spoken language to written and/or scripted texts (eg Grice, Goffman, Lakoff, Tannen)
- applied theories from spoken language to online communication rather than more appropriate and mode-specific studies and ideas
- applied very generalised readings of (often outdated and/or contested) research into gender to data where other factors are much more salient
- used data that was not originally in English without proper consideration of the fact these are in translation
- over-stated the significance of pronouns when they needed to consider what other choice could have been used instead of a pronoun
- chose a purely quantitative approach to data analysis, just counting linguistic features which did not allow them to access the AO3 part of the mark scheme
- provided too much generalised contextual knowledge that was not linked to the data.

Song lyrics were often a problem. They are not always written by the performer, are often part of a broader art form (song writing) and cannot always be taken at face value. Moderators saw some very good examples of work on lyrics but also some very weak ones: it is worth considering whether or not students who want to do investigations like this are suitably aware of the issues connected to the form before approving their investigations.

Reliance on surveys and questionnaires was a problem. The data from questionnaires — particularly when it was purely numerical data — was hard to analyse in a way that allowed AO3 or AO1 to be credited. Even when the data was more attitudes-based, this often resulted in a more sociological study that did not allow students the chance to analyse language in depth. It was perfectly acceptable — helpful even — to use questionnaires as part of a wider methodology (for example, an identity questionnaire being used as part of a study on language variation) but using them as the main form of data gathering was a huge risk for many students.

In terms of AO2 references, it was good to see recent work in different areas:

- research by Robbie Love on contemporary language change
- Frazer Heritage on gender in video games
- Lucy Jones on sexuality and language
- Amanda Cole for accent attitudes and change
- Paul Baker on Polari
- Gretchen McCulloch on social media and online communication
- Fought and Eisenhauer on gendered speech in Disney films
- Deborah Cameron on sexism and misogyny in mainstream media.

Some investigations on gender needed to draw on more relevant, useful and specific work. This meant going beyond Lakoff, Zimmerman & West and Jespersen and finding work on gender that was directly relevant to the contexts of the data being analysed.

Original writing and commentary

Moderators again saw some really good work here and the idea of the style model and its role in both the writing of the original piece and the commentary were well understood.

Some of the most effective commentaries were clearly comparative and evaluative and drew attention to the form, genre and context of the two texts — the student’s own and the style model — that they were analysing.

As in previous years, many different forms and genres were submitted and their success varied depending on how competent, convincing or creative and innovative they were judged to be. Two of the key discriminators here were the ability of the student to capture/create a voice and to understand a genre.

In the commentary, the main area that still needed developing for many students aiming for the top end of the mark scheme was the approach to genre.

The most successful students thought carefully about the genre characteristics of their style model by looking at specific examples from across the different language levels, for example:

- how discourse structure had been manipulated to organise content that was typical of the genre of the text
- how lexical choices were linked to genre in opinion pieces
- how grammatical choices were linked to the shaping of an argument in a review or opinion piece
- how non-standard language choices in lexis and syntax had been used to mimic the spoken voice in a dramatic monologue
- how world-building elements had been constructed using specific lexical and semantic choices in different kinds of genre fiction.

These were then applied equally to the student’s own original writing piece to shed light on the decisions they had made in their own writing.

Moderators again found very similar issues to previous years. Less successful students:

- made a poor choice of style model, often using self-published, online pieces where quality control was not strong
- used the commentary to describe the process of writing the piece rather than analytically comparing the two texts
- chose to write in a different form to the style model
- produced ‘recreative writing’ where they attempted to use the content of the style model as an inspiration for a piece of writing in a completely different genre
- made limited reference to/quotation from a style model
- used two style models
- chose to write in the same form and genre and on the same topic as the style model
- adopted a persona
- tried to “script the unscriptable”, writing spontaneous speech.

Folder administration

The administration of coursework samples was of a very high standard in most cases. Folders were secure, well-organised and accessible. The best method of presentation was hole-punching the work and using treasury tags.

The work was presented in the following order:

- relevant signed cover sheet
- language investigation (and data)
- references/bibliography
- original writing
- commentary
- annotated style model
- references.

Moderators were grateful to avoid staples, work which needed to be extracted from folders and loose work which ended up separated and mixed up with other work in transit or unpacking.

Further advice and support

Please note that further advice and help for next year's submission of NEA can be obtained from your centre's **NEA adviser**. Your exams officer will be emailed in September or October 2024 to inform them of the identity of the centre's NEA adviser and their contact details. It is especially important to contact your NEA adviser if marks have been adjusted this year and/or comment has been made on the centre feedback form about problems with any of the work submitted. If you do not receive information about an NEA adviser early next term, please contact the AQA advice team.

Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLS) folders are made freely available through AQA Centre Services each year (usually in October/November) and these provide a benchmark for assessment as well as detailed marking commentaries to help you with marking and moderation of your own centre's work. It is clear from the work moderated that centres who used the TOLS folders to help them mark and internally moderate their work were much more likely to adhere to the AQA standard than those who did not reference the materials. While use of the TOLS materials is not compulsory, it is strongly advised.

An **e-learning unit** for the entire specification is available through Centre Services and the section on the NEA is suggested as a good place to start for advice about approaching this component if you are new to it, or just need a refresher.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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