



A-LEVEL

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

7702/2 Language diversity and change
Report on the Examination

7702/2
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General

The work of students in this fifth 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, to explain their views and arguments, and to demonstrate their skills as writers. The tasks proved to be of a similar level of demand to those that had gone before.

Key messages

- Students must identify the key words in the Section A ideas for evaluation and consider carefully what they imply.
- Students need to link case studies and examples of their own to the question focus and evaluate them 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 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 2 was chosen roughly twice as often as Question 1. Statistical analysis suggests that the two questions were of equal demand.

There was some evidence of students' answers being affected by the other question. Ideas about code-switching were sometimes linked with ideas about social groups in Question 2. There was less evidence of students answering Question 2 under the influence of tasks from previous series.

AO1

In Questions 1 and 2 students were assessed on their ability to use appropriate terminology and coherent written expression to present an argument, evaluating the idea offered in the question.

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 always communicate logical links between sections. Less successful responses simply tagged on a statement at the end of a paragraph to attempt 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.

A key discriminator was the degree to which students accurately interpreted the idea proposed in the task.

Most students were very well prepared with lots of case studies and theories which they could discuss in their answers. However, these were not always closely related to the question focus.

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).

Question 1

Question 1 focussed on language diversity. Students were asked to evaluate the idea that it is an advantage to be able to switch between different varieties of language (AO2). They then had to express their views in a coherent argument using linguistic terminology (AO1).

Key discriminators were whether students could explain and evaluate the benefits of code-switching in specific situations.

Most students could illustrate when standard and non-standard language would be used and could illustrate ideas of convergence and divergence which put them in Level 3.

Many answers were able to explore the benefits of code-switching which moved them into Level 4.

Fewer were able to evaluate the issues raised about identity and authenticity and standard language ideology and power.

More successful answers:

- recognised that the idea in the question relied on the concept of a language repertoire
- identified and explained Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory
- explained convergence and divergence, upward, downward and mutual
- explained Matched Guise findings and other research on attitudes to explain why people might change their language use
- examined the covert and overt prestige attached to different varieties of language
- cited quantitative sociolinguistic research on the effects of situation, eg Trudgill and Labov
- discussed hypercorrection by the lower middle class in Labov's New York research
- examined the use of and switch into Polari as an anti-language designed to exclude other groups and to foster in-group identity
- discussed Labov's Martha's Vineyard study to explore how changes in language were used to signify allegiances and identity

- used Ives' Bradford study to show how language choices varied with the speaker's sense of identity and belonging
- looked at Rob Drummond's work on the significance of the language practices of different generations of Polish people in Manchester
- explored the value of code-switching in occupational contexts
- discussed the work of Garner and Rubin on the effects of attitudes to AAVE on the linguistic behaviours of lawyers
- evaluated arguments about the authenticity of identity when people code-switched
- explored how code-switching maintained language hierarchies and structures of power.

Less successful answers:

- did not focus on the act of code-switching
- discussed examples of the language variation shown by different social groups
- were over-reliant on learned explanations of research, struggling to discuss these relevantly for the task
- 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 caused by contact between different social groups. (AO2). They then had to express their views in a coherent argument using linguistic terminology (AO1).

A major discriminator was whether students could identify diachronic changes caused by contact and other factors as opposed to identifying synchronic variation caused by group membership.

Weaker answers tended to discuss the language associated with different social groups without engaging with the ideas of contact or change.

Many students were able to give examples of contact situations and the effects they had on language. They were also usually able to discuss other causes of language change. They could also discuss different views and explanations of language change.

A minority of students were able to evaluate and challenge different views of language change caused by contact between social groups.

Many answers relied on pre-prepared discussions of Ives' Bradford study, Eckert's Jocks and Burnouts work and Labov's Martha's Vineyard findings. These often enabled students to discuss variation but weren't used to discuss how variation might lead to change.

Multi-Cultural London English was a productive focus for many. There was impressive knowledge of the social changes underlying its emergence, the linguistic innovations created, research by Sue Fox et al and the idea of a feature pool.

Pidgins and Creoles were relatively rarely discussed. Answers that did examine them often engaged with the racist assumptions that drove many judgements of such varieties and showed an impressive grasp of the social, historical and ideological contexts of the development of such languages.

Another relatively rare area of content was world or global Englishes. Where students did consider this area, Singapore was often used as a case study and the emergence and treatment of Singlish gave lots of opportunities to explore the complexities of the colonial contact between language groups and the post-colonial legacy.

More successful answers:

- identified the view offered in the question as only one aspect of how language change occurs
- demonstrated a synthesised overview of the competing forces and agencies driving change
- examined different types of social group and contact situations: invasion, colonialism, trade, travel, immigration
- examined cultural transmission and sub-stratum explanations of language change and evaluated changes caused and the attitudes to them
- discussed how new technology enabled more contact between different social groups and increased the speed by which language changes might spread
- examined the phenomenon of cultural borrowing to fill lexical gaps
- explored how social borrowing occurred, reflecting the prestige of social groups that were borrowed from
- examined whether the spread of Americanisms and US English could be seen as cultural imperialism
- examined the process of dialect levelling in Milton Keynes
- explored the emergence of Multicultural London English
- showed detailed knowledge of the social and cultural context in London
- made use of the concept of a feature pool
- examined Crystal's claims that as soon as English is spoken in a new area a new variety is created, often citing South African English examples of vocabulary
- explored how Viking and Norman invasions affected the development of English
- recognised how power and status affected the kinds of vocabulary that was affected
- explored the formation of pidgins as contact languages
- showed detailed knowledge of the characteristics of pidgins and gave specific examples
- evaluated views of pidgins as broken grammar or baby talk
- argued a case for pidgins as optimal communication systems
- explored the social and historical connections of pidgins and the slave trade
- explained the emergence of creole languages
- evaluated views of creoles as corruptions of European languages, full of errors caused by laziness or lack of intelligence
- located such views within racist discourses linked to the slave trade
- examined in detail the influence of African languages on the development of creoles in the Caribbean
- evaluated debates about creoles in colonial and post-colonial contexts
- used Singlish as a case study to explore agencies of language change and the cultural contexts of attitudes to varieties that developed
- illustrated Schneider's dynamic model of world Englishes
- examined the development of Polari as an anti-language designed to exclude other social groups and to foster in-group identity
- characterised the process of change by using the Potential, Implementation, Diffusion and Codification model
- contrasted 'crumbling castle' explanations that saw changes as corruptions or deviations with ideas about the evolution of language

- contrasted ‘infectious disease’ explanations of change with wave models and looked at the receptiveness of some people to linguistic changes
- countered ‘damp spoon’ attitudes to the formation of pidgins and creoles as broken Englishes caused by the laziness or lack of intellect of speakers with detailed explanation of the influence of other languages’ grammar
- explored other causes of language changing, often synthesising a view of multiple forces at work simultaneously.
- examined functional theory and the idea that language change is motivated by needs
- frequently used texting and the effect of technology as a case study of other factors that affected language change, producing new vocabulary and conventions
- discussed language reform projects as an influence of language change
- examined random fluctuation theory.

Less successful answers:

- did not address the issues of contact and change
- wrote generally about the varieties of language used by different social groups
- were over-reliant on learned explanations of research, struggling to discuss these relevantly for the task
- wrote about differences between women’s and men’s language
- 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 language change and ‘snowflakery’.

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 changing uses of the full stop, showing connections between the texts as parts of wider discourses about language change and woke snowflakery (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 students 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.

Far fewer answers demonstrated the language feature-led technique which hinders Level 4 achievement 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 (though there was frequent uncertainty in the application of these terms). Modal verbs were frequently identified and well analysed. There was good exemplification of sentence and phrase types and the identification of the precise extent of a clause was improved. Issues with pronoun person were less frequent than formerly.

Students who looked at sentence and clause features were credited in Level 5 on AO1. These were, however, often the least salient descriptions in an answer. Very few students used these descriptions to analyse the effects the writers were achieving by their deployment of sentence and clause choices.

Some things students could profitably address are:

- identifying and showing the exact extent of a verb phrase
- what counts as post-modification in phrase analysis
- what counts as a predicate
- 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 discourses about language change, tradition, 'correct' English and 'snowflakery'.

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 changing uses of language, and the full stop in particular.

Many reached Level 3 on AO4 because they compared the use of sentence functions, pronouns, the language of the headlines, the use of the term 'snowflake' and other features of language.

The answers placed in Level 4 could link language with ideas about language change. Often students recognised prescriptivist discourses and made use of Aitchison's terms to characterise them. They also recognised discourses about snowflakery and being woke.

There was a clear improvement in the engagement with the ideas in the texts this year. Most students wrote effectively about how full stops and their use were presented as well as the ways in which young people were satirised and mocked.

This enabled a more effective analysis of 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.

Some students had difficulties disentangling the different views within the texts. The best answers had a clear understanding of how Bancroft positioned the views of Doctor Lauren Fonteyn and Professor Celia Klin and how Weaver presented the university research.

Some students had difficulty disentangling the audiences of the texts from the imagined or ironic addressees within the texts.

More successful answers:

- placed the texts, and ideas within them, within prescriptivist and descriptivist discourses
- analysed discourses of correctness, tradition, decay, snowflakery
- identified and compared the views of Sheridan in Text A the presentation of the research findings by Bancroft in Text B
- contrasted the views and ideas of Klin and Fonteyn with the views of the authors
- contrasted the language of Klin and Fonteyn with that of the authors
- compared and evaluated how Text B's use of quotations gave the views more weight than the brief reference to Fonteyn's 'comments' in A
- considered how 'according to experts' and 'academic paper' might have negative connotations (in contrast to common sense and tradition) rather than being an endorsement and compared them with Sheridan's passive 'They are said to....'
- compared how both articles sensationalised the story: 'under the spotlight again' and 'Feverish debate broke out last week....' and evaluated the hyperbolic attempts to provoke disbelief and anger
- compared the way both articles represented and judged the young's views of the full stop as aggressive, abrupt, blunt, angry
- compared the representation of the full stop as harmless, humble, innocent
- compared the representation of the full stop as traditional, long-standing, useful, creating clarity
- compared ways the texts infantilised younger people and treated them as immature with the intertextuality of 'big bad full stop' and the metaphor of being 'weaned on text messages'
- compared the representation of the young as sensitive, easily intimidated, overly anxious
- compared the positioning of the reader in the headlines
- analysed the disbelieving tone of the thematised adverbial 'Now' and the capitalised 'FULL STOPS' in Text B's headline and how these represented snowflakery and compared Sheridan's use of ellipsis in her first paragraph to show her disbelief
- compared how Text A assumed the position and voice of a young person or addressed them directly to satirise them with the use of address in the first sentence of Bancroft's article
- explored how both texts created a generational divide by the use of pronouns, the identification of a 'generation' and references to 'youngsters' and 'Older people'
- explored how Text A created a nightmare vision of a totalitarian woke world run by woke chief constables and the Keypad Cops
- evaluated Sheridan's use of hyperbole, alliteration, punning, neologism, sentence shaping and punctuation use to make her points playfully yet powerfully
- analysed Sheridan's address to her imagined sympathetic reader at the end to position them and their response
- analysed Sheridan's self-presentation as put-upon traditionalist accused of being a stuffy stick-in-the-mud and compared Bancroft's appeals to tradition and the length of time full stops have been used
- considered how the reference to Aristophanes made the audience perceive the full-stop

- noted the conventions regarding full stops in the headline and sub-editorial from the MailOnline.

Less successful answers:

- misread and misinterpreted the language of crime in Text A and thought young people were criminals because of their abandoning of the full stop
- claimed that Sheridan and Weaver were creating their authority by quoting researchers, missing how the research findings were being treated
- were uncertain about what constituted a verb phrase
- were unclear about audiences and address in both articles
- quoted material without linguistic description
- quoted material without articulating what precise meanings and representations were being created
- paraphrased the passages' content
- quoted very rarely
- 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 changing uses of punctuation, linguistic conventions and etiquette.

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.

Again, this year this question was often answered less effectively than the other questions on the paper.

Students generally understood the AO5 requirements of the task and most had clear ideas about the demands of writing feature or opinion pieces.

The mean mark for AO2, however, was significantly below the mean marks for AO2 in Section A. Many struggled to select and deploy knowledge effectively. This was sometimes caused by a rather imprecise focus on the actual issues raised in the texts.

A major distinguishing factor therefore was the recognition of the need to provide a satisfying level of information and argument about the linguistic issues.

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 the views and arguments of Sheridan and those reported in Text B before dismantling them.

More successful responses focussed on identifying and classifying the attitudes to language expressed in the sources. Most focussed on the issues of language change and relatively few the issues about young people being woke snowflakes.

Less successful responses wrote rather broadly about language change as natural and found it difficult to find a clear focus for their article and develop an argument.

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 clinching conclusions as time ran out for many.

Many recognised the need to link their article to having read the articles in question 3. This was done more effectively than in previous series with fewer elaborately contrived scenarios and late-night doom-scrolling. Far fewer responses referred to 'Text A' or 'Text B'.

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. There were a number of responses that relied on abuse of Weaver Sheridan and Holly Bancroft, boomers or the old in general.

More successful answers:

- focussed very tightly on the issues of changing uses of punctuation or etiquette in phone or online communication
- cited the ideas of Sheridan and Bancroft so that they could challenge them
- helped the reader to identify the ways of thinking about language they represented
- located attitudes to change within discourses of correctness and tradition
- classified the prescriptivist outlook, often identifying declinism or sticklerism as key discourses about language change
- used Aitchison's metaphors to categorise explanations of change as decay, laziness or an unwelcome spread or invasion
- linked the articles with others that formed the discourse, many quoting John Humphrys
- placed the views of young people within anti-woke discourses clustered around ideas of the young as snowflakes
- challenged and evaluated the ideas in the sources and offered alternative views
- examined other examples of changes, evaluating them from different points of view
- examined the nature of texting as a mode of communication, trying to replicate aspects of spoken language
- introduced language researchers by first and last name and indicated who they were for an unfamiliar audience
- explored ideas of potential, implementation, diffusion and codification to explain how and why changes came about
- discussed wave models, s-curves and style to style changes to explore how uses of language are spread
- use Deutscher's principles of economy and expressiveness to offer more neutral explanations
- examined the nature of texting as a mode of communication, trying to replicate aspects of spoken language, referring to McWhorter's idea of 'fingered speech'
- discussed ways in which being woke affected language use and why
- mounted a defence of being sensitive and aware when using language
- developed a convincing persona and voice and addressed the experiences of their imagined audience
- deployed techniques seen in the sources, shaping their syntax powerfully for effect
- played with sentence punctuation, semantic fields and neologism to create engaging texts.

Less successful answers:

- re-hashed the views of Sheridan and Bancroft and approved the need to maintain correct use of punctuation
- did not provide the reader with ideas and information about changing uses of language
- wrote generally about language change as inevitable and natural
- relied on assertion or abuse as a way of responding to the sources
- 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 of who they were
- introduced linguistic terms and concepts without any explanation for the non-specialist reader.

Advice to students

To improve performance on this paper:

- read carefully all the words in the idea for discussion in Section A questions
- address the specific focus of the idea
- 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 how the texts in Question 3 represent language, its use and its users
- use knowledge of language study to evaluate the specific arguments raised in Section B texts when answering Question 4
- 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
- use argument and evidence rather than assertion or abuse when writing.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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