
AS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

7701/2: Language Varieties
Report on the Examination

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General Comments

As with last year's paper, it is evident that centres are preparing students well for this unit. Many responses were thorough and showed evidence of deep understanding of the different skills and aspects of knowledge required. There were very few rubric infringements or missed questions.

Section A assessed both AO1 and AO2. For AO1, students were expected to write a discursive essay. They were assessed on both accuracy of written expression and, at the higher levels, structure of argument. This latter skill was often well demonstrated, in work which at first provided evidence to support the given statement, and then gave evidence to challenge it. Discourse markers were generally used well to show a developing line of argument. While written accuracy was largely sound – as would be expected by the nature of the subject – examiners noted frequent errors in relation to the spelling of 'accommodation,' use of possessive apostrophes, and misapplication of 'prestige' (as in, 'the standard -ing form is prestige,' rather than 'prestigious'). A minority of students failed to paragraph, which hindered their AO1 attainment.

AO2 is assessed in both sections, assessing how well students can select and apply learned knowledge to the specific question given. At lower levels of achievement, students were able to identify some relevant theories/research/examples, while more developed answers considered the complexities inherent within the area of language study raised. In both sections, those students who securely linked their learned knowledge to the data prompt were more successful. The data is provided as a 'springboard' into the issue in the question prompt, and many students made successful use of this. As in previous series, AO2 tended to be less effectively integrated into Section B responses. In both sections – although more notably in Section B - students whose responses were general, or who didn't support their comments with language-related ideas and concepts, were unable to access higher levels of the mark scheme.

Section B also assesses AO5, which is students' abilities to write creatively and engagingly, tailoring ideas to a specific audience. Those students who failed to support their ideas with language study (and therefore limited their AO2) were also less effective here, as part of the task is to transform ideas for a non-specialist audience. However, students are not doubly penalised and can perform very well on AO5 even with a poor response for AO2. It is worth noting that those students who specifically stated their audience – and who planned for this specific audience, rather than a general readership – were more successful. Similarly, as AO5 is equally weighted with AO2, students are advised to proofread their response. Fewer students than in previous series wrote an essay-like response to this question.

Question 1

In this series, question 1 asked students to 'discuss the idea that there is a connection between a person's identity and the language they use.' Students were provided with quantitative data relating to social class, gender and the use of non-standard pronunciation as a stimulus. Many students identified this as originating from Trudgill's research in Norwich, and were able to explain it with confidence. While many students simply outlined its findings, more effective responses interrogated the data, considering both of the two variables given, social class and gender. They also drew on their own deeper knowledge of Trudgill's research, and considered ideas of conscious or careful language use. In many cases, it was evident students had been taught this piece of research well. However, students should be wary of dismissing the research simply due to its age, as some did.

Many students used the data as a springboard to explore similar studies of social class. Malcolm Petyt's work in Bradford and Labov's work in New York stores were the most frequently applied. While it was pleasing to see this research commented on in detail, students sometimes missed the complexities of these studies, and so did not fully engage with them. For example, very few considered the socially aspirational middle classes raised by Petyt, and few seemed to understand the nature of the accommodation occurring in New York (assuming, for example, that the sales assistants were of the classes targeted by the stores). While, again, many students attempted to critique these studies on the grounds of age, the significance of this was rarely engaged with. Centres are advised to encourage students to consider why a study's age may impact its validity if students are to be seen to fully 'evaluate.' Similarly, where more contemporary research exists (as in Mather's 2009 repeat of the New York Stores study), centres are advised to encourage their students to explore any significant similarities or differences arising from the variable of time.

Another common approach taken by students was to consider the gender variable presented within the data. From this, students engaged well with ideas of covert and overt prestige (often supported with references to Kuiper, and further comments on Trudgill) and genderlect. As in previous series, students often developed well from dominance/deficit models into difference and, in the higher cases, diversity. These were often well supported with reference to relevant spoken language studies including Lakoff, Spender, Zimmerman and West, Tannen's difference model, Holmes, Cameron and Hyde. Again, however, it is worth noting more recent work, including Tannen's work on managerial styles and floor holding, is not frequently being raised. Similarly, students are advised not to repeat learned essay structures, without tailoring these to the specific focus of the question.

Some students considered 'identity' more broadly, and there were some highly successful responses focused around the language of teenagers. Here, ideas of accommodation and code-switching were well considered, with many of the students who used this angle able to successfully argue against the premise of the question. It was pleasing to see students here using contemporary research, including Drummond's work in Manchester, Moore's assessment of non-standard 'were' in Bolton, and Kortenhoven's case study into code-switching by a US preacher.

More successful answers:

- accurately identified the trends presented by the data, before using these as a springboard into similar studies from other researchers
- had a clear sense of how they were interpreting 'identity' (eg gender, social class, age) or clearly explained how different aspects of 'identity' can interplay
- were able to consider variables in relation to one another, considering in detail how (for example) genderlect may be influenced by class (and vice versa)
- considered learned knowledge in pairs, ie the direct correlation between Lakoff and O'Barr & Atkins, or Zimmerman & West and Beattie. This enabled them to challenge ideas confidently
- clearly rooted their ideas in language features and linguistic issues.

Less successful responses:

- misinterpreted the data
- made unhelpful references to stereotypes associated with men and women which weren't rooted in language comment (ie behavioural ideas)
- showed insecurity with details of research, or miscredited work (for example, aligning the 'Difference' model with Lakoff)

- attempted to force their response into a pre-prepared structure with less relevance to the specific focus of this question
- made little attempt to shape their response through the use of discourse markers to highlight their argument, or, in some cases, paragraphs.

Question 2

This question was not attempted as frequently as question 1. The data was an extract from Susie Dent's 'Modern Tribes,' focusing on the use of jargon in schools. Students were often able to use this as a starting point to present a specific view of jargon, usually that jargon is unhelpful or confusing. Many students successfully supported their comments with further examples of jargon, usually from their own education contexts, although some were also able to offer examples from sport, music, and business. Students who were able to include these further contexts often engaged with the question focus ('jargon is an important part of any activity') more successfully.

Students seemed less confident when applying learned knowledge to this question, and explicit references to AO2 were not as frequently deployed as in responses to question 1. However, many were able to align jargon's use with specific discourse communities or considered the workplace (often relating to Drew & Heritage's features of workplace talk).

Many students took a straightforward approach, which agreed with the statement and was at times well supported. However, by not engaging with the complexities implied by the question (ie that jargon is not important, or that it is not an important part of any activity) they were not able to access more challenging ideas.

Those students who performed best were able to consider how jargon may or may not be used by the same person according to their context. Doctors and teachers were the most commonly considered occupations, with clear discussion of accommodation as justification for the use of, or avoidance of, jargon. Some students were able to explore how dentists can accommodate to multiple people in the room at any one time, ie the patient and the dental nurse. Again, students are reminded of the need to support their comments with specific examples of language use. The most successful responses were often based in students' own contexts, including helpful references to part-time work or interests (e.g Scouting, orchestras or rock-climbing, all of which were well referenced).

A slight concern was that a small minority of students attempted to complete a Paper One Meanings and Representations style analysis of the data. While an element of this can be helpful, for example if exploring Dent's attitude to jargon, students are reminded that the data is meant as a springboard, and should not be the exclusive focus of a response.

The most frequently referenced ideas were those of Herrgard, Drew & Heritage, Swales, and Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory. Many students engaged with code-switching behaviours, with some making good use of Koester or French and Raven.

More successful answers:

- clearly defined their interpretation of jargon, often grounding it well in theoretical constructs such as occupational language or discourse communities
- offered their own examples of jargon from a range of fields (addressing the 'any' aspect of the question)

- considered occasions where a specific person may choose to use AND not use jargon (as in a doctor or dentist accommodating to both patient and fellow medical professional);
- considered how jargon can be used as a tool for conscious self-presentation
- engaged with ideas of power.

Less successful answers:

- demonstrated insecurity in their understanding of jargon
- failed to underpin their comments with reference to learned knowledge or research
- considered the question in simplistic terms, arguing simply that jargon is simply confusing, without consideration of its benefits
- relied overly on the given data, either by paraphrase or extensive quotation.

Question 3

Students were given an article from the 'Recruiting Times,' which claimed that people with regional accents, specifically Birmingham (Brummie), were being discriminated against in job interviews. This prompted a lot of lively debate within responses, with most students challenging this notion as 'unfair' or 'outdated'.

This question requires students to write informatively, but for a different audience than questions 1 and 2. Most students were careful to state their audience/intended publication, with the Daily Mail and the Guardian remaining the most common choices. Others wrote a riposte for publication within the Recruiting Times, and some students wrote effectively for regional newspapers. Some students also wrote effectively for school leaver magazines. This resulted in some effective positioning of the author, especially when the persona adopted was a job-seeking regional language speaker, or as someone working in Recruitment writing for their 'team.' The most successful students wrote pieces which were fully believable, including paying close attention to register for their stated audience throughout, and with effective uses of headlines and other sub-editorial features. These students had evidently thought carefully about the conventions and 'house style' of their chosen publication, and responded well. Mid-performing students did this less effectively, but were able to use headlines and some sub-editorial features such as direct address or anecdote.

There were some very creative uses of language, including the use of effective metaphors. These were sometimes extended, although they did at times appear a little laboured. Anecdotes were often well deployed, particularly illustrating examples of accent prejudice, although inauthentic quotation (e.g of celebrities, job applicants or, in some cases, researchers) and creation of new statistics to 'support' a view were much less helpful. Similarly, a small number of students struggled to maintain a measured tone. Whilst a degree of subjectivity is necessary to the piece, students must be reminded that their tone must be appropriate, and expletives and uses of crude language do little to support their argument.

Although the question focus explicitly addressed 'the significance of accents in the workplace,' students were rewarded for a range of ideas relating to accents, accent prejudice, and occupational language. However, it is worth noting that those students who simply considered the nature of occupational language (e.g references to jargon studies, or occupational frameworks) struggled to keep an accent focus, and responses were less effective.

The source data specifically referenced RP and Brummie, and these formed the focus of most students' responses. Most students made good use of a range of Matched Guise studies, with

effective reference to Giles, Giles and Powesland, Worcester College (Dixon, Mahoney and Cocks) and the University of Aberdeen. These studies enabled students to effectively consider accent prejudice, with more effective responses considering both positive and negative responses to specific accents. As in questions 1 and 2, those students who brought their own examples to their responses were more successful. A minority of students showed insecurity around RP, suggesting it was a 'mainstream' accent, or confusing it with Standard English. Similarly, some students showed insecurity with Labov's New York stores study, wrongly asserting that RP is the standard accent of upper class America.

Some students were able to connect their work on Matched Guise to justifications for the accent prejudice discussed in the text. For example, Geordies' friendliness was often connected to work in call centres/customer facing roles, while RP was frequently connected with 'business'. The most effective responses here considered international intelligibility. Some students were able to connect these stereotypes with ideas of power, with some effective discussions of French and Raven or Fairclough. Asymmetry was very well handled by most students who considered it, particularly when the focus remained on the way that stereotypes are perpetuated within occupations. The Army was an effective case study here, with some students considering the relationship between public schools and higher-ranking officers, and the impact this has on language use and representations.

It was pleasing to see students taking ideas beyond theory into real-world social applications and implications, with some very effective discussions focused around class issues in contemporary society, or evaluating ideas of accent prejudice in a seemingly more diverse and equal society.

More successful answers:

- selected an appropriate target audience, and tailored their piece to their chosen publication and audience through register
- clearly used subeditorial features
- wrote in a measured but personal tone, maintaining this throughout
- used 'real life' examples to support their ideas
- clearly 'glossed' technical terms, or explained research or theorists in a helpful and engaging way
- made explicit reference to learned knowledge.

Less successful answers:

- brought little or no new information to the response, relying heavily (sometimes exclusively) on the source data
- showed confusion around Received Pronunciation, Standard English, or variations such as American English
- struggled to consider the non-specialist audience, writing an essay-like response, or not maintaining awareness of the form beyond a headline
- wrote in a similar style to questions 1 and 2, failing to target a non-specialist audience through register
- struggled to maintain a measured tone.

Key advice to students from this series

In all questions, check you are consistently addressing the focus of the question. Consider whether in your 'line of argument' you can consider an opposing view, or show in some other way that you understand the complexity of an issue or idea.

Ensure you guide your readers by signalling your developing argument.

Use the data/source texts as a stimulus, but always go beyond this. What are the 'bigger issues' the data suggests? Can you bring further examples of your own which support (and ideally also challenge) the view of language given in the source?

Ensure enough time is allocated to planning and, particularly in Section B, proofreading.

Be careful with spelling of key terminology and phrasing.

Consider using a specific publication as a style model for question 3, and replicate its house style as closely as possible. Or, if writing for a specific audience (eg school leavers), directly address their concerns.

At all times, remember that this is an English Language exam, and responses must be rooted in issues of language. Use relevant examples and, where necessary, explain them.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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