



A-LEVEL

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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

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General

June 2019 saw the third series of 7702/1, with examiners impressed yet again by the high quality of examination performances seen. This is particularly true given the range of skills tested across the four questions answered. This year, it was pleasing that many students managed to operate confidently and consistently across the whole paper. There is evident awareness of the differing demands of the assessment objectives and more effective scripts showed that students were aware of the characteristics of higher level responses and were able to meet these challenges.

Section A

Section A offered students three questions, all of which were compulsory. Question 1 took the form of the 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 to students about the older text B. As with previous years, 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. They were far better placed to identify patterns in language use across the text and make relevant comments based on an understanding of the contextual perspective from which it had been written. A less successful approach was for students to think in terms of individual assessment objectives, identifying language points as separate from their comments on representation and context. The most successful responses were able to choose relevant language comments which illuminated discussion of the wider context and key representations.

For question 3, students had to explore the similarities and differences in the ways that text A and text B used language. As with previous years, examiners noticed that students were less confident in answering question 3. While questions 1 and 2 assess across both AO1 and AO3, question 3 is solely assessing AO4. Students had to operate across both texts for this question, which is arguably more challenging. For the majority of students, this question was also answered as a mid-point in the examination and it was evident that time pressures sometimes negatively affected performance for this question.

Question 1

Text A took the form of an extract from a blog, 'We are London', from 2018. The blog post was an opinion piece which identified a range of recent food trends emerging from the capital city. The text proved to be accessible to all with few students encountering difficulty in making meaningful comments about audience, purpose, genre and language content. A good number of students moved beyond this to consider a range of representations. Indeed, responses to this question were the strongest across the whole paper. A large number of students attained either level 4 or 5 marks across both assessment objectives. Students were able to discuss with confidence the way in which the food trends were negatively presented. Many students also moved on to discuss how the audience was positioned to share the writer's negative perspective. The most effective responses saw students considering the wider social contexts from which the text had emerged and evaluating the impact of these on the language used.

Students commented confidently on the online nature of the text and were able to make insightful points about the potential interactivity of the blog. More successful students made connections between language use and this interactivity (for example, use of imperatives to encourage readers to respond to the opinion piece). Associated with this was a keen awareness from many students about how the graphology worked alongside text to create cohesion and reinforce meanings.

AO1

There are ten marks available for AO1 for question 1 and it was pleasing to see a wide range of features being addressed. Most students correctly identified sentence functions and word classes. There was increasing confidence in applying language terms with precision and detail. Most commonly identified were superlative adjectives, proper nouns, neologisms/blends, pre-modifying adjectives, and use of interrogatives. Students appeared to be well versed with the level descriptors from previous mark schemes so were also attempting to comment on patterns across the data and grammatical constructions. Cohesive features such as juxtaposition, anaphoric referencing and repeated grammatical structures were often discussed with confidence. Occasionally, students were so keen to comment on sentences or clauses that this hampered meaningful comment. There were also occasions when this grammatical focus led to less accurate discussion of the language being identified.

AO3

Students clearly understood that discussion of representations within the data often characterises level 4 responses for AO3. Students therefore often approached the question with a plan to identify and explore two or three representations. Responses covered the way that the writer, food trends, London restaurants, food trend followers and readers were represented. It is worth remembering that simply using the word 'represent' does not guarantee more developed comment which is needed to reach the level 4 band. In order to comment on representation successfully, students needed to focus on interpretation and analysis. The most effective responses did this successfully and also considered how these representations linked to modern society (particularly in relation to social media and influence).

More successful answers:

- precisely identified and explored the impact of a range of word classes (for example, proper noun 'London' and superlative adjective 'most annoying')
- were able to explore and evaluate the wider social context of the competitive nature of the food industry in the light of social media. Often this was developed further by exploring how London emulated America as part of a wider global trend
- linked language comments closely to context and audience interpretation. For example, the list of blend words was sometimes identified as echoing the repetitive nature of new food types appearing
- identified patterns across the text and posited reasons why they might be there. For example, the repeated use of questions through the text could serve to highlight the writer's confusion over food trends
- analysed how language was used to position the reader alongside the writer against those who follow the food trends
- analysed how humour was constructed, with a particular focus on representation of the Paleo diet and the sarcastic nature of the noun phrase 'grand old age of 30'
- demonstrated a pragmatic awareness tied in to how the audience was being positioned. For example, some students identified the nuances of the question 'Which food trends irk you?' which presupposes reader agreement that food trends are in fact annoying.

Areas for further consideration:

- responses which focused primarily on graphological features often remained relatively straightforward and limited in links made to representations
- some students were working to comment on clausal elements and not then mentioning those language points which they could have done more accurately and confidently
- exemplification was sometimes too lengthy, with full sentences being written out to demonstrate a word class. While the examples might have contained an example, it was difficult for examiners to discern whether the student knew which word was right
- students sometimes needed to have considered the word in the context of the sentence. For example, the words 'irritating' and 'annoying' operated as pre-modifying adjectives within this text but a fair number of students labelled these as verbs.

Question 2

As is expected with this question, text B featured an older text on the same theme as text A. The 1908 newspaper article from 'The London Daily News' covered a story about the rising popularity of vegetarianism within the capital city. Any older text can offer less familiar vocabulary choices and grammatical constructions and occasionally demands greater contextual awareness. This text proved largely accessible, however, with the majority of students able to make valid and meaningful comments about the text and its key features and messages. Nevertheless, there were some difficulties in fully understanding some elements of the text. The strike which was mentioned was occasionally misunderstood, with students imposing a judgement onto the text, suggesting that the article presented vegetarianism in a very negative light without much evidence to support this reading. Nevertheless, students were usually able to comment confidently on the form of the text and the more neutral positioning of the writer.

AO1

Students identified word classes with varying levels of accuracy and complexity. There were some really interesting comments made about the dynamic verb 'swarm' and how this affected the reader's understanding of those following a trend. Indeed, more successful students were able to think about the metaphorical language used across the text and draw conclusions about this linked to representation. In terms of more challenging vocabulary choices, the word 'patronising' led to some impressive comment about the connotations of the word within this particular context. There was a pleasing level of precision in labelling of word classes, with students often identifying the abstract nouns, superlative adjectives and adverbs of manner. More successful responses were able to discuss the use of the passive voice, pragmatic meaning within the text and a range of grammatical constructions around clauses, sentences and syntax.

AO3

Students often made valid comments about audience, purpose and genre though there was a tendency to make generalised comments around gender and literacy levels when considering audience. Those students who recognised that the purpose might have been to persuade as well as inform often made interesting observations about how the language reinforced this particular view. There were a number of different representations which students chose to explore. They commented on the representation of vegetarianism, London, the restaurant and its workers and Mr Eustace Miles himself. More effective responses grounded this reading of representations in a really secure discussion of the wider social context from which the text had emerged.

More successful answers:

- made interesting connections between the text and social class, identifying ways in which people of different classes are being represented differently
- considered the pragmatic meaning of some of the language around the food being served, identifying a gently amused tone in places (for example ‘more dainty and refined’ linked to the intention to ‘feed the brain’)
- identified patterns across the data such as the passive construction, use of dynamic verbs, repetition of ‘popular’, adverbials
- were able to use the topic shift to the discussion of the strike as an opportunity to consider an alternative representation of the restaurant from its presentation in the first part of the article
- considered the rights of the workers compared with the authority of Mr Miles to discuss social class and representations of power.

Areas for further consideration:

- there remained some inaccuracy when identifying clauses and sentence types, with mislabelling of more complicated grammatical structures often occurring (to the detriment of meaningful language comment which might have been made elsewhere)
- some students overstated the strike, suggesting there was a more chaotic feel to the restaurant than was perhaps meant from the text
- there were less successful comments about cohesive devices and textual structure within the responses for question 2 than seen in question 1
- students can of course be credited for pointing out a lack of cohesion and for identifying contradictory or dissonant elements in any text.

Question 3

Traditionally this question seems to have proved particularly challenging to students, both in terms of time available for response and challenge of comparing two texts and synthesising comments about language, context and representations across the two texts. However, there was a marked improvement in performance for this question for this series. Students often demonstrated the capacity to move from more literal connections (characteristic of level 2) to language comparison (level 3) to then more synthesised comparison of language in the light of context and representation (level 4). It was more unusual to see students performing at level 5 for this question, since a more evaluative element was less evident. There were still a fair number of students who struggled to move beyond more literal comments about content, genre, purpose and audience. It is unclear whether this is partially linked to time management. Indeed, there were more noticeably incomplete responses for question 3 than in previous series. It seemed that students felt confident with texts A and B but perhaps invested a disproportionate amount of time in these two questions at the expense of question 3.

More successful answers:

- addressed differing representations in the two texts and used these as a springboard to discussing wider contextual differences. More successful responses compared the two texts in terms of their age, genre, technological factors and social changes in relation to discourses about food
- tended to stand back from the texts and make holistic comparisons rather than repeating detailed linguistic analysis in a similar way to questions 1 and 2

- were able to look at the texts through many lenses such as: the differing attitudes towards food trends, the self-representation of the writers, the way in which London society was represented differently and the context of publication/technology
- offered a cogent structure to the response, making a number of quite precise and often well-developed comparisons
- recognised that the element of evaluation required for level 5 was more about the effects of the techniques on readers rather than focusing on a more personal view about which text was most successful.

Areas for further consideration:

- students still occasionally repeated language comments from questions 1 and 2. The level of detail could be excessive, particularly given that there is no AO1 mark available for this question
- comments were occasionally still being made about each text in isolation, becoming distracted by the detail around a particular text and forgetting to then compare them
- those responses with no exemplification to support language comparisons remained somewhat unconvincing. More effective responses provided brief examples to support points made.

Section B

This section of the examination paper offered students a choice between question 4 on spoken language acquisition and question 5 on literacy development. It was pleasing to see so few rubric infringements with virtually no students inadvertently attempting both questions. As with previous years, considerably more students chose to answer question 4 rather than question 5. Unfortunately, there are still some students who responded to question 5 but included mostly spoken language theory without making links to ideas about literacy.

When answering either question 4 or 5, there is an equal balance of marks to be distributed across AO1 and AO2. In last year's report it was noted that examiners saw more focused discussion on theory (AO2) than linguistic analysis (AO1). The balance in performance across both assessment objectives was more even this year. Students were more often considering the statement within the task and selecting the most appropriate theory and linguistic features from the data to both support and refute the statement. There were also far fewer instances of theory 'dumping' when students wanted to include all the theory they remembered without selecting that which was most appropriate. The most effective responses for both of these questions were often not the longest but those which had clearly identified the two or three most relevant theories and developed arguments and counter-arguments concisely in the light of these. Those students who were able to examine theory through the lenses of both the statement offered and the data were far more likely to be successful and attain the higher levels for both assessment objectives. In order to attain a level 4 for AO2, students need to be offering not only an explanation in the light of the statement but also different views and interpretations. It is worth being aware that prefacing a new theorist with 'A counter argument could be..' or 'There are contrasting perspectives, however,..' will only signal a level 4 response if the opening of the statement is then substantiated with careful discussion of a counterpoint to a previously developed argument.

Question 4

This year's question presented a transcript between Erin, aged 3 years and 1 month, and her mother. They are playing in a sandpit and pretending to do the gardening. The question asked students to evaluate the view that 'without the stimulus of different contexts, children cannot fully

develop their language'. The most successful responses were those which started by examining this statement, really thinking about what was meant by stimulus and the notion of 'different contexts'. For many students, the starting point was consideration of the importance of 'nurture' within the nature/nurture debate. Chomsky and the Language Acquisition Device was often then presented as an alternative interpretation. Students sometimes became weighed down with explaining the contrasting theories which took the focus away from the task and data in hand. Lengthy explanations of case studies like Genie or Jim also proved distracting at times (though it was entirely valid to refer to these studies briefly). Some more varied approaches focused on play and discussed Vygotsky or Garvey, or thought about Tomasello's usage based theory.

In terms of AO1, there were many precise and relevant language comments to be made in what proved to be a rich data set. Most commonly referenced were diminutives, modal verbs, imperatives, pronoun use, sentence construction and syntax, use of declaratives, discourse structure and non-standard grammatical features. The data provided scope for students to comment across all levels of performance. Examiners felt that all students were able to access some language elements within the text. There remained a small minority of students who approached the data descriptively, explaining what was going on rather than analysing elements of the data in relation to the task. Some students continued to neglect the data set in preference for discussing theories linked to the statement.

More successful answers:

- were judicious in selection of theorists which would be most relevant to the statement posed and wrote in a clearly structured and relatively concise way rather than trying to include all learnt theory
- were able to discuss grammatical rules accurately, confidently exploring past tense formation, irregular verb patterns and use of inflections
- analysed patterns across the data (for example, use of questions by Mum, repetition of 'look' by Erin, adjacency pairs and discourse structure)
- referred to relevant case studies briefly without undue focus on less relevant details.

Areas for development:

- some students still used pre-learned material in the examination room (whether this is first and last paragraphs or a standalone nature versus nurture essay). This approach really hampered a focused response to the task in hand
- some students used a number of theories to simply agree with the statement offered. It is important for students to also consider whether there are alternative viewpoints to incorporate into the response.

Question 5

This question offered some school-based writing from Hattie at the age of 7 years and 4 months. The question asked students to evaluate the statement that 'the teaching of explicit grammatical rules is the key to developing children's literacy skills'. Students who chose this question were often able to engage with the statement in the light of explicit grammar focused teaching (of suffixes) evident in Hattie's work. Immediately, more successful students also considered the amount of creative freedom offered to Hattie in creating the content for her sentences. This observation from the data allowed an immediate focus to be placed on contrasting perspectives which could then be explored.

In relation to ideas from language study, students demonstrated a range of reference points. Some students began by considering National Curriculum requirements and the increased grammar focus seen at Key Stage two in recent years. Other students commented on teacher input and often linked this successfully to the notion of the teacher as ‘more knowledgeable other’ (Vygotsky). The teacher feedback and stamps also led to some relevant discussion of positive reinforcement. As with previous series, some students focused primarily on spoken language theory but this did not necessarily allow adequate focus on the question. Occasionally a focus on nativism in relation to grammar development (with discussion of the Wug test as a pertinent example) yielded some quite interesting and fruitful discussion. Only a few students offered any detailed discussion of creative models for literacy development.

More successful answers:

- identified and explored language patterns across the data, thinking about conversion of nouns into adjectives by addition of the suffix (eg play to playful), spelling patterns (with variant spellings of ‘move’) and use of the first person
- engaged with different sides of the debate, thinking about explicit teaching of grammar versus other areas such as genre and creativity
- synthesised discussion of the statement with pertinent examples from the data and relevant ideas from literacy theory
- commented on Hattie’s incomplete sentence (and repeated ideas) and discussed the level of engagement with the task, despite her obvious success with the task itself.

Areas for development:

- some responses focused primarily on handwriting and presentation issues which led to a rather surface consideration of AO1 features within the text
- some students did not engage with the data in the light of the question about grammar teaching and this was evidently a missed opportunity
- some students still used exclusively spoken language theory when answering this question, without relating it specifically to literacy.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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