



A-LEVEL

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

7702/2: Language diversity and change
Report on the Examination

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General

The work of students in this third series of this specification saw further improvements and more effects of the feedback loops that followed last year's examination. Once again questions provided students of all levels with opportunities to show what they had learned about language, their views and arguments and their skills as writers. Students demonstrated much greater understanding of what the tasks required them to do. Examiners reported their great pleasure in reading the sophisticated understanding of the nature of language diversity and change, the sharp critical analysis of discourses about language and the impassioned and entertaining intervention written by students as the culmination of their two years of study.

Key messages

- Students must read all the words in the Section A ideas for evaluation and consider carefully what they imply.
- Students need to discuss case studies and examples of their own evaluatively in the light of the given idea, rather than just rehearse information.
- Students need to avoid leakage from the other Section A question in their writing.
- Students need to identify the discourses about language that run through the texts for Question 3.
- Students need to identify 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 slightly more frequently than Question 1. Statistical analysis suggests that the two questions were of equal demand. Students recognised that both questions could draw on aspects of both diversity and change and wrote perceptive arguments. There was some evidence of students' answers being influenced by the idea in the other question.

AO1

In Questions 1 and 2, students were assessed on their ability to use appropriate terminology and coherent written expression. 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. More effective responses also used skilful discourse markers to knit together their stages of thought. Less successful responses tagged on a statement at the end of a paragraph 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. Most students were very well prepared with lots of case studies and theories which they could discuss in their answers. 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 focused on language diversity. Students were asked to evaluate the idea that language variation had decreased over time (AO2). They then had to express their views in a coherent argument using linguistic terminology (AO1).

Key discriminators were whether students could illustrate variation and evaluate its increase or decrease.

Not all students were certain what variation might mean. In some cases it was taken to mean any changes in the English language. A significant number of students brought in ideas from language and gender. Often they could cite ideas about variation in women's and men's language but could not address the issue of whether it had increased or decreased over time. Many students could illustrate varieties and variations but the more successful were those who could address the other key words in the question.

More successful students:

- considered variation in terms of varieties and the different ways an individual would look to use language
- discussed the nature of standardisation and its effects on variation
- had detailed knowledge of the processes of selection, acceptance, elaboration of function and codification
- explored the emergence of world varieties and debates around standard and non-standard forms around the world, often exploring the situation in Singapore
- explored processes of standardisation and variation in new Englishes, using Schneider's model
- explored dialect levelling and the social reasons for it
- discussed whether dialect levelling in Milton Keynes had actually introduced a new variety
- examined how Estuary English could be seen as removing some older social and regional distinction
- gave some interesting insights into a less standardised world via online communication and the lack of gatekeepers for modern communication technologies
- developed interesting arguments about identity and repertoires leading to increased variation even in the face of levelling elsewhere
- discussed the repertoire analysis by Devyani Sharma of British born Asians
- explored MLE and MUBE as case studies of the emergence of new varieties and variation, citing Rob Drummond's UrBEn-ID project
- examined technology's role in spreading innovation and levelling (eg Americanisms, urban slang, online gamer jargon/slang growing beyond their base but also being used more widely and flattening out/killing more individual local forms)
- discussed the emergence of Polari and its diminishing use as social conditions changed
- explored the creation of pidgins as contact language and their disappearance when their need was no longer present
- considered the very disparate nature of Old English and Middle English before the emergence of Standard English
- examined classic variationist studies and questioned whether variables such as class and gender now saw different patterns of use
- evaluated reasons for standardisation and variation: migration, globalisation, education, technology, identity politics
- gave good examples of variation across different levels (eg phonological variants as markers for class and identity, dialect variation, sociolect and occupational jargon)

- showed a subtle appreciation of the ebb and flow of variation
- evaluated whether changes in variation were a good or a bad thing.

Less successful students:

- illustrated variation but without addressing the issue of increase or decrease
- had detailed knowledge of case studies (Trudgill, Cheshire, Petyt, Labov et al) and what was found, but could not quite link it to the ideas of increase or decrease
- were uncertain where to draw the line between change and variation and how to choose the right material to best answer the question set
- were uncertain about what variation might mean
- discussed changes in language as examples of variation
- confused researchers' names eg Labov versus Lakoff
- confused Labov's New York Department store study with his Martha's Vineyard study
- did not know how to use Kachru's circles to explain an increase or decrease
- forced gender and interaction into answers without linking the material into the question.

Question 2

Question 2 focused on language change. Students were asked to evaluate the idea that changes in communication technologies have had a damaging effect on the English language (AO2). They then had to express their views in a coherent argument using linguistic terminology (AO1).

Students seemed very well prepared for this question. There was good focus on a variety of communication technologies and good discussion of their effect. A major discriminator was whether students could evaluate specific examples of language use and explore how they could be seen as damaging or otherwise.

Less effective answers spent a long time discussing history and dates but with no exploration of damage or focus on technologies. Some students agreed with the idea in the question and referred to any type of change as damaging. Such students often cited the views of John Humphrys or John Sutherland as evidence.

More successful students:

- looked at the effects of a range of technologies – for example TV, the internet, social media and smartphones
- evaluated the effects of the printing press and its connection with standardisation and the dissemination of language
- explored the affordances and limitations of new technologies
- explore how technologies affected what people could use language to do
- examined the impact of new technologies on vocabulary
- evaluated the significance of grammar and spellcheckers as well as predictive text
- explored how people had used the resources of technology to replicate spoken interaction
- evaluated the social etiquettes associated with phones and digital communication
- examined debates about the impact of mobile phones on literacy
- explored debates about emojis and referred to Vyvian Edwards' *The Emoji Code*
- used Crystal to challenge decay views
- cited Wood, Kemp and Plester and their Coventry University research on the impact of texting on literacy
- placed the question's debate within discourses of language change as decay

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- used Aitchison’s metaphors to characterise discourses about change as undesirable
 - used Guy Deutscher to formulate less pejorative accounts of the creativity and functionality of language change
 - argued that language’s evolution was accelerated by technology but that this was a positive benefit to society and paralleled the increase in faster communication
 - discussed the democratisation of language by the internet and the ability to publish
 - discussed the impact of technology on the standardisation of language and its impact on the creation of non-standard usages as well.

Less successful students:

- accepted the ‘damage’ argument far too easily and seemed to be writing an argument against their own behaviour (many asserted that technology was affecting students’ performance in exams for example)
- mentioned the influence of technology on change, but gave no specific examples
- claimed dictionaries as examples of communication technology
- discussed the development of the printing press without discussing its impact
- gave lengthy historical accounts of how the English language has changed
- focused on examples of change that were not connected with communication technologies
- misrepresented Aitchison’s views and models
- claimed that Jean Aitchison is a prescriptivist
- could not explain her metaphors clearly
- lacked examples to evaluate the views
- defined descriptivism as seeing language change as ‘positive’, rather than as observing/describing it.

Section B**Question 3**

Question 3 focused on discourses about standard and non-standard accents within broader discourses about language diversity and change.

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 standard and non-standard accents, showing connections between the texts as parts of a wider discourse about accents, correctness, class and prestige (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. Students were able to engage well with the arguments and the language of both texts. Many students had a very good overview of the texts and made some evaluative comparisons of how they viewed accents. Some students did not pay equal attention to AOs 1 and 3. Others did not compare very systematically. The key to success was found in answers comprised of analytical paragraphs that connected both texts, described salient language features and explored how these represented accents and dialects and sought to shape the reader’s response.

A significant number of students continued to bring in too much theory and research in answering this question, spending time writing paragraphs about research findings and getting no marks for it. They did need to know about the discourses the texts instantiated and research ideas could be

useful to evaluate a representation or idea but students sometimes went off focus into a more Section A type response.

AO1

This year, the large majority of students understood that they were expected to describe the linguistic features in the texts which they were analysing. Generally, the features described were salient and significant for the construction of representations. Nonetheless quite a high percentage of students 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. Some students showed excellent linguistic understanding so achieved highly on AO1 but were then unable to provide a clear analysis of representations. Some answers demonstrated a language feature-led technique which was not helpful.

Precise linguistic terminology was much more in evidence with lots of references to verb types, with mental and material processes appearing more often. Modal verbs were frequently identified and well analysed. There was better exemplification of sentence and phrase types. Issues with pronoun person were still relatively frequent. Many students did not look at sentence and clause features. Of those who did, not all were able to use such descriptions to explore how the texts were conveying meanings and representations.

Some things students could profitably attend to are:

- accurate labelling of word classes
- identifying and showing the exact extent of a verb phrase
- what pragmatics actually involves considering.

AO3 and AO4

Students were much clearer about the purpose of the task this year and there were far fewer general textual analyses. Almost all recognised the need to compare how the texts were part of a discourse about accents.

There were lots of highly effective responses and most tackled the comparative element well. Some chose to compare just language while others did not compare language at all but compared just representations and discourses. Many did both and these students achieved the most success for AO4.

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 a separate paragraph about similar aspects text by text. Almost all compared the shared focus on accents and ideas about the value of elocution lessons. Many reached Level 3 on AO4 because they compared the use of sentence functions, pronouns and other features of language. The answers placed in Level 4 could link language with ideas about standard and non-standard accents. Often students recognised discourses about language and class and prestige. They also recognised discourses about correctness and superiority. Discourses were much better dealt with this year and most students saw the links between the texts and the bigger issues and were able to discuss the connections.

The most effective answers in Level 5 evaluated how these representations were constructed to be convincing and persuasive in Text B and saw how Text A produced a mediated view of these discourses from a different cultural perspective. These answers showed a very strong sense of the texts' different contexts.

There was a clear increase in the number of students looking at 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. There was a trend within some such answers to ignore what the texts were actually saying about accents and elocution, however.

More successful students:

- understood what discourses are and used the word 'discourses' in answers
- connected the texts all the way through, showing how Text B reproduced and developed discourses about the desirability of RP while Text A presented a mediated view of this discourse
- recognised elements of standard language ideology and discourses: correctness, neutrality, aesthetic appeal, prestige and success
- recognised the different voices in Text A and the different stances they held
- saw how McCullagh and thetutorpages.com sought to normalise accent change while Waldie sought to expose class division
- analysed the use of first person pronouns in B to position the audience and create a belief that changing their accent would give them control of their lives and success
- looked at the implications of the imperative 'Allow' and its representation of the reader's situation
- saw how Text A used a third person perspective to describe the 'Brits' from outside and treated the issue of elocution as one for its audience to observe with detachment
- noted how Text B helped to create some of the anxieties that Waldie described as characterising the 'anxious' Brits who 'worry' and 'fret' about accents
- considered the original intended connotations of describing RP as 'Gold Standard'
- saw through this phrase and how it linked RP with wealth, status and standard language ideology and Waldie's analysis of RP's links with class and wealth in tough economic times
- contrasted Waldie's use of the noun phrase 'upper-crust accent' and the quotation marks in 'to talk "posh"' to show a less reverential and more critical view of RP
- examined McCullagh's description of RP as a 'proper English accent', 'speaking properly' and 'nice neutral accents' and the way thetutorpages.com referred to teaching 'correct speech'
- evaluated Text B's patronising representation of 'the local patois' and the cynical advice to use it to get what you want
- looked at the verbs that were associated with regional accents or learning to speak RP and the effects they claimed: 'to get ahead', 'holding ... back', 'miss out' and 'feared being ridiculed or held back' in Text A and 'change', 'progressing', 'assist', 'encourage', 'move', 'influence' in Text B
- examined how Text B's verbs 'mellowing', 'polishing', the adjective 'scientific' and the noun 'reduction' represented the nature of elocution lessons and their implications about standard and non-standard language
- examined how Waldie's use of the present perfective verbs 'have soared' and 'have popped up' with its associate adverbial 'by the dozen' represented the emergence of elocution lessons as a recent phenomenon and craze
- examined the modality in Text B and the impact of 'there is a common acceptance', 'often' 'can' and 'will' to convince a reader of the truth and potential of the text's claims
- considered how descriptions like 'unusual help', 'children as young as two years old' and 'often charging up to \$90 an hour' questioned the elocution industry
- considered the implication of the adjectives 'industrial and domestic' in representing the benefits of standard language use
- evaluated Text B's use of the euphemistic noun phrase 'a particular social standing' and the noun 'opinion' to represent the stereotypes attached to regional accents
- examined Text B's championing 'modified RP' as a sign of social progress

- evaluated how McCullagh tried to play down the class dimension
- made very astute discussion of the wider contexts of these debates and the political implications of the positions being adopted, responding to Waldie’s analysis of ongoing and entrenched class divisions.

Less successful students:

- did not recognise the different views presented in Text B by Waldie, McCullagh and thetutorpages.com
- did not use methods of language analysis when examining how representations were constructed
- did not engage with how the texts represented RP and non-standard accents
- explored audience positioning and modality without really considering what was being communicated about accents
- used ideas about audience positioning, pragmatics and modality with little real understanding
- made very few comparisons between the texts
- thought the footnotes were part of the original source in Text A
- struggled to achieve an appropriate register for analysis (‘sarcastic vibes’).

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 language diversity and attitudes to accents. 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 asks students to take their knowledge of English language and engage with and intervene in real-world debates.

This question was generally answered much more effectively than the equivalent question was last year. The mean mark for AO2 rose but was still below the AO2 marks in Section A. More students recognised the need to integrate explicit linguistic knowledge into a text for a non-specialist audience. Many struggled to select and deploy knowledge effectively however.

Many students drew on variationist and matched guise research into accents, communication accommodation theory, opinion polls, TV documentaries and news stories about accents. It seemed like a very ‘live’ topic for many of them and it led to some engaged personal responses. Higher achieving students explored accentism and showed a good understanding of the social origins of accents and the arbitrary nature of judgements about accents. Many challenged negative attitudes towards regional accents, some in a rather rant-like style, but others were able to adopt a more subtle polemic approach, often injecting satirical humour.

Some recurrent weaknesses were the conflation of accent and dialect/sociolect; asserting a position with little linguistic evidence; and simply parroting the accent reduction agenda. Less successful responses accepted that RP and/or elocution is necessary for success and agreed with negative judgements of regional accents, often prompting the reader to ‘learn RP’ or ‘abandon [their] accents’. While most students understood that they needed to show off their linguistic knowledge, many answers were still very light on specific linguistic knowledge.

There were some passionate, articulate and witty pieces. Form was used really well and examiners received the impression that students were much better prepared for writing opinion pieces this year. Almost all students this year were prepared to write an article and provided a functional

headline. Many also provided engaging sub-editorial features, though once again there were fewer really telling conclusions. There were many very creative and engaging pieces showing flair and sophistication. Many used cohesive devices eg ending with a point mentioned in the introduction, or linking back to the headline, and this was effective.

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

More successful students:

- referred to the sources represented in Texts A and B as a starting point for their piece
- informed their reader about these sources appropriately and identified the views and issues they contained
- evaluated the views expressed in Texts A and B using knowledge about language
- explored the ways non-standard and standard accents are judged and perceived
- introduced their reader to matched guise research to illustrate these
- noted that views about accents are really about class, politics and social values
- explored how individual accents could be judged both positively and negatively
- established that attitudes to accents are social rather than linguistic judgements
- recognised that this did not mean that they had no effect or significance
- explored the advantages and disadvantages of speaking with non-standard accents
- explored the advantages and disadvantages of speaking with standard accents
- weighed up issues of identity and authenticity
- debated whether regional accents, often seen as more friendly than RP, might not be an advantage in dealing with all sorts of people
- discussed the fact that RP is not necessarily any clearer to speakers of English around the world
- examined how fashions in attitudes to accents have changed over time
- examined the significance of the emergence of modified RP and Estuary English
- explored the BBC's role over time in promoting both RP and diversity of accents
- considered what implications this might have for the individual reader
- weighed up pragmatic responses against idealistic notions of freedom of choice and accent equality
- explored the value of linguistic accommodation and code-switching (providing information about appropriate thinkers and researchers for their audience)
- argued that changing a non-standard accent for a standard accent made a speaker complicit in the perpetuation of linguistic and social inequality
- chose a wise and helpful place of publication
- wrote answers which often incorporated well-judged humour and paid judicious attention to the need to entertain
- used sentences which were varied and crafted for effect
- used anecdotes skilfully to engage the reader
- addressed the reader in an appropriate way
- used witty and informative headlines that hooked and summarised
- guided the reader by means of sub-editorial features
- provided a thoughtful, memorable or witty conclusion.

Less successful students:

- recycled the language and ideas of both texts
- wrote only a general response to the texts, often outraged that people should not be allowed to use their regional accents
- simply accepted views that it was a good idea to learn to speak with an RP accent
- made little or no reference to any concepts relevant to the study of accents and standard language ideology
- misunderstood the views and attitudes of Paul Waldie
- wrote as if their audience had read Text A and Text B
- referred to the sources as Text A and Text B
- used an inappropriately informal style of expression
- included expletives and taboo language in their answer which became immoderate, abusive invective
- showed little control of spelling and punctuation
- showed little control of the ability to analyse and argue a case.

Advice to students

To improve performance on this paper, students need to:

- read the tasks very carefully, identifying key words and the exact focus of the task
- select relevant materials and examples that address the question
- understand that key question verbs like ‘evaluate’ and ‘assess’ require them to make judgements about ideas
- treat AO1 as a toolkit to enable AO3 and not as an end in itself
- 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 what the texts in Question 3 are saying as well as looking at positioning and modality
- focus on evaluating the ways Section B texts use language to represent language and persuade the reader of their views
- use their knowledge of language to evaluate the specific arguments raised in Section B texts when answering Question 4
- use argument and evidence rather than assertion when producing their piece
- attend to the need to provide readers with information about language and to educate them
- challenge the ideas offered in the texts in Section B.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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