



General Certificate of Education

English Language A 1701

Specification A

ENGA1 Seeing Through Language

Report on the Examination

2009 examination – June series

This Report on the Examination uses the [new numbering system](#)

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General

This was the first summer series for this Unit and examiners reported that many candidates displayed pleasing familiarity with the main linguistic, modal and contextual features of the two texts offered for analysis, as well as an impressive knowledge of the ways children acquire both spoken and written language. Candidates were able to demonstrate an appropriate range and depth of skills, knowledge and understanding relevant to the Unit's Assessment Objectives.

Question 1 required candidates to analyse two texts: part of a published speech about environmental issues by a leading member of the Green Party and a poster giving advice about how to save paper and energy. To access the higher mark ranges for AO1, candidates were expected to analyse both texts systematically by illustrating, describing and analysing key graphological, phonological, semantic, grammatical and syntactical features. To access the higher mark ranges for AO3i (mode), candidates were expected to examine the main mode characteristics of the texts such as synchronicity, permanence, planning and interactivity. To access the higher mark ranges for AO3ii (meaning), candidates were expected to identify and explore contextual features such as purposes, participant positioning, synthetic personalisation, functions, tenor, genre, structure, topics, topic management and the various meanings both literal and pragmatic constructed by the writer/speaker of Text A and the writer/designer of Text B.

The first part of each of Questions 2 and 3 required candidates to study a data set related to children's acquisition of either speech or writing and comment linguistically on five different features of language which they found of interest. To access the higher mark ranges for AO1 candidates were expected to describe these features precisely and accurately.

The second part of each of Questions 2 and 3 required candidates to write an answer on either what they had learned about language acquisition from children's early uses of words and meanings or what they considered to be the most significant factors which affect children's development of writing skills. To access the higher mark ranges for AO1, candidates were expected to spell and punctuate correctly, write in complete sentences, use an accurate linguistic register, express their ideas fluently and structure their answers cohesively using paragraphs. To access the higher mark range for AO2 candidates were expected to examine particular linguistic features and contexts appropriate to the requirements of the question as well as showing understanding of language issues, theories, research and debates.

Examiners noted some issues relating to the amount of time spent by candidates on each section of the examination. There is a lot of information in this paper for candidates to assimilate and it is recommended that they spend 30 minutes reading the questions and data in order to prepare their answers as thoroughly as possible. There is a parity of marks between the two sections and it is recommended that candidates spend 45 minutes on each answer. It is important for candidates to realise that the data analysis in the first part of each of Questions 2 and 3 carries a maximum of 10 marks out of the question total of 45. Given this proportion it is recommended that candidates should spend about ten minutes analysing the data and make five precise points. The most successful candidates accomplished this in five sentences but examiners noted that some data analyses were up to one and a half pages long. Too much time spent on the first part of each question takes valuable time away from the second part which carries a maximum of 35 marks.

To improve their performance in future examinations candidates should:

- time their answers carefully to manage the demands of the each part of the paper
- analyse explicitly the mode characteristics of the texts in Section A
- read both texts in Section A carefully for meaning
- identify **five** features from the data sets in Section B precisely and describe them linguistically in a brief and focused answer.

SECTION A – Language and Mode

Question 1

The segmented layout, inclusive tenor and triadic rhetoric of the Green Party speech and the visual design, second person address and imperative mood of the Australian National University poster were readily accessible to candidates. There was clearly sufficient variety of linguistic, modal and contextual features in the texts for candidates to make purposeful and interesting comments.

The most successful candidates:

- described key linguistic features correctly and gave precise quotations to illustrate them
- explored the main mode characteristics of the texts
- explored the meanings created by the texts.

These candidates gave close attention to semantic fields in the texts and were able to conduct an assured examination of topics such as ecological issues and electioneering in Text A and technology and energy saving in Text B. The most successful candidates described and examined grammatical features such as the use of modal verbs, verb tenses and aspects, adverbs of manner and degree, superlative and comparative adjectives and dynamic and stative verbs. These candidates explored syntax by describing sentence types, clause types, clause linking, parallelism and the use of co-ordinate clauses as separate sentences.

The most successful candidates explored and conceptualised the mode of the texts and were able to talk confidently about carefully planned informality, degrees of permanence, accessibility, message orientation and types of interactivity. Examiners noted that this area of mode analysis produced some of the most interesting and productive work from candidates but also, unfortunately, some of the most brief and cursory. Candidates should be encouraged to ask not just *what* the mode is but *why* it matters: *why* the producer of a text has chosen that particular mode to deliver their message. There were some productive comments about the use of graphology. Some candidates commented that the short paragraphs and repetitive sentence openings of Text A paralleled the bullet points of Text B, but others thought that the use of bullet points simply indicated a young audience. The use of punctuation in Text B to create an informal tenor and spoken tone was generally recognised and the most successful candidates were able to link this feature to politeness.

The most successful candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of how the contexts of the texts shaped the meanings created. These candidates explored particular meanings and effects such as the use of scale of problem and ease of solution as strategies in Text B and challenge to conventional thinking and the representation of the Green Party and other political parties in Text A. It was, however, rarer to see a discussion of the representation of ANU. Perhaps candidates were less comfortable with the representation of a more anonymous institution than with a political party with a human face.

Most candidates were able to identify some word classes and many described types of nouns and adjectives. The description of number and person of pronouns was also usually quite precise but some candidates struggled with the difference between subject and object. Sentence functions were usually identified accurately and to some purpose but sentence types less so. The description of graphology was generally brief, accurate and productive. Most candidates were able to list the basic mode features of each text in terms of planning, permanence and formality. Some candidates identified the texts as 'mixed mode' and could comment, for example, on the use of specialist or prestigious lexis in Siân Berry's speech as appropriate to her self-presentation as a parliamentary candidate but most candidates stopped short at labelling this as a mode feature. Most candidates showed understanding of the purposes of the writer/speaker of Text A to challenge other parties and solicit votes and good will from its audience and the writer/designer of Text B to encourage University students and staff to save paper and energy. The audience for Text A was generally well described but many candidates were vague about Text B. They did not notice who produced it and assumed that it was a generally available poster likely to be displayed in any office. It is important for candidates to ask *who* produced a text and *why*. Most candidates considered how the texts used address and markers of spoken tone to encourage inclusiveness and accentuate shared interests.

Less successful candidates made broad assertions about the texts without proof or exemplification. These candidates identified one or two pronouns or one or two word classes without linking them to meaning. A minority of candidates offered narrative commentaries on the texts sometimes including unanalysed quotations. These less successful responses made basic comments about graphology and labelled the texts as writing and speech. Less successful candidates often did not read the question and description of texts carefully. Many identified Text B as a website and discussed it in terms of blended mode features including the interactivity of a hyperlink. Some candidates referred to Text A as an article. Candidates should be encouraged to identify the genre of the text carefully using all the information available to them on the paper. Some candidates misread the middle portion of Berry's speech in which she issues policy challenges to the other parties in a series of sentences beginning 'They will...'. These were read as a direct rather than indirect statement of Green Party policy, with *they* referring to the Greens rather than to the others. This emphasises the need for candidates to spend time carefully reading the texts for meaning. Examiners noted that there was often an imbalance in coverage across the two texts, with Text A generally receiving more attention. There is no stipulation that candidates should give equal attention to the two texts. It is the overall quality of their analyses which examiners will be assessing. If candidates only answer on one of the texts, their ability to reach the higher mark ranges will be impaired. This occurred in only a few answers.

The most successful candidates:

- began with an overview of context, modes and topics thus supplying a context which informed subsequent analysis of language features
- conceptualised characteristics of mode in terms of such factors as synchronicity, permanence, interactivity, planning and structuring
- were successful in not only identifying the texts as mixed modes, but also in exploring the subtleties of the linguistic choices that distinguished the texts from straightforward written or spoken mode texts
- considered in detail the implications of the planning and structuring of the two texts in terms of the syntactic, lexical and discourse choices made by the writers
- focused in some detail on the use of rhetorical devices such as triadic structures 'warm, dry and safe homes'

- explored the message orientation and topics of the texts: green policies, ecological issues and electioneering in Text A and office work, technology and energy saving in Text B
- gave examples of personal and direct address: 'your quality of life', 'how you can help'
- analysed the replication of spoken voice: 'we must fight bigger AND better', 'Utilise the features on your photocopier!!!'
- engaged closely with the meanings of both texts and made some interesting observations about semantic choices – for example the verb 'consume' giving a negative representation of the photocopier eating up resources
- analysed representation of the scale of the problem '21 times taller than the Telstra tower' and the ease of solution 'pressing a few buttons' in the Text B
- considered the speaker's representation of other parties in Text A (eg use of third person pronouns in place of direct reference) and the construction of the Green Party message through the use of emotive lexis 'fairer, happier, healthier'
- explored in depth the use of statistics in Text B 'over 80000 reams of paper' to construct a persuasive case for responsible use of photocopying facilities
- explored the representation of ANU as green and responsible: 'ANU green workspace'
- explored the representation of the Green vision 'we all get home in plenty of time to spend with our children before they go to bed'
- identified clause types accurately (the highest-achieving candidates discussed conditional clauses and relative clauses) and commented successfully on the functions of these clause types
- gave detailed attention to the variety of sentence types, accurately identifying simple, compound and complex sentences and explaining clearly their effects
- made productive observations about the structural features of the texts, commenting on the use of cohesive devices and the organisation of topics and themes
- gave an in-depth account of the register, focusing not only on lexical choices but also on syntactic features (eg ellipsis, juxtaposition of simple and multiple sentences; sentence and paragraph length, coordinate clauses used as sentences) and interactive features (eg address, synthetic personalisation)
- identified a wide range of word class types (eg abstract and proper nouns, comparative and superlative adjectives, conjunctive and disjunctive adverbs, dynamic and stative verbs)
- identified verb tenses and aspects and the effect of these in the texts
- commented successfully on the strategic use of modality within the texts
- wrote fluently and articulately, structuring their response carefully and logically.

Less successful candidates:

- simply identified graphology/complexity/formality
- used linguistic methods with minimal accuracy
- labelled texts only in terms of speech and writing
- paraphrased the content of the texts and included unanalysed quotations
- wrote only about one of the texts
- misunderstood audience, purpose, context, content, meaning significantly
- made basic errors which hindered clear communication.

Advice to candidates

Do:

- write about both texts
- plan and structure your answer systematically using paragraphs with clear topic sentences
- begin your answer with an overview of context, modes and topics
- identify key language features using appropriate linguistic terms
- explain how these features contribute to the construction of meanings
- explicitly comment on the mode features of the texts.

Do not:

- summarise the content of the texts
- leave out comments on the meanings and effects of language features
- forget to comment on mode characteristics
- write about only one of the texts
- offer quotations without linguistic description.

SECTION B – Language Development

Question 02

Examiners noted that Question 02 was by far the most frequent choice in Section B. They reported that many candidates were very well prepared and were able to identify a range of features from the data concisely and accurately. There was often good understanding of over-generalisation, overextension and telegraphic syntax. Some candidates, however, just paraphrased the data without linguistic precision, while others were confused about naming word classes. Many candidates clearly identified features such as: inventive lexis – ‘snuggly’, ellipsis – ‘don’t want to’, present progressive – ‘folding it up’, uncooperative answer – ‘I won’t talk about it’, imitation of ‘adult’ exclamations – ‘good lord’, self-correction – ‘a coat (1) a coat’, imperative mood – ‘pretend it to be a goat’, precise semantic usage – ‘body warmer’, possessive pronoun – ‘my snuggly blanket’, auxiliary verbs (present) – ‘won’t’ (absent) ‘I (will) iron’, interactivity – ‘what is’, ‘ah’.

The most successful candidates:

- identified five accurate and clearly differentiated linguistic features
- quoted the example of the feature in the answer rather than giving the line number
- gave a brief linguistic description of the feature
- gave a short indication of why the feature was of interest.

Less successful candidates:

- wasted time and effort by writing an essay length answer
- identified one feature and gave two explanations
- attempted to comment on features such as pauses rather than features of acquisition
- explained at length not only how the feature demonstrated particular aspects of theory, but explained the theory in detail.

Question 03

Examiners noted that this question produced some highly knowledgeable, detailed and sustained answers. The most successful candidates explicitly explored what they had learned about language acquisition with particular attention to children’s early uses of words and meanings. These answers contained clear evidence of the study of English Language in the form of empirical observations and specific reference to appropriate research such as that of Skinner, Vygotsky, Bruner, Lennenberg, Chomsky, Thompson and Chapman, Piaget and Berko and Brown. Some of these most successful answers examined early words, word classes, semantic environments, the nature of two word and telegraphic stages, the importance of cognition in children’s understanding, the role of morphology in meaning and the different types of extension. There were some excellent answers where conceptualised approaches to children’s acquisition of meaning offered detailed discussion of the nature of words and meanings and the labelling, packaging and network building model of Jean Aitchison.

Most candidates demonstrated some knowledge of key theories of language acquisition but often without sufficient focus on children’s uses of words and meanings. Most candidates offered some examples of children’s language but many lacked clear linguistic description. Examiners commented that, given the wealth of data presented to candidates in Question 02, much of which they analysed well, it seemed strange that more examples of children’s language were not forthcoming.

Less successful candidates struggled to address the issue of 'words and meanings' at all and offered a very generalised account of one or two aspects of early sound production. A number of candidates offered generic 'theories and stages' responses which did not really address the question. A significant minority of candidates did not answer the specific 03 question but based their answer almost entirely on the data in 02, which limited the scope of their answers.

The most successful candidates:

- explored what they had learned about language acquisition from children's early uses of words and meanings
- commented on a range of well selected examples of semantic relations, morphology, types of extension
- described holophrases and some of their pragmatic meanings
- explored word classes used by children when acquiring language
- gave detailed and accurate explanations of over- and under-extension
- examined the labelling, packaging and network building model of semantic acquisition
- evaluated the roles of input and imitation
- gave examples of correction and children's reaction to them by, for instance, examining Thompson and Chapman's 'fis' research
- examined some rules and principles applied by children, eg tense formation
- considered plurality by examining Berko and Brown's 'wug' research
- considered the role played by virtuous errors in the process of language acquisition
- used their knowledge of researchers such as Skinner, Chomsky, Bruner and Piaget to explain and illuminate the acquisition process
- assessed research and theories critically, using evidence to evaluate them
- showed insight into the roles of environment and interaction in the development vocabulary and understanding by considering ideas such as the Zone of Proximal Development, Child Directed Speech, Language Acquisition Support System and the role of the More Knowledgeable Other
- wrote fluently and articulately, structuring their response carefully and logically and offering a well-crafted line of argument.

Less successful candidates:

- wrote general essays outlining the theories about child language acquisition without specific attention to words and meanings
- gave a broad account of stages of development, especially pre-verbal stages
- identified very few features of children's language
- didn't focus on linguistic issues and gave generalised discussions of children's behavioural development
- confused the ideas of different researchers and theorists
- agreed with mutually contradictory models of the acquisition process
- made frequent errors, with the worst of these impeding communication.

Advice to candidates

Do:

- read the question carefully and identify the issues to which it refers: children's early uses of words and meanings
- plan and structure an answer which clearly addresses those issues
- examine some key features of children's language acquisition (such as word classes, morphology and virtuous errors) using correct linguistic terminology

- use some examples from the data in Question 02 as well as your own prepared ones
- examine relevant research findings and theory in detail
- evaluate research findings and theory, evolving a balanced and clear line of argument.

Do not:

- make sweeping and unsupported assertions
- summarise a range of research superficially with no reference to the question
- forget to include some relevant examples of children's language
- ignore the importance of input and interaction in children's acquisition of language
- only write about pre-linguistic sounds.

Question 04

Many of the candidates who answered Question 04 were able to identify a range of features from the data concisely and accurately. Others, however, described the data without linguistic insight and simply made broad comments about the writing being wrong. Many candidates clearly identified features such as: simple sentences – 'I am driving the red dodgem', compound sentences – 'I had a dream and I was eaten up by King Kong', first person narrative – 'I had a dream', reversed letters – 'e', spatial dimensions of early writing – various letter sizes and positions such as 'p' and 'g', past tense – 'I bumped', present progressive tense – 'I am driving', present perfect tense – 'has changed', omission – 'Th(e) ugly..', orthographical variants to represent consonants – 'people', writing as an interactive process – 'good boy'.

The most successful candidates:

- identified five accurate and clearly differentiated linguistic features
- quoted the example of the feature in the answer rather than giving the line number
- gave a brief linguistic description of the feature
- gave a short indication of why the feature was of interest.

Less successful candidates:

- wasted time and effort writing an essay
- only wrote about perceived errors
- used one feature and gave two explanations.

Question 05

Examiners were pleased to report that a significant number of candidates answered with knowledge and understanding by citing a variety of relevant research and illustrating, describing and discussing particular features of children's writing. Some answers to this question, however, were very limited and contained little understanding of the process of written language acquisition. The most successful candidates explicitly explored the most significant factors which affect children's development of writing skills. These most successful answers integrated specific examples of children's language such as handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar and syntax into their answers. These answers referred confidently to the work of researchers such as Kroll, Vann, Vygotsky, Gundlach and Bereiter and clearly identified and evaluated a variety of written acquisition models such as cognitive, physiological, interactional, experimental and developmental.

Most candidates showed some awareness of the importance of speech and reading in children's acquisition of writing skills and some were able to begin to examine the relationship between phonemes and graphemes.

Less successful candidates found difficulty in relating the issues specified in the question to anything within their knowledge or experience. These candidates either applied generic theory models from initial spoken acquisition or discussed, very narrowly, the imitation model.

The most successful candidates:

- examined and evaluated the most significant factors which affect children's development of writing skills
- made productive links between the acquisition of speech and the development of writing skills
- explored a substantial and varied range of examples of children's writing, focusing on a breadth of language levels including syntax, grammar, semantic relations, orthography
- evaluated critically research and theories about writing acquisition such as Kroll's stages of written acquisition
- assessed the contribution of reading, drawing and narrative to the development of writing skills
- considered writing as representing communicative power
- examined some features of handwriting, formation of letter symbols and punctuation
- considered relationships between sounds and symbols
- identified some rules and principles applied by children, eg word order, negation, agreement of word classes and tense
- considered written language acquisition as an active and deductive process, eg experimentation, correction
- evolved a view of the nature of written language acquisition as an interactive, developmental and cognitive process
- wrote fluently and articulately, structuring their response carefully and logically and offering a well-crafted line of argument.

Less successful candidates:

- demonstrated little or no understanding of the process of written language acquisition
- focused their attention on a range of theories more relevant to the development of spoken language, without making explicit their relevance (perceived or otherwise) to the development of writing skills
- offered few examples of children's writing, or in some cases none at all
- did not make use of the examples of children's writing from the data in Question 3(a)
- made frequent errors, with the worst of these impeding communication.

Advice to candidates

Do:

- read the question carefully and identify the issues to which it refers
- plan and structure an answer which clearly addresses those issues
- examine some key *relevant* features of children's written language acquisition such as formation of letter symbols, punctuation, syntax, semantic relations, negation and systematic orthographical variation using correct linguistic terminology
- examine some relevant research findings and theory about acquisition of writing
- evaluate research findings and theory, evolving a balanced and clear line of argument.

Do not:

- make sweeping and unsupported assertions
- use research about *the* acquisition of speech
- forget to include some examples of children's writing such as spelling, word order, agreements
- ignore the importance of interaction, input and correction in the acquisition of writing skills.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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