General Certificate of Education

English Language A 1701
Specification A

ENGA2   Representation and Language

Report on the Examination
2009 examination – June series

General

This series was a promising start to the new specification. Overall, candidates engaged purposefully with the concept of representation in both investigation and production pieces. There were very few incomplete folders. The required focus on representation encouraged candidates to engage with texts' meanings. It was pleasing to note that there were very few investigations that simply listed linguistic features with no consideration of meanings produced. The best candidates based their interpretations of source texts on close study of language in the light of contextual factors, such as publication, audience and purpose, linked to consideration of social values and debated issues. This usually resulted in analyses that went beyond the mere repetition of surface meaning.

Word counts and length requirements presented various types of difficulty. The length restriction on the investigation requires candidates to select features which are most relevant to the representation under consideration, rather than simply to analyse their source texts line by line. Some candidates' work fell well short of the specified length given in the specification. Such work was self-limiting in terms of range and depth. More problematic were investigations that were substantially above the word count, some cases more than 6000 words. Usually, such submissions would have benefited from ruthless editing at the drafting stage. The specified length should be adhered to as closely as possible.

Representation Investigation

AO3 Analyse and evaluate the influence of contextual factors on the production and reception of spoken and written language

The vast majority of investigations focused on individuals recently in the media: celebrities (top choices being Jonathan Ross, Russell Brand, Jade Goody, Britney Spears, Amy Winehouse and Victoria Beckham); politicians (the clear favourite being Barack Obama, although Sarah Palin and Hilary Clinton both featured); or those at the centre of major criminal investigations (Gerry and Kate McCann, Karen Matthews).

Having identified their individual, many candidates then simply proceeded to analyse each text in isolation without addressing the requirement to consider, in the words of the specification, 'how texts might produce social values and how they might contribute to maintaining or changing values'. Weaker candidates concluded that journalists were either for or against whichever individual they were considering, which was usually self-evident in the text and so not particularly illuminating.

Although there was some searching work on the representations of individuals, more considered choices tended to be more successful. Some featured a social group (teenagers, working women, mixed race families) and linked it to current social trends or debates. The monarchy featured mainly in the specific issue of Prince Harry and racism. A wide range of issues were covered, including obesity, violence in the media, size zero models, drugs, euthanasia and immigration. A few candidates recycled materials on WAGs, issued in the autumn specimen folders.

The success of these more wide-ranging investigations depended initially on the choice of source texts. Careful selection is essential for an interesting, convincing analysis which presents a coherent line of argument. Occasionally, the source texts were so disparate as to preclude meaningful comments on representation. Three source texts were used by most candidates, with only a few opting for four or five. These varied considerably in length. Many candidates downloaded very long articles of which they analysed a very small part. Unless indicated on the

source itself, quotations were very time-consuming to locate in order to check for accuracy. It would be helpful if candidates showed clearly which parts of the source texts had been used for close analysis of linguistic features, either by highlighting, underlining or bracketing in the margin.

In a few cases, texts were too slight to support the claims made in the investigation. Such texts included, for example, brief film reviews from magazines, which often did no more than summarise a film's plot, list its main actors and give a sentence or two of recommendation or criticism. Some investigations based entirely on the lyrics of three popular songs were similarly limited. A number of candidates selected tabloid reports which consisted largely of quotations and failed to differentiate between the journalist's voice and the voices of other people interviewed. Some choices of source text, such as blogs, made consideration of contextual factors very difficult. A few candidates chose obscure publications from abroad but could say little about the social context in which the text had been produced.

Some centres had clearly allowed candidates to pursue their own interests and have a completely free choice of topic. This is to be encouraged - as long as source texts are approved by the centre at an early stage of the planning process, in order to avoid some of the problems mentioned above. There is the danger, too, that weaker candidates will be unable to conceptualise representation issues easily at the planning stage and will select texts without much thought about a possible line of argument beyond the obvious; in such cases, early advice and guidance will be crucial to the success of the coursework.

In a few centres, all candidates based their investigations on the same three source texts. While this has clear advantages in terms of the appropriateness of source type and content, it is nevertheless to be discouraged: it means the majority of candidates will have had little involvement in the selection process and are therefore unlikely to engage fully with the issues presented in the texts. Candidates need to be actively involved in researching topics and finding appropriate texts, since these activities help to develop a number of important skills as well as broadening understanding of a range of representation issues.

A compromise strategy, which seems to have been operated successfully in a number of centres, was to combine student selection of sources with 'quality control' by teachers. From the initial range of representation topics and texts provided by their students, teachers chose a few topics and a range of texts on each one. Candidates then made a final choice from the packs created, so that those who chose the same topic did not necessarily select identical sources. This made it more likely that the candidate chose a topic and texts with personal appeal and became productively engaged with the issues involved.

In a very small number of cases, candidates seemed to have little idea of the requirement to focus on representation and simply analysed three texts consecutively, with no clear focus. While such work could be given credit for linguistic knowledge, there was often little to reward in terms of interpretation.

Most candidates used as their sources newspaper or magazine reports, articles or, in a few cases, editorials and were able to place such sources in a wider social context. There were some injudicious generalisations about audiences and social class. Ideas about audience need to be deduced from linguistic analysis, rather than assumed from the start. However, to define audience there were some lengthy and not usually very productive explorations of the lexis of source texts. Often these took the form of listing decontextualised words, labelling them as latinate or native English words (often inaccurately) before reaching fairly bland conclusions: long words appeal to intelligent audiences and are designed to make them think; short words are more colloquial and are designed to engage and entertain.

Some candidates lost sight of what the act of reading is about and claimed that latinate sentences were for older, more literate audiences, whereas colloquial sentences were there to engage a new teenage audience. The word 'tabloid', with the intended meaning of 'popular', was often misapplied to *The Times* or *The Independent* which confused candidates' assumptions about audience.

A more productive approach was taken by the more able candidates, who looked at audience from the point of view of the writers' strategies for manipulating readers' responses in a number of different ways. For example, they looked at how writers sought to engage the audience (humour, address, dramatic impact, and so on), to persuade (a range of rhetorical features, creation of an authoritative tone) or to inform them (forceful declaratives, factual evidence or references and so on). With a clear understanding of the ways in which writers had carefully positioned their audiences, candidates were able to explore representation from an informed viewpoint.

The best work also showed an overview of context, gave a convincing account of writers' strategies and closely analysed implicit as well as explicit meanings, linked to specific linguistic features. These were carefully selected to demonstrate how the representation was produced and included some of the following: connotations of verbs, adjectives and nouns; functions of passive clauses; ordering of clause elements such as subject and verb.

AO1 Select and apply a range of linguistic methods, to communicate relevant knowledge using appropriate terminology and coherent, accurate written expression

The majority of candidates were able to apply knowledge of a range of linguistic frameworks, including lexis, semantics, grammar, phonology and graphology. Key discriminators were the range of features used and the accuracy with which they were labelled. In order to access the upper half of the mark range, candidates needed to demonstrate their control of the grammatical framework, as detailed in the marking grid. For the top band, this range had to include not only word classes but also accurate recognition of sentence and clause types or clause elements.

Less successful candidates' marks were limited by frequent labelling errors. In the middle range, candidates were able to apply word classes with greater accuracy, but ignored or were insecure in their identification of sentence types. The words 'clause' and 'phrase' were often used interchangeably. The most successful candidates were able to identify non-finite, nominal, adverbial and relative clauses or show knowledge of subject and object elements of clauses.

Many candidates were able to recognise simple sentences and comment appropriately on their uses: to add dramatic impact, introduce a new aspect or summarise an argument, for example. However, those who were able accurately to identify compound and complex sentences often gave formulaic comments on their effects. Successful candidates identified, for example, ways in which a particular compound sentence was used to clarify two or more, often opposing, aspects of an argument, or a complex sentence to add subtlety to a line of argument and challenge a simplistic view.

Clause labelling, too, was most successful when accompanied by searching analysis of representational effects. Many candidates found relative clauses, for example, simple to identify, but only the best responses analysed their precise functions, whether informative or evaluative, and how these shaped readers' responses.

Successful candidates also looked closely at the content and positioning of clause elements. They noted how the foregrounding of adverbial elements, for example, in the form of types of adverbial phrase or clause, shaped the direction of an argument. They noted how admiration for a strong individual, such as Barack Obama, could be implied by making him the subject of a number of active clauses, controlling the verb elements, whereas sympathy for a victim, such as Jade Goody, could be aroused by positioning her as either the subject of a passive clause or the object in an active one.

Most could identify nouns and verbs, although there was less certainty about noun types. The work even of more able candidates demonstrated widespread confusion about verb forms. Tense and aspect were often imprecisely identified and their specific functions ignored. Non-finite participles were frequently labelled as continuous or perfect aspect. Adjectives and adverbs tended to be confused, particularly when adjectives with an apparent adverb structure, such as 'deadly' or 'friendly' occurred in the source texts. A few candidates regarded 'superlative' as a semantic rather than a grammatical concept and incorrectly labelled as superlatives words such as 'last' or 'ultimate'. Prepositions and determiners were often confused with subordinate conjunctions. A few candidates confused punctuation with grammar. As with sentence and clause analysis, successful candidates explored effects of word classes in detail and did not see linguistic labelling as an end in itself.

It is vital that, where there are labelling errors, these are clearly indicated, so that moderators can see they have been taken into account in the mark awarded for this AO. Moderators frequently reported that errors in candidates' work were left unmarked or, in a number of cases, ticked as being accurate. In the latter cases, this undermined confidence in the mark awarded.

Another essential aspect is the use of specific supporting examples for linguistic features, preferably quoted and precisely located in the text. Decontextualised lists of words are not generally helpful for analysis or marking. If quoting a sentence or noun phrase in order to identify a single verb or adjective, for example, underlining needs to be present in order for the moderator to be sure that labelling is accurate. No credit can be given for unsupported or generalised points. Claims that a certain text consisted of only simple and compound sentences, for example, tended to be inaccurate and were given no AO1 credit unless followed by one or two specific examples, clearly labelled.

Technical accuracy, fluency of expression and structure were taken into account when locating a candidate's work within a particular band of the marking grid. The mark was limited, for example, where there were frequent errors in sentence punctuation or where ungrammatical expression impeded the clarity of ideas. Basic spelling errors similarly undermined achievement. In terms of structure, most candidates gave a brief introductory overview of their topic and source texts. Occasionally, general introductory comments were overlong and left little room within the word count for close analysis. At the other extreme was a minority of candidates whose work had no introduction or overview, but simply began immediately with the first text. In such cases, it was difficult to discern any clear line of argument with regard to the representation under consideration.

Successful candidates:

- thought carefully about the writers' varied purposes and the language used to achieve them
- engaged closely with ideas and issues linked to the specific representation chosen
- gave a coherent overview of the source texts, identifying a range of strategies, linked to specific examples and effects
- selected a range of key word classes for detailed analysis of representation: abstract nouns, superlative adjectives, adverbials of time and place, emotive nouns and adjectives, verb forms
- identified, exemplified and explored significant uses of specific sentence and clause types
- wrote clearly and accurately.

Less successful candidates:

- ignored contextual factors such as audience, purpose and context of use
- went through texts line by line, rather than selecting significant features
- used decontextualised examples or failed to exemplify points made
- made frequent labelling errors
- showed weak control of sentence punctuation, spelling and expression.

Representation Production

AO4 Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English in a range of different contexts, informed by linguistic study

A Form and Content; B Style and Structure

A clear majority of candidates chose to write a feature article on a single celebrity, often the same person used for the representation investigation. The best examples presented a coherent and persuasive view and entertained by means of style as well as content. However, in many cases, the representation production piece was closely reliant on one or more of the sources used in the investigation, so that the writing seemed derivative and predictable. Often the representation itself, although different from the one presented in the source texts, replicated a view already familiar in the media. The aim of the production piece is to produce an original representation or challenge a prevailing view.

Very few candidates included a bibliography to show which sources they had used to research statistical and biographical details about their chosen celebrity. Although not specifically required in the specification, it would be worth including where work is in danger of seeming derivative.

As in the investigation, candidates who chose to represent a social group rather than an individual tended to write in a more convincing voice and produce fresh arguments to support their viewpoint, since influential models were not so readily available. There was some very good work on the function of celebrities in modern British culture and the representation of young people with respect to gangs (males) or physical appearance and health (females). Such pieces briefly informed readers of the factual basis of the article before going on to explore issues and create a convincing personal argument. Weaker candidates simply rewrote celebrity biographies with simplistic comments on representation.

Many candidates showed a confident grasp of the formal requirements of feature articles and included a witty, dramatic or intriguing headline. Fewer also wrote a brief sub-editorial introduction, giving an overview of the content and identifying the author and his or her role. This was especially necessary where the article was written in the first person. Candidates also needed to have a specific publication in mind in order to shape their content and style appropriately. Those who did so tended to give this information at the start of the Commentary (AO4C) or in a single sentence before the headline of the production piece itself.

The dramatic monologue was often used successfully to challenge the representation of a variety of social groups: teenagers, unmarried mothers, hoodies, the elderly, the homeless. These often replicated spoken style in an inventive, lively way, using humour or emotive language to engage the audience. Other candidates chose to write speeches on a variety of topics. Their use of a wide range of rhetorical devices demonstrated their ability to present a convincing and persuasive argument; these techniques were then analysed in the commentary. Candidates who wrote in these genres tended to write with originality and strong personal engagement, with a beneficial effect upon achievement. Some successful candidates wrote interestingly about their own membership of a social group that was misrepresented currently in the media and sought to dispel incorrect assumptions.

A small number of candidates chose narrative or informative genres. While there were some very accomplished short stories for specific magazines, there were also some modern or adapted fairy tales, often parodies, which were less successful. These tended to lack a clear sense of audience and purpose, unless they were aimed at a specific publication, such as *Private Eye.* The choice of leaflets also tended to be less successful, resulting in skimpy, fragmented texts, despite the use of sophisticated graphological and layout features.

Some candidates' marks were undermined by poor proofreading and basic spelling, grammar and punctuation errors. Careful checking at the final draft stage is essential.

AO4C Commentary

Here, the 600 word limit was often exceeded. In order to meet the requirements of this part of the unit successfully, candidates needed to select carefully the features of their production pieces which were most significant for representation; an exhaustive line-by-line analysis of linguistic features is not feasible and, in any case, inappropriate. The best responses integrated analysis of meanings produced with the relevant linguistic features or structures used.

In terms of content and analysis, the most relevant points are similar to those already discussed with reference to investigations. The most frequent cause of low marks was either that there was no linguistic content, or that features noted had not been exemplified.

Successful candidates:

- were aware of the formal requirements of their chosen genre
- used a variety of inventive and engaging strategies
- thought carefully about viewpoint and voice
- varied their syntax and included lively, convincing vocabulary
- produced balanced, cohesive production texts which addressed appropriate issues in depth
- identified key strategies used and analysed specific examples
- demonstrated good control of accuracy and expression.

Less successful candidates:

- produced a text similar to one or more of the sources
- omitted or paid scant attention to the specific issues raised in the sources
- failed to create a convincing voice
- used a very simple style with limited use of appropriate strategies
- made frequent errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Presentation

The simplest presentation style possible was generally the most convenient for moderators, as long as pages were securely fastened. Treasury tags or simple plastic folders were more reliable than paper clips or staples and preferable to plastic envelopes or wallets. Candidates should be discouraged from using unusual fonts or italics or very small print sizes; Times New Roman or Ariel in 12-point were the most frequently used. Margins need to be generous so that teachers' annotations are clearly legible by moderators.

Given the length of some source texts, there were many substantial folders, not always easy for moderators to navigate. Some candidates included a clean as well as an annotated copy of their texts; this is not necessary, as long as annotated texts are legible. Annotations can often be helpful in terms of guiding moderators to quotations used in analysis. A few candidates re-typed their sources; if possible, original sources or photocopies are preferable, since this avoids the danger of introducing errors.

Texts were often included with no identifying information as to publication, date or writer. Given a reference in the investigation, for example, to 'Text A', moderators would have to spend some time reading through the materials before it became apparent which text was being referred to. It would be very helpful if centres could check that source texts were clearly identified as Text A, B, C and so on before despatching folders. It would also enable speedier access to sources if these were included at the end of the folder, after the Language Production piece and Commentary.

At the opposite extreme, some candidates failed to include any of their source texts. Occasionally, where texts had been lost, this was explained on the Candidate Record Form. Whatever the reason, however, the absence of texts made it impossible for moderators to verify the accuracy of quotations or imprecise references to a linguistic feature shown only as being 'at the beginning of the second paragraph', for example. It is worth repeating that credit cannot be given for unsupported points.

Administration

The vast majority of centres were very conscientious about checking administrative details, such as the inclusion of Centre Declaration Forms and fully completed Candidate Record Forms and Centre Mark Sheets. In a few cases, there were incorrect candidate numbers or incorrect addition of total marks. If a candidate's mark changes as a result of internal centre moderation, the original mark must be amended on the pieces of work.

The Candidate Record Form does not require centres to enter the sub-marks for AO4 A, B and C, but it is very helpful to moderators if these are shown on the work itself. A number of centres had created their own summary sheets, giving details of the topic, sources used (for investigations), genre and intended publication (for production pieces), word counts and final marks awarded after internal moderation. Not only were these very helpful to moderators, but often were clearly designed to help candidates formulate an overview of their tasks. Use of copied marking grids, to show achievement at different levels, was also helpful, but needed the accompaniment of a specific mark and justifying comment.

Summary of Key Advice

There are some key messages arising from this year's coursework; it is very helpful to moderators and/or candidates if teachers do the following:

a) General

- advise candidates at first draft stage to meet length requirements as nearly as possible
- remind candidates at final draft stage to proofread carefully for technical and labelling errors and, if necessary, edit or extend their work
- familiarise candidates with marking grids
- annotate candidates' work to identify strengths and weaknesses, so that moderators understand the rationale for marks given
- show the breakdown of marks awarded for AO4 A, B and C
- ensure that marks on candidates' work are consistent with marks on CRFs
- ensure that source texts for investigations are clearly identified and included at the end of folders
- discourage the use of complicated folders
- remind candidates of appropriate fonts, layout and type size
- consider the use of internal summary sheets
- remember to include Centre Declaration forms.

b) Representation Investigation

- encourage candidates to engage actively in researching topics and texts
- exercise 'quality control' of final choices, in order to ensure texts are not overlong but are sufficiently challenging in content and style
- check that candidates have a clear sense of focus on representational topics and issues
- ensure candidates are aware of the need to consider relevant contextual factors and shape a coherent argument
- encourage exploration of strategies used for audience positioning
- emphasise the need for careful selection of features for analysis in order to produce relevant analyses and stay within word limits
- discourage line-by-line analysis or feature-spotting
- emphasise the need to explore how social values are produced or challenged
- encourage candidates to link linguistic analysis with close exploration of meanings produced
- emphasise the need to exemplify linguistic points

c)   Representation Production

- encourage candidates to consider a range of genres, not necessarily the same as used for the investigation
- check that candidates have a clear idea of a specific context of use for their work, in terms of publication and audience
- identify cases where a bibliography might be advisable
- encourage students to place their representation within a wider context of social issues
- urge candidates to work on style and expression as well as on content and argument
- emphasise the need for succinctness and careful selection of a range of key features in the Commentary.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the **Results Statistics** page of the AQA Website