



General Certificate of Education

English Language A 1701

Specification A

ENGA1 Seeing Through Language

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – January series

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General

This is the third series of this Unit and it was clear to examiners that many candidates displayed pleasing familiarity with the main linguistic, modal and contextual features of the two texts offered for analysis, as well as impressive knowledge of the ways children acquire language both spoken and written. All three questions enabled candidates 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 an Australian Broadcasting Corporation message board where participants exchange views about graffiti and profile of graffiti artist Banksy from the online edition of *The Guardian*. To access the higher mark ranges for AO1, candidates were expected to analyse both texts systematically by describing, illustrating and analysing key 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 participants in Text A and Simon Hatterstone and Banksy in Text B.

Part A 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.

Part B of Questions 2 and 3 required candidates to write an answer on either what they had learned about the ways in which children develop their grammatical skills or the ways in which it is possible to help children learn to write. 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 were concerned to note some issues relating to the amount of time spent by candidates on each component 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 answering each question. It is important for candidates to realise that the data analysis in part a) of Questions 2/3 carries a maximum of 10 marks out of the question total of 45. Given this proportion it is recommended that candidates should spend no more than 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 Section A takes valuable time away from the Section B answer.

To improve their performance in future examinations candidates should:

- time their answers carefully to manage the demands of each element 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 texts for analysis proved to be very accessible. The segmented layout, interactivity and distinctive voices and opinions of the message board and the cohesive structure, authorial narration and direct quotations of the online article were accessible to almost all 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 and within the texts.

These candidates gave close attention to semantic fields in the texts and were thus able to conduct an assured examination of topics such as urban environments, social problems, creativity, non-conformity, criminality and covert prestige. The most successful candidates described and examined grammatical features such as the use of modal verbs, verb tenses, and aspects and discourse markers. These candidates explored syntax by describing sentence types, clause types, clause elements, clause linking and parallelism.

The most successful candidates explored and conceptualised the mode of the texts and were able to talk confidently about degrees of spontaneity, planning, permanence, accessibility, synchronicity as well as message orientation and types of interactivity. Examiners noted that this area of mode analysis produced some of the most productive work from candidates but also 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 language has chosen that particular mode to deliver their message. The most successful candidates offered a conceptualised overview of mode by discussing elements of mixed modes, markers of spoken mode, syntactical simplicity and complexity, repetition and reformulation, degrees of interactivity, shared context and address, inclusiveness and shared interests, structuring and visual design.

The most successful candidates demonstrated clear understanding of how the contexts of the texts shaped the meanings created. These candidates explored particular meanings and effects such as the representation of views on graffiti as either artistic expression or vandalism in Text A and the representation of rebellion and challenges to conventional social and artistic values in B. These candidates also explored rhetorical strategies such as the use of assertive responses as strategies in A.

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 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 and formality. Some candidates identified the texts as 'mixed mode' and could comment, for example, on features such as semantic colloquialisms which replicated spoken mode. Most candidates showed understanding of the purposes of the participants in Text A to initiate, respond and contribute to a discussion about the benefits and disadvantages of graffiti and the writer of Text B to introduce readers to Banksy and his work. Most candidates identified the potential audience for Text A as people who, because of their interest in graffiti, have deliberately searched for this message board and the potential audience for A as people browsing through *The Guardian* online. These candidates also considered how the texts used address to encourage

inclusiveness and accentuate shared interests. These candidates were generally able to identify some information and opinions about graffiti in the two texts.

Less successful candidates made broad assertions about the texts, often without proof or exemplification. These candidates were only able to identify one or two pronouns or one or two semantic features. These less successful candidates made basic comments about layout and were only able to label the texts as different kinds of writing. Some candidates offered narrative commentaries on the texts sometimes including unanalysed quotations with little attention to meanings or effects. Less successful candidates often failed to read the question and description of texts carefully. Some, therefore, identified Text A as a spoken interaction.

Examiners noted that there was sometimes 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. However, 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
- identified clause types accurately (the highest-achieving candidates discussed conditional clauses and relative clauses)
- 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 juxtaposition of simple and multiple sentences, sentence and paragraph length) and interactive features (eg address, synthetic personalisation)
- identified a wide range of word class types (eg abstract nouns, adverbs of manner, comparative adjectives, coordinating conjunctions, 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
- conceptualised characteristics of mode in terms of such factors as synchronicity, permanence, interactivity, planning and structuring
- explored the subtleties of the linguistic choices that distinguished the texts from straightforward written mode texts
- placed the three messages in Text A at different points on the mode continuum
- wrote about posters to the message board in terms of roles
- wrote about the nature of planning in electronic communication as a rapid revision before sending rather than the re-drafting of written communication
- 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
- explored the topics of the texts: urban environments, social problems, creativity, non-conformity, criminality, covert prestige and the challenge to conventional social and artistic values
- differentiated the participants in Text A and gave examples of personal and direct address
- analysed the replication of spoken language features

- engaged closely with the relationships enacted between Lazarous, Streeter and Cherrykat in Text A and Simon Hatterstone and Banksy in Text B
- explored the representation of different views and opinions of graffiti as artistic expression or vandalism
- explored the representation of Banksy as a socially concerned rebel.

Less successful candidates:

- simply identified graphology/complexity/formality
- used linguistic methods with minimal accuracy
- paraphrased the content of the texts including unanalysed quotations
- identified Text A as emails or a blog
- described the message board as transactional
- failed to give precise examples referring to 'the first line of the text'
- made sweeping assumptions about the readers/participants of message boards and broadsheet newspapers
- did not identify that Text B was from an online edition
- wrote only about one of the texts
- made basic errors which hindered clear communication.

Advice to candidates

Do:

- write about both texts
- think carefully about why the participants and writer have chosen to use language as they do
- plan and structure your answer systematically using paragraphs with clear topic sentences
- begin your answer with an overview of context, modes and topic
- 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:

- paraphrase the content of the texts
- presume that all types of writing have the same characteristics
- forget to comment on mode characteristics, meanings and effects of language features
- write about only one of the texts.

SECTION B – Language Development

Question 2a

Examiners noted that Question 2 was by far the more frequent choice of candidates in Section B. They reported that many candidates were very well prepared for this component and were able to identify a range of features from the data concisely and accurately. 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: repetition – 'Ross comes bed bed'; ellipsis – 'come out night'; use of third person address – 'Ross runs'; non-fluency – 'Ross em Ross runs'; use of indefinite determiner – 'in a dark'; declined correction – 'in the dark'/'in a dark';

equivocal response to question – ‘mmm’; declarative mood – ‘Ross runs’; present tense – ‘comes’; simple sentence – ‘Ross runs in a dark’; subject/verb agreement – ‘Ross runs’; adverb use – ‘sometimes’; role of care-giver (questioning) – ‘what did you say’ role of care-giver (reformulating) – ‘in the dark’ and non-use of prepositions – ‘come out night’.

The most successful candidates:

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

Less successful candidates:

- wasted time and effort by writing an essay-length answer
- described the child’s speech as ‘incorrect’
- explained at length not only how the feature demonstrated particular aspects of theory, but explained all of the theory in detail.

Question 2b

Examiners noted that this question produced some highly knowledgeable, detailed and sustained answers. The most successful candidates explicitly explored what they had learned about the ways in which children develop their grammatical skills. These answers contained clear evidence of the study of Language Development in the form of empirical observations and specific reference to appropriate research such as that of Skinner, Vygotsky, Bruner, Lennenberg, Chomsky, Pinker, Piaget and Berko and Brown. These most successful candidates examined a range of examples of grammatical features and functions, eg word classes, word order, grammatical function words, affixation, negation, tense, plurality, over-generalisation and question formation. These candidates also explored the acquisition of grammatical skills as an active and deductive process, evaluated theories of acquisition critically and considered links between cognitive, social and innatist theory and linguistic development.

Most candidates demonstrated some knowledge of key theories of language acquisition but often without sufficient focus on children’s grammatical skills. Most candidates offered one or two examples of children’s language but often these tended to be phonological or semantic. Examiners commented that, given the wealth of data presented to candidates in 2a, 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 ‘grammatical skills’ 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 didn’t answer the specific 2b question but based their answer almost entirely on the data in 2a, which limited the scope of their answers. One or two candidates even combined 2a and 2b. Examiners found that, when assessing these answers, candidates’ achievement for AO2 was very low. It is essential that candidates are made aware that 2a and 2b should be answered separately.

The most successful candidates:

- explored the ways in which children develop their grammatical skills
- explored word classes and word order used by children when acquiring language
- gave detailed examples and explanations of over-generalisation
- examined some rules and principles applied by children, eg tense formation
- considered plurality by examining Berko and Brown's 'wug' research
- examined developing forms of questioning and negation
- 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 development of grammatical skills
- 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
- evaluated the roles of input, imitation and correction
- 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 the acquisition of grammatical skills
- gave a broad account of stages of development, especially pre-verbal stages
- identified very few features of children's language
- gave disproportionate attention to feral children
- 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 issue to which it refers
- plan and structure an answer which clearly addresses this issue
- write a first paragraph which addresses the issue
- examine some relevant key features of children's language acquisition using correct linguistic terminology
- use some examples from the data in Question 2a as well as your own prepared ones
- examine and 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
- only write about pre-linguistic sounds.

Question 3a

A minority of candidates answered Question 3 but many 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 went to have a chat with Tom, Steven and mum’; subordinate clauses – ‘Wilst we were having tea...’; first person narrative – ‘I got up...’; colon to introduce list – ‘I gota: kareokey...’; proper nouns – ‘magnetix Race Game’; spatial dimensions of early writing – various letter sizes; past tense – ‘I went to bed’; past progressive tense – ‘we were having tea’...’; repetition – ‘we had some fun’; omission of prepositions – ‘I got up Cristmas moning 7 a.m.’; orthographical omission – ‘Cristmas’ and ‘Wilst’; elision – ‘gota’; linear, sequential, familial narrative; ellipsis of subject – ‘had some fun’ and capitalisation – ‘Three Bers’.

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 to indicate why the feature was of interest.

Less successful candidates:

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

Question 3b

Examiners were pleased to report that, although this was far less frequently chosen than Question 2, 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 ways in which it is possible to help children learn to write. 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. These candidates also examined the contribution of reading, drawing and narrative to the development of writing skills, writing as representing communicative power, syntax, semantic relations, motor skills and the relationship between phonemes and graphemes. The most successful candidates explored written language acquisition as an active and deductive process and evaluated theories about writing acquisition critically.

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 some features of handwriting, spelling and punctuation.

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. Examiners commented that it was difficult to identify where any study of written language was evident in some answers.

The most successful candidates:

- examined and evaluated the ways in which it is possible to help children learn to write
- 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 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 and drawing to the development of writing skills
- considered writing as representing communicative power
- examined some features of handwriting such as formation of graphemes and punctuation
- considered relationships between phonemes and graphemes
- identified some rules and principles applied by children, eg word order, negation, agreement of word classes and tenses
- 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
- offered few examples of children's writing, or in some cases none at all
- 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 relevant key features of children's written language acquisition such as formation of letter symbols, punctuation, syntax, semantic relations and systematic orthographical variation using correct linguistic terminology
- 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.