General Certificate of Education

English Language A 1701
Specification A

ENGA1   Seeing Through Language

Report on the Examination
2010 examination – June series

General

This is the second summer series of this Unit and examiners reported that many candidates demonstrated a pleasing familiarity with the main linguistic, modal and contextual features of the two given texts as well as an 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 interview from Radio 5's live broadcast from the Glastonbury Festival and an article on the media coverage of the Festival from *The Observer's* television listings section. To access the higher mark ranges for AO1, candidates were expected to analyse both texts systematically by describing and illustrating key semantic, grammatical, syntactical and discourse language 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, proximity, channel, 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, functions, tenor, topics, topic management, structure, the effects of language features and the various meanings both literal and pragmatic constructed by the participants in Text A and Katie Toms in Text B.

The first part of Questions 2 and 3 required candidates to study a data set related to children's acquisition of either speech or writing and to 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 Questions 2 and 3 required candidates to write an answer on either the importance of interaction between children and adult speakers in the process of language acquisition or the extent to which teaching children to write is all about encouraging inventive content. 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 topic paragraphs. To access the higher mark ranges 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 and plan 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 the first part 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 no more than ten minutes analysing the data and make five precise points. The most successful candidates accomplished this in five sentences but some data analyses were up to one and a half pages long. Too much time spent on this part takes valuable time away from answering the second part of the question.

To improve their performance in future examinations candidates should:

- time their answers carefully to manage the demands of the 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 | 0 | 1 |

The texts for analysis proved to be very accessible. The partially planned, largely spontaneous, synchronous, face-to-face, nationally broadcast spoken mode of the radio interview and the carefully planned, permanent, informal, distant, inclusive written mode of the newspaper article were obviously familiar to all candidates. There was a wealth of linguistic, modal and contextual features in these texts for candidates to make purposeful and perceptive 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.

The most successful candidates described and examined grammatical features such as types of adjectives and adverbs, verb tenses, aspect, voice, modality and interactive features such as the use of tag and rhetorical questions. These candidates also explored syntax by describing sentence types, clause types, clause elements and clause linking.

The most successful candidates offered a conceptualised overview of mode by discussing the auditory reception of Text A and the visual reception of Text B, markers of spoken mode in Text B, repetition and reformulation in Text A, as well as degrees of interactivity, address, spontaneity, planning, inclusiveness and shared interests in both texts. Examiners noted that mode analysis produced some of the most productive work from candidates but also some of the most cursory. Candidates should be encouraged to examine not only what the mode is but why it matters and why particular channels of communication have been chosen.

The most successful candidates demonstrated clear understanding of how the contexts of the texts shaped the meanings created. These candidates explored various representations of the BBC, Glastonbury and its performers as well as the self-representations of Nick, Mary, Luke and Katie Toms. At this level of achievement, candidates showed clear understanding of the dual context of Text A: a face to-face encounter broadcast live to many listeners. This awareness led candidates to comment perceptively on Nick's detailed, 'visual' descriptions of his surroundings.

Most candidates were able to identify some word classes and many described types of nouns. The description of number and person of pronouns was usually quite precise but some candidates struggled with the difference between personal and possessive. Sentence functions were usually identified accurately but sentence types less so. The description of graphology was generally brief, accurate and productive. Most candidates understood that Text A was predominantly spontaneous but that Nick had prepared his questions and was shaping the interview accordingly and that Text B was distant but that Katie Toms was using rhetorical strategies to engage readers. Most candidates showed understanding of the purposes of the participants in Text A to discuss the pleasures and discomforts of family camping at Glastonbury and the writer of Text B to encourage readers to stay at home and enjoy the festival through a variety of broadcast media from the BBC. Most candidates identified the potential audience for Text A as casual listeners or those with a particular interest in the festival and the potential audience for B as people browsing through *The Observer's* television listings section. These candidates generally gave close attention to semantic fields and were thus able to conduct a reasonably assured examination of topics such as family camping, bad weather, discomfort and musical opinion 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 and/or phonological features. These less successful candidates often labelled Text A as spontaneous speech without recognising that it was a live radio interview. Many often failed to read the texts carefully and sometimes misunderstood the purpose of Text B by suggesting that Katie Toms was encouraging readers to actually attend the festival. Some candidates offered narrative commentaries on the texts sometimes including unanalysed quotations with little attention to meanings or effects.

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. Fortunately, this occurred only rarely.

The most successful candidates:

- began with an overview of contexts, modes and topics thus supplying a framework which informed subsequent analysis of language features
- identified clause types such as conditional clauses and relative clauses accurately
- commented successfully on the functions and effects of these clause types
- gave detailed attention to the variety of sentence types by accurately identifying minor, simple, compound and complex sentences and explaining their effects clearly
- made productive observations about the structural features of the texts, commenting on the use of adjacency pairs, discourse markers 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 fronting sentences with co-ordinate clauses) and interactive features (eg address, synthetic personalisation)
- identified a wide range of word class types (eg abstract nouns, adverbs of manner, comparative adjectives, co-ordinating conjunctions, dynamic and stative verbs)
- examined the effects of figurative language, eg simile in Text A and metaphors in Text B
- commented successfully on the strategic use of modality within the texts
- conceptualised characteristics of mode in terms of such factors as channel, synchronicity, immediacy, proximity, permanence, interactivity and planning
- considered the use of rhetorical devices such as triadic structures and rhetorical questions
- recognised that stressed syllables in Text A were linked to the hardships of camping
- identified and described non-standard grammar in Text A such as 'I'm sat'

- explained the interviewer's control of the interaction through humour and questioning
- explored the interviewer's strategies for interacting with and speaking to the children
- recognised that the interviewer is a performer by describing his varied intonation and how he assumes the voice of a child 'hang on (.) I've had enough'
- discussed how Katie Toms positioned her ideal reader in terms of musical knowledge
- understood that Katie Toms was encouraging people to explore media coverage of the festival rather than attend
- examined topics such as family camping, bad weather, discomfort and musical opinion
- explored various representations of the weather, the BBC, Glastonbury and its performers as well as the self-representations of Nick, Mary, Luke and Katie Toms
- wrote fluently and articulately, structuring their response carefully and logically.

Less successful candidates:

- simply identified graphology, complexity and formality
- used linguistic methods with minimal accuracy
- paraphrased the content of the texts including unanalysed quotations
- identified Text A only as a face-to-face interaction
- misread the purpose and context of Text B in various ways – as a website, as a attempt to persuade people to attend the festival
- criticised Mary's parenting skills for taking her children to the festival
- confused phatic communication with the topic of the weather
- categorised 'squally' as an example of dialect
- did not identify that Text B was from a television listings page
- wrote only about one of the texts
- made frequent basic errors which hindered clear communication.

Advice to candidates

Do:

- write about both texts
- begin your answer with an overview of context, modes and topic
- plan and structure your answer systematically using topic paragraphs
- identify key language features using appropriate linguistic terms
- explain how these features contribute to the construction of meanings
- explicitly examine and comment on the mode features of the texts
- think carefully about why the participants and writer use language in the way they do.

Do not:

- write about only one of the texts
- paraphrase the content of the texts
- presume that all interactive speech is totally personal and private
- forget to comment on mode characteristics, meanings and effects of language features.

SECTION B – Language Development

Question 2 | 0 | 2 |

Question 2 was the most popular choice for candidates in Section B. Examiners 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.

Many candidates clearly identified features such as: ellipsis – 'you play snakes and ladders me', clipped pronunciation of a polysyllabic word – 'seen', simple sentences – 'Amy see me', demand function – 'me want a bissy', declarative function – 'you take bissy', object pronoun form used as subject – 'me want that', disconnected response – 'see Jack', directive function – 'you play…', interrogative mood (curiosity) – 'what's that', role of care-giver (questioning) – 'what is it', role of care-giver (expands and models) – 'I took a biscuit', omission of grammatical word classes – 'you take bissy'.

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
- gave a short indication of why each feature was of interest.

Less successful candidates:

- wasted time and effort by writing an essay-length answer
- described the child's speech as 'incorrect'
- failed to give examples of features they were identifying
- explained at length not only how the feature demonstrated particular aspects of theory, but explained all of the theory in detail.

Question 2 | 0 | 3 |

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 importance of interaction between children and adult speakers in the process of language acquisition. 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 Bruner, Halliday, Nelson, Lennenberg 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. At this level of attainment, candidates gave close attention to the characteristics of Child Directed Speech, the Language Acquisition Support System, the Zone of Proximal Development as well as examining examples of correction. These candidates also explored the acquisition of language as an active and deductive process, evaluated theories of acquisition critically and considered links between cognitive, social and innatist theories and linguistic development. At this level of attainment candidates were not only able to give a clear account of the stages of language acquisition but were able to relate those stages to interaction between children and adult speakers.

Most candidates demonstrated some knowledge of key theories of language acquisition but often without sufficient focus on children's interaction with adults. 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 data set 1, 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 'interaction with adult speakers' 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 second part of Question 2 but based their answer almost entirely on the data in 2a, which limited the scope of their answers. One of two candidates even combined both parts of the question. Examiners found that, when assessing these answers, candidates' achievement for AO2 was very low. It is essential that candidates are made aware that the first and second part should be answered separately.

The most successful candidates:

- explored the importance of interaction between children and adult speakers in the process of language acquisition
- maintained a focus on interaction and the role of caregivers throughout the essay, linking all theories to the question and centring their debates and critical evaluation of the theories around the question of interaction
- drew on personal experience (eg siblings, cousins), linked them to the question and demonstrated their contribution to the discussion at all times
- explored all levels of language development (grammar/syntax, lexis/semantics, phonology, pragmatics) and made relevant observations about their contribution to the debate
- considered in detail the nature of acquisition as an active and deductive process (discussing in detail over-generalisation, regression, virtuous errors etc)
- acknowledged the role of caregivers and the influence of the social environment (eg drawing on Katherine Nelson for the composition of the early productive vocabulary)
- examined some rules and principles applied by children, eg tense formation
- considered plurality by examining Berko and Brown's 'wug' research
- discussed correction by examining Jean Berko Gleason's 'fis' experiment
- 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 Bruner, Mehler, McNeil and Kegl to explain and illuminate the importance of interaction between children and adult speakers
- 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, the Language Acquisition Support System and the role of the More Knowledgeable Other
- wrote well-structured answers which had a logical line of argument, debated the various positions, and gave a clear overview of the candidate's own perspectives.

Less successful candidates:

*   wrote general essays outlining theories about child language acquisition without specific attention to the importance of interaction between children and adult speakers in the process of language acquisition
*   offered a brief and broad account of stages of development, especially pre-verbal stages
*   identified very few features of children's language
*   wrote pre-planned, general answers which, whilst often detailed on theories, did not maintain focus on interaction and therefore did not answer the question
*   focused on aspects of personal development that were only loosely related to language
*   gave disproportionate attention to Genie and Jim
*   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
*   examine some key features of children's language acquisition
*   use some examples from the data in the first part of Question 2 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 3 | 0 | 4 |

A minority of candidates answered Question 3 but many were able to identify a range of features from the data concisely and accurately. Some, 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 was walkung in the jungle', subordinate clauses – 'because he was chasung me', first person narrative – 'I was at home', past tense – 'heard', progressive aspect – 'he was chasung me', adjective – 'frightening', expressive function – 'I was scared', co-ordination/clause division – 'but', omission of punctuation mark – '…tiger He heard me…', orthographical variants to represent vowels – 'walkung', elements of narrative structure – 'then'.

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
- identified one feature and gave two explanations.

Question 3 | 0 | 5 |

Examiners reported that, although this was a far less popular option than Question 2, a 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.

The most successful candidates explicitly explored the extent to which teaching children to write is all about encouraging inventive content. 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 (eg experimentation), correction and evaluated research and 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 examined features of handwriting, spelling and punctuation as well as giving some consideration to imaginative content.

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 extent to which teaching children to write is all about encouraging inventive content
- made productive links between the acquisition of speech and the development of writing
- assessed the contribution of reading and drawing to the development of writing skills
- considered writing as representing imaginative and communicative power
- explored a substantial and varied range of examples of genres of children's writing including various narrative forms
- evaluated critically research and theories about writing acquisition such as Kroll's stages of written acquisition
- considered written language acquisition as an active and deductive process
- evolved a view of the nature of written language acquisition as an interactive, developmental and inventive process
- placed the discussion of inventive content by exploring a substantial and varied range of examples of children's writing including syntax, grammar, semantic relations, orthography
- 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
- wrote pre-planned, general answers which, whilst often detailed on theories, did not answer the question or, at best, gave only a partial answer to the question
- misinterpreted 'inventive content' as 'experimental approaches', or were otherwise unclear about their understanding of what 'inventive content' was
- drew mainly on theories of spoken language development, in some cases, making these theories artificially relevant to the question of written language development
- 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
- explore a range of examples of children's writing
- 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
- 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 inventive content 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.