General Certificate of Education

English Language A 2701
Specification A

ENGA4   Language Investigations and Interventions

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – June series

General

Although this was the first occasion on which most centres entered candidates for the new A2 coursework unit it was evident that the majority of candidates had a secure grasp of the requirements of the two components – the investigation into an aspect of spoken language and the intervention focused on a recognised linguistic debate. Most teachers, too, demonstrated a clear understanding of the nature of the components and applied the assessment criteria with discrimination.

Language Investigation

Productive areas for investigation included:

- diachronic studies (eg television advertisements, the Queen's Christmas Speech, film dialogue and film trailers across the decades)
- contrasting interviewer styles (Jonathan Ross, Oprah Winfrey, Trisha Goddard, Jeremy Kyle, Ali G, Paul O'Grady, Alan Titchmarsh, Charlotte Church)
- contrasting interviewee styles (abrasive Brian Clough and gentle Nigel Clough, strategies for dealing with criticism)
- gender and power (with data acquired by means of a problem-solving exercise like the one featured in the 2010 coursework standardisation pack)
- age-related variation (within a single family, in sales transactions)
- the development of a child's conversational skills
- the interplay of transactional and interactional dimensions in conversation (in a vet's surgery)
- Labov's analytical model of spoken narratives applied to conversation.
- genderlect: competition and collaboration in children's conversation
- strategies for breaking bad news
- cooperation and politeness in political interviews
- political oratory (using film clips to explore phrasing, tone and delivery).

The reduced word limit produced some very tightly focused and successful research into a wide range of spoken data. The disadvantage of the reduced word limit, however, was evident in investigations which skimped on analysis, so conclusions came very quickly with little evidence offered in support of their claims. This was sometimes the case even when candidates had collected extensive quantities of transcripts.

Although most candidates dealt with data 'designed to be spoken' and took account of the requirement that the investigation should 'illuminate a question about spoken language' (as stipulated in the specification), a few applied theories of speech to unsuitable data, eg blogs or computer-mediated communication. Though these investigations showed evidence of linguistic knowledge, they didn't have appropriate material as their *raison d'être.* In some cases candidates (and even whole centres) focused exclusively on scripts for political speeches and paid little (if any) attention to the context and significance of the speeches as delivered. For similar reasons stand-up comedy routines proved problematic: a variety of non-linguistic factors contribute to the success of a comic's act, and explaining the timing, implications and impact of jokes proved beyond the capabilities of most candidates.

In general candidates were more successful at gaining marks for AO1 (and in most cases for AO2) than for AO3. Typically they demonstrated that they had learned to identify a range of spoken language characteristics and had a grasp of relevant theory and research findings. The strongest candidates, however, went beyond description and awareness of published findings: in exploring their data they paid sustained attention to the importance of linguistic variables, to the significance of context, and to intentions and effects.

The most successful candidates:

- chose data which repaid investigation in terms of its communicative significance in a specific context
- formulated precise linguistic aims and hypotheses
- gave a rationale for their methodology
- selected frameworks which illuminated contextual and communicative issues
- drew linguistic conclusions related to the aims and hypotheses
- evaluated the extent to which it might be appropriate to generalise from the conclusions
- outlined promising lines of further enquiry.

Less successful candidates:

- chose data on the basis of subject content
- proposed non-linguistic aims
- paraphrased the data
- took little account of the context
- ignored the participants' roles and intentions
- looked at what was said but not at how it was said
- demonstrated no awareness of the limitations of their findings.

Language Intervention

This was a good start to a task familiar from the legacy synoptic unit (ENA6). Candidates produced a range of lively, fluent and well-targeted interventions underpinned by appropriately deployed linguistic knowledge. Successful pieces included:

- reviews of books (by Lynne Truss, John Humphrys and Kingsley Amis)
- broadsheet articles and opinion pieces
- Radio 4 scripts (incorporating readings from linguistic experts)
- complementary selections of letters to the press
- short stories dramatising conflicting attitudes.

The very best interventions dealt with a genuine linguistic debate and demonstrated both a judicious sense of balance and a sure grasp of how to meet the demands of writing in an appropriate form for a non-specialist audience. They were located firmly in a context in which such issues might be discussed and they worked within a set of audience expectations which corresponded realistically with the norms and conventions of serious journalism and broadcasting. Less successful pieces were characterised by a failure to grasp the nature of the task: insecure or partial linguistic knowledge, a simplistic or unbalanced attitude to the character of the debate, and a failure to adapt material to audience were typical of such pieces. Some weaker candidates confined their attention to a linguistic urban myth (such as the 'banning' of 'Baa Baa, Black Sheep') or an Aunt Sally (PC 'madness').

It was not uncommon for candidates to choose to submit two intervention pieces. This approach worked well when the intention was to present contrasting attitudes to a single debate; it had clear advantages for candidates who might have struggled to handle complexity in a single piece. It was also permissible for candidates to submit two intervention pieces on different topics although in practice this approach tended to be unproductive, with candidates giving an incomplete and undeveloped account of each topic. There was a tendency for such unbalanced pieces to degenerate into mere rant.

Many centres used the Genre/Audience/Purpose/Placement cover sheet from the 2010 Standardisation pack to focus candidates on realistic forms and styles, and the information provided was greatly appreciated during the moderation process. Lack of such information was a distinct handicap for candidates and teachers as well moderators: in the most problematic cases it led to a disconcerting lack of clarity and certainty about what the candidate intended and what the teacher was rewarding.

One further issue requires highlighting. Candidates who submit radio scripts should distinguish clearly between presenters (whose words the candidate will rightly script) and linguistic experts (whose contributions ought to be quoted or summarised accurately, with an appropriate attribution).

The most successful candidates:

- identified a serious linguistic debate (from amongst those covered in Unit 3)
- chose a convincing form and context in which to represent the debate
- provided a clear and non-specialist account of the principal differing points of view, and the arguments and evidence used to support them
- employed a range of structural and stylistic features appropriate to the chosen genre, audience and placement.

Less successful candidates:

- selected a favourite topic rather than a debate
- chose to write for a publication which would be unlikely to feature a serious debate
- adopted a one-sided or over-simplified point of view
- imported passages of course notes expressed in specialist linguistic terminology
- made a limited (or no) attempt to produce a coherent and cohesive text.

Administration

Moderators appreciated the efficiency and thoughtfulness which characterised the administrative aspects of the majority of entries. By contrast, in cases in which language intervention context sheets were not provided and separate marks for AO4 A, B and C were not given, moderators struggled to understand how marks had been awarded. The problem was exacerbated when folders contained little or no teacher comment or other evidence of marking, and when teachers were unwilling to challenge their students' errors. Thankfully, most centres provided detailed annotation, highlighting strengths and weaknesses, giving a rationale for the assessments and frequently also supplying evidence of rigorous internal moderation.

Most candidates' work was clearly organised and helpfully packaged. In a number of cases, however, folders were not presented in a secure form: paperclips proved no more than a token gesture, and there were even (fortunately rare) instances of candidates' work being submitted as loose papers.

Two further administrative matters require centres' attention. The first relates to investigations with a bilingual dimension. In such cases the centre must ensure that any claims made about the additional language are validated by someone with appropriate subject knowledge. The steps which have been taken to comply with this requirement should be stated clearly in the summative comment.

The second concerns the consent of participants. Candidates must obtain written permission from all participants in data collection activities for the data to be included in their coursework. Failure to seek the permission of participants was noted, in particular, when classroom interactions were being recorded.

Centres had been encouraged to consult their Consortium Adviser about coursework proposals, and many took the opportunity to do so. It is hoped that this practice will continue and become the norm. Attendance at the teacher standardisation meeting in the Autumn term provides further opportunities for discussion and consultation, and is also strongly recommended.

Advice to candidates

To maximise your success, you should try to do the following:

Language Investigation

Do:

- keep a focus throughout your investigation on the requirement that the data is intended to be spoken
- select data which has a precise context and from which you can draw conclusions about how the audiences/participants are affected
- explain why you have chosen to explore and compare particular pieces of data and participants
- explain how you intended to control variables
- formulate clear and precise linguistic aims and hypotheses
- select frameworks which will help you reach conclusions about your aims and hypotheses
- focus on interactional and discourse features when analysing speech
- draw cautious conclusions about what you discovered, commenting explicitly on how far you have achieved your aims and tested your hypotheses
- ask yourself about the extent to which you can generalise from your conclusions, and consider further lines of investigation which might allow you to refine or extend your conclusions.

Language Intervention

Do:

- choose a debate which is characterised by clearly distinguished points of view and is studied for Unit 3
- decide where in the real world your intervention piece(s) might be published/broadcast
- use a cover sheet for your language intervention piece(s) and give clear information about what kind of piece you have written, who you see as the audience, what purpose(s) you aim to achieve and where you intend it to be published/broadcast (If your school/college does not provide such a cover sheet, design your own)
- identify the characteristics and conventions of the genre in which you intend to present the debate
- cover the principal points of view and arguments
- use engaging, non-specialist language
- be prepared to challenge arguments and assumptions.

Try to avoid common mistakes.

<u>Language Investigation</u>

Do not:

- assume that data will be linguistically interesting just because you are interested in the topic
- choose vague or non-linguistic aims and hypotheses
- paraphrase the data
- treat your evaluation merely as an opportunity to make claims about how much better you would have done if you had only been allowed more time, space and data.

<u>Language Intervention</u>

Do not:

- choose a topic if it isn't specified as part of the subject matter covered in Unit 3
- expect anyone reading your work to be prepared to guess the answers to questions about audience, purpose and genre if you don't know yourself (and haven't made those answers clear)
- claim that you intend to place your piece in a publication which would be unlikely to print it
- base your piece on over-simplified or trivialised views about language
- indulge in an uninformed rant
- use untransformed class notes.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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