General Certificate of Education

English Language A 1701
Specification A

ENGA1   Seeing Through Language

Report on the Examination

2011 examination – January series

General

This is the third winter series of this Unit and examiners reported that many candidates demonstrated an ability to identify the main linguistic, modal and contextual features of the two given texts as well as showing an understanding 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: a transcript of part of a family conversation about children's behaviour and a webpage giving advice about bringing up children. 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 channel, synchronicity, proximity, 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, effects of language features and various meanings and representations both literal and pragmatic constructed by the participants in Text A and writer of 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 extent to which the acquisition of language depends on children's experiences of the world about them or the importance of reading and drawing in helping 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 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 and an ability to integrate and evaluate 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 2/3 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 spontaneous, synchronous, face-to-face, immediate, expressive, anecdotal family discussion and the carefully planned, authoritative, permanent, distant yet inclusive blended mode of the webpage were obviously familiar to nearly 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, the expressive orientation of Text A and the message orientation of Text B, repetition and reformulation and degrees of interactivity (eg tag questions, monitoring features, simultaneous speech, tabs, links). Examiners noted that in general candidates' analysis of mode has improved considerably from previous series. However, candidates should continue to 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 and they explored representation of children, caregivers, behaviour and views on children's upbringing. These candidates recognised the use of humour, impersonation, metaphor and rhetorical questioning to express opinions on child care in Text A. These candidates also recognised the sensitive nature of the topic and tenor of Text B and explored the writer's strategies to reassure without alienating the audience while still establishing and maintaining authority. They also examined effects of clause type, tenses and modality as well as the self-representations of Jane, Ruth and the writer of Text B.

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 frequently. The description of graphology in Text B was generally brief, accurate and productive. Most candidates understood that Text A was spontaneous, interactive and immediate and that Text B was distant but that the writer was using rhetorical strategies to engage readers. Most candidates showed

understanding of the purposes of the participants in Text A to discuss the behaviour of children and caregivers and the role of rewards and discipline in children's upbringing and the writer of Text B to reassure parents about discipline and their own parenting styles. These candidates identified the potential audience for B as parents deliberately browsing the internet looking for advice on childcare. These candidates generally gave close attention to semantic fields and were thus able to conduct a reasonably assured examination of topics such as control, rewards and punishments, children's behaviour, adults' responsibilities 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 scripted speech. 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 register focusing not only on lexical choices but also on 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 metaphors in Text A
- 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
- the use of parenthesis in Text B to create a confidential relationship with the reader
- recognised that stressed syllables in Text A were linked to misbehaviour and tension
- identified and described non-standard grammar in Text A such as 'I turns'
- explored Jane's strategy of impersonating the mother and child in the bookshop
- discussed how the writer of Text B positioned the reader in terms of parenting needs
- examined topics such as control, rewards, children's behaviour, adults' responsibilities
- explored the implications of the use of 'he' in Text B to represent children's misbehaviour
- explored various representations of views on children's upbringing as well as the self-representations of Jane, Ruth and the writer of Text B
- 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 as a scripted interaction
- thought all participants in Text A were female
- gave disproportionate attention to the gender of the participants in Text A
- misread Text B as a printed article
- confused phatic communication with recounting an anecdote
- 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.

Don't:

- write about only one of the texts
- paraphrase the content of the texts
- comment at length on the graphology of the transcript
- 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 part and were able to identify a range of features from the data concisely and accurately.

Many candidates clearly identified features such as: imperative function – 'look nanny Pam', elision – 'nextember', simple clause – 'I want my branky', transposition of initial consonants – 'par cark', conversion – 'mowered', overgeneralisation of past tense suffixing – 'stolened', possessive 'my' used as a subject – 'my sliding down', present progressive – 'sliding', present perfective – 'has stolened', linked clauses – 'cow cow musn't go on the grass cause it's been mowered', first person narrative 'I', reduplication – 'cow cow', functions of speech, eg control – 'I want my branky', genres of speech, eg story telling – 'I saw a mouse and a monkey...'

The most successful candidates:

- identified five accurate and clearly differentiated linguistic features
- presented each feature clearly and separately in the layout of their answer
- 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.

Less successful candidates:

- wasted time and effort by writing an essay-length answer
- described the children'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 extent to which the acquisition of language depends on children's experiences of the world about them and analysed carefully what these experiences might be. 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 Piaget, Bruner, Halliday, Nelson, Lenneberg 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, types of extensions (categorical, analogical and statement) and question formation. At this level of attainment, candidates gave close attention to the characteristics of Object Permanence, Seriation, Child Directed Speech, Language Acquisition Support System, Zone of Proximal Development, pragmatic and social dimensions of learning language, the significance of correction, reception and production of language as well as functional explanations of language development. These candidates also explored the acquisition of language as an active and deductive process, evaluated theories of acquisition critically and considered the relative merits of cognitive, social and innatist theories of 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 their experiences of the world about them.

Most candidates demonstrated some knowledge of key theories of language acquisition but often without evaluation of their relative merits and with insufficient focus on children's experiences. Most candidates offered only one or two examples of children's language. Examiners commented that, given the wealth of data presented to candidates in 2, 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 'the extent to which the acquisition of language depends on children's experiences of the world about them' 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 | 0 | 3 | question, but based their answer entirely on the data, which severely limited the scope of their answers and their achievement for AO2. It is essential that candidates are made aware that | 0 | 2 | and | 0 | 3 | should be answered separately.

The most successful candidates:

- explored the extent to which the acquisition of language depends on children's experiences of the world about them
- centred their debates and critical evaluation of research and theories around children's experiences
- drew on personal experience (eg siblings, cousins), linked them to the question and demonstrated their contribution to the discussion of experiential development
- 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
- used their knowledge of researchers such as Piaget, Bruner, Halliday, Nelson and Lenneberg to explain and illuminate children's developing relationship with the world around 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 theories, 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 children's experiences of the world about them
- identified very few features of children's language
- offered a brief and broad account of stages of development, especially pre-verbal stages
- 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 feral children
- confused the ideas of different researchers and theorists
- labeled Social Interaction theory as 'Socialist'
- agreed with mutually contradictory models of the acquisition process
- made frequent errors, with the worst of these impeding communication.

Advice to candidates

Do:

- read the question carefully and identify the issues to which it refers
- plan and structure an answer which clearly addresses these issues
- examine some key features of children's language acquisition
- use some examples from the data in | 0 | 2 | as well as your own prepared ones
- examine and evaluate research findings and theory, evolving a balanced and clear line of argument.

Don't:

- make sweeping and unsupported assertions
- summarise a range of research superficially with no reference to the question
- agree with contradictory theories
- 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 most of those 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: main clause – 'I had to work in a mine', reversed letter 't', reversal of letter corrected – 'hab/had', interaction – 'good work', past tense – 'there were other children in the mine…', imaginative narrative function – 'I had to work in a mine', narrative linked to drawing, adverb – 'only', one terminal full stop, orthographical variation – 'childrin', lexical repetition – 'in the mine', 'in the mine', patterning of clause elements – 'I' + verb.

The most successful candidates:

- identified five accurate and clearly differentiated linguistic features
- presented each feature clearly and separately in the layout of their answer
- quoted the example of the feature in the answer rather than giving the line number
- gave a brief linguistic description of the feature.

Less successful candidates:

- wasted time and effort by writing an essay-length answer
- wrote only about perceived errors
- failed to give examples of features they were identifying.

Question 3 | 0 | 5 |

Examiners reported that this was a far less popular option than Question 2. However, 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 importance of reading and drawing in helping children learn to write. The most successful candidates integrated specific examples of

children's written 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, 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), the role of correction, the impact of new technologies, eg keyboards, different forms of writing and their contexts (eg diaries), systematic orthographical variation, acquisition of writing as an interactive process, links between speech and writing, some rules and principles applied by children, eg word order, negation, agreement of word classes, tense and sentence boundaries, a view of the nature of written language acquisition as a developmental and cognitive process and evaluated research and theories about written language 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 the role of drawing in augmenting 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 importance of reading and drawing in helping children learn to write
- made productive links between the acquisition of speech and the development of writing
- 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
- explored a substantial and varied range of examples of children's writing including syntax, grammar, semantic relations, orthography
- 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
- 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 did not answer the question or, at best, gave only a partial answer to the question
- 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
- plan and structure an answer which clearly addresses these issues
- examine some key relevant features of children's written language acquisition such as formation of letter symbols, punctuation, syntax, semantic relations, negation and systematic orthographical variation using correct linguistic terminology
- evaluate research findings and theory by evolving a balanced and clear line of argument.

Don't:

- make sweeping and unsupported assertions
- use research and theory about the acquisition of speech
- forget to include some examples of children's writing such as spelling, word order, agreements
- ignore the importance of reading and drawing 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.