General Certificate of Education

English Language A 2701
Specification A

ENGA3   Language Explorations

Report on the Examination
2011 examination – January series

General

This was the second January series of this Unit and examiners reported seeing some excellent work as candidates showed increased familiarity with the demands of the new examination.

Overall, there were some brilliant scripts, where the engagement with the ideas and language was a real pleasure to read. Even the weaker responses showed that candidates seemed quite well prepared to analyse and discuss variation and change topics, if not necessarily able to deal with the more nuanced positions of Texts D and E.

There was clear evidence that candidates knew a great deal about language and were able to respond to unseen data in lively and thoughtful ways. The questions provided candidates of all levels with stretch and challenge as they developed their responses to the materials they were provided with and the issues that were raised. There was a great deal of evidence that candidates had developed a good body of knowledge about language and acute critical thinking skills as well.

All the stimulus materials used were readily accessible to candidates and provided plenty of opportunities for discussion at a variety of levels. In Question 1 two texts were provided so candidates could examine how and why language might have changed by using some evidence. In Question 2 candidates were given an example of English as written in a South African community newspaper. The source materials in Questions 1 and 2 gave candidates primary data and research findings that illustrated the variation and change topics being focussed on. In Section B Question 3 texts that illustrate popular discourses about language, in this case texting, were provided for critical analysis.

The wording of the questions proved clear and straightforward, though some candidates often produced rather pre-prepared set responses which did not fully address the focus of the questions. The two bullet points helped candidates to approach and structure their responses to the tasks. Often it was those candidates who wrote two 'mini-essays' that did best as they were able to hit all the assessment objectives. There was a tendency for less attention to be given to the second bullet which often limited the marks candidates achieved.

Question 1 was answered by more candidates than Question 2. Performance across the questions was relatively similar and the mark scheme enabled examiners to produce a wide range of mark totals, helping to discriminate between levels of achievement.

Candidates generally had plenty of time to process the materials and write substantial answers that let them display all the necessary knowledge and understanding to gain the very highest marks. There were, however, some issues regarding the amount of time candidates spent on each question. Some scripts showed much longer answers to the Section A question and shorter responses to Section B. Both sections carry the same total marks in the same proportions so it is sensible to devote 1 hour 15 minutes to each question.

Not all candidates were equally well prepared for the paper in terms of subject knowledge, and relied on straightforward textual analysis, with only brief, if any, references to wider examples, theories or theorists. It is important that candidates have detailed knowledge of research findings and an understanding of the big issues, debates and different approaches that characterise the different topics.

There were a small number of incomplete scripts. It is important that candidates recognise that the topics selected on the paper now sample those in the specification and that they need to be prepared for this. It would also be unwise to engage in question spotting, bearing in mind that a topic can appear in Section A or Section B (for example gender and interaction in June 2010 and January 2010).

There were a small number of rubric infringements with candidates answering both Question 1 and 2 from section A but not Question 3 from section B. In these cases both answers were marked and the highest scoring question was counted.

Assessment Objective 1
The AO1 descriptors are designed to assess how well candidates can describe aspects of language and communicate ideas as a linguistic specialist. Examiners looked to reward the range of linguistic descriptions first and then balanced this out against the quality of expression in terms of precision, organisation and accuracy.

This Assessment Objective is marked out of 10 on all the questions and therefore carries less weight than AO2 or AO3, though it can be evidenced across the work answering both bullet points. The weighting of ten marks is a reminder that just describing features of language is not sufficient to succeed fully on this unit. There were candidates who were very skilled in describing language at a very sophisticated level but who lost a sense of perspective and treated the description as an end in itself rather than a means of analysing the construction of meaning.

Examiners reported that some candidates often forgot to describe relevant linguistic features technically even when they were quoting them and analysing them. There were also some recurrent problem areas:
• pronoun number
• identifying clause and phrase boundaries precisely when quoting
• uncertain labelling of types of phrase and identification of headwords
• misapplication of post-modification to language outside of a phrase
• mixing terms, eg 'present tense adjectives'.

Spelling, punctuation and expression were generally good. A substantial number of candidates needed to improve their punctuation of sentence boundaries, presentation of quotations and reference to people and researchers. Rarely were titles indicated by inverted commas while names often were.

Many candidates would have benefitted from more systematic planning and organisation to construct paragraphs with clear topics and topic sentences. Many answers used very short paragraphs and offered loosely chronological accounts of the texts.

Assessment Objective 3
This AO is designed to assess candidates' ability to analyse how texts are affected by aspects of context and the ways in which they create meanings. It is weighted at 15/45 marks and should be seen as linked with AO1 as candidates need to be able to describe and analyse salient linguistic features to answer the first bullet point in the questions.

All the questions required some form of textual analysis in answering the first bullet point. Textual analysis was a task with which candidates were clearly familiar. Candidates were able to make productive analyses of the data in Question 2 which may have been quite unfamiliar which was very encouraging.

Assessment Objective 2
This AO carries 20/45 marks and requires candidates to show wider knowledge of the concepts and issues concerning the topic set. It is particularly targeted by the second bullet point.

Candidates knew most about attitudes to language change for Question 3. Their knowledge of language change was sometimes limited to the process of standardisation of spelling and grammar in the distant past and broad references to prescriptivism and descriptivism, though many candidates had good knowledge of a range of ways of accounting for language change. Applying their knowledge provided more challenge.

To improve their performance in future examinations candidates should:

- time their answers carefully to balance the amount of attention they give to their two answers which are worth equal marks
- pay close attention to the requirements of the bullet points
- address the question set rather than provide a pre-prepared all purpose answer on change or variation
- be responsive to the data
- select relevant research and concepts relating to the change and variation topics
- evaluate views about language use by reference to specific examples
- argue their own views.

SECTION A – Language Variation and Change

Question 1

This question used two texts from different periods with a thematic connection as a way of testing candidates' ability to respond to texts from different times and use them to explore the nature of language change.
The texts were an album review from a music newspaper from 1965 and a CD review from a music website from 2009. These two texts encouraged a good range of responses from candidates and gave them many opportunities to show their textual analysis skills and their knowledge about language change. Although relatively short, the texts were very rich and candidates were able to produce a variety of responses.

Candidates were asked to describe (AO1) and comment on (AO3) linguistic features to explore the way meanings were conveyed. They were then asked to evaluate the effect of period and context on the ways the texts used language (AO2).

Generally responses were stronger in response to the first bullet point. Candidates were able to examine the information the reviews gave and the ways in which the writers expressed their opinions. Many noted that Allen Evans seemed more enthusiastic about Doris Day than Jewel Akens. They also noted the qualified approval of Belladonna.

Successful candidates adopted a systematic approach to analysing the effect of period and context. They identified and explained features of language that could be linked to social, historical, genre and mode contexts.

Some candidates noted the ways in which the technology of listening to music had altered and was reflected in the vocabulary. Another effective focus was found in comparing the names of artists, genres and titles and how these reflected changing genres and styles. Some considered modes of communication. They compared the graphological simplicity of Text A with the greater variety of B. Looking at Text B in terms of the effect of the internet on vocabulary and interactivity was very fruitful for some. Some identified a more spoken style in B and attributed

this to changing styles and conventions. Some looked at the significance of social values. There was discussion of the words *gay* and *coloured* in Text A and the representation of women in B. Another approach was to note similarities and differences in the form and language of a review over time. Some stronger candidates were able to talk about the style of Text B being less straightforward and more reference-heavy than that of Text A. There were some candidates who developed this really well and talked about shifting reference points and how music journalism was probably quite young in 1965, perhaps a bit jaded and knowing in the NME of 2009.

A less successful but very common approach involved looking at how the invention of the printing press, Johnson's dictionary, the King James Bible, the Norman Conquest, Shakespeare's use of compounds and other similar examples from the history of English had a bearing on these particular texts. Answers which adopted this approach often spent a large amount of time recounting knowledge of the history of English at the expense of analysis of the data given. Another effect of this approach was that the points made could have been true of many other texts as well. To say that standard spelling was used as the texts post-dated Caxton's printing was true but did not illuminate these particular texts very precisely. Discussion of the spelling of *Grrl* was more productive.

Most candidates commented on *gay* and *coloured*. The level of responses represented the overall hierarchy of analysis on this question. Some just identified a period feature and commented it would not now be used. A level up saw candidates explaining the meanings of the words and the changes in meaning and usage now. Candidates then began to explore processes of semantic shift and pejoration and how words can become archaic and fall out of use. Some were able to use the words to illustrate wave and S-curve models of language change and diffusion. At the highest levels candidates were able to show how changing social values, the development of political correctness (with its deterministic beliefs about the significance of language) and processes like the euphemism treadmill might affect the language used in these texts.

Candidates often showed some uncertainty in discussing the development of the meanings and uses of *gay*. There was quite a lot of confusion about the sequence of developments and what exactly represented pejoration.

The task asked candidates to evaluate as well as analyse the impact of contexts and periods. One method was to discuss how significant different contexts had been in changing the language used. Another approach was to show how the features that exemplified change could be interpreted differently. Candidates often found examples and showed how they could be interpreted using the approaches typified by Jean Aitchison as the crumbling castle, damp spoon and infectious disease approaches. They also then used alternative explanations, popularly random fluctuation or functional approaches, applied to the data to discuss the nature of language change.

Some candidates mechanically explained Jean Aitchison's models of prescriptive attitudes to change with varying degrees of application to the text. Weaker answers simply used the terms while others at least explained what the ideas were. There remained confusion about the nature of Jean Aitchison's relationship with these ideas. Careful practising of how to write about these ideas would help candidates express themselves accurately. Weaker candidates talked about the styles of A or B as being prescriptive or descriptive, rather than using these terms to characterise attitudes to language.

Key issues affecting candidates' performance positively were:
- using linguistic descriptions consistently across different levels when analysing the language of the text, thus gaining high marks on AO1
- balancing their answer between the demands of the two bullet points
- engaging fully with the reviewers' judgements of the music
- engaging fully with the way they characterised the music they described
- evaluating how the period and modes of communication had affected the language of the texts
- evaluating the language use and changes in the light of different views about why language changes.

The most successful candidates:
- addressed both bullet points fully, often dealing with the first before going on to the second and presenting two mini-essays
- began by establishing the text's immediate contexts: genre, audience, subject and purposes
- identified pertinent linguistic features in relation to the genres, audiences and purposes of the two texts
- quoted and described word classes used from the semantic field of music to inform the reader: *double tracking, vocals, organ, guitar, drums, backing*
- identified, described and interpreted words used to characterise the music in Text A: *gay, swingy, dramatic, beaty, rocking*
- identified, described and interpreted words used to characterise the music in Text B: *old school, funky, Ron Asheton School Of Riffs, Chas'n'Dave style, more smart than smut*
- explored evaluative language in Text A, describing word classes and interpreting the meaning: *terrific, highlight, great, top-class, versatile, good, fresh, well*
- explored evaluative language in Text B in the same way: *attempting, more rewarding, raw charm, for once that's a good thing*
- examined the use of thematised non-finite subordinate clauses in B to describe the album when making judgements
- noted the more personal voice of Text B with its use of fillers and dashes to suggest the speaking voice
- identified *er* as 'planned to look unplanned' and discussed it as a stylistic choice creating mode and contributing to the tone and views
- examined the use of present tense verbs and particularly the modality of the verb *to be* when presenting judgements
- explored the modality of *Nobody can match* and *can* as ways of presenting firm and unarguable opinions in Text A
- commented on the omission of verbs in the final sentences of the Text A reviews to leave a punchy main message
- explored how words to label and characterise the music were affected by changing styles and trends
- compared changes in terms for musical artefacts: *LPs, album*
- commented on the time bound use of allusions and references in Text B
- examined how words were created, eg suffixation (*beaty, swingy*), compounding (grunge *rock*), blending (*scuzz, grrrl, blog*), initialism (*RSS*), semantic shift (*feed, Twitter*)
- considered the titles of the songs and what they suggested about the periods
- explored the social and cultural contexts that had changed and affected the way *gay* and *coloured* are now seen
- analysed the effect on vocabulary of the internet: *RSS, blogs, Twitter*
- looked at the imperatives and hyperlinks that created the interactivity of the mode of the 2009 text
- explored the ability to add comments to the review and to move off from the text in a variety of directions

- evaluated how much influence the online nature of Text B had on its language
- applied crumbling castle, damp spoon and infectious disease models to examples from the texts and offered alternative explanations based on functional necessity, economy, fashion, creativity, changing social attitudes, the impact of social media and the prosumer.

Less successful candidates:
- did not engage with the meanings of the two reviews
- used few or inaccurate linguistic descriptions
- did not identify distinctive language features in relation to period or context
- noted the *er* in Text B but treated it as a feature of spontaneous language and claimed it showed the writer did not know what they were going to say next
- analysed the titles of the LPs and songs in Text A as though they were the linguistic choices of Allen Evans
- thought that *gay* was a pejorative term for homosexual
- claimed that any compound term was evidence of the influence of Shakespeare as he used them a lot
- wrote lengthy analyses of the word *recycle* and the significance of environmental concerns
- off-loaded knowledge of key events in the history of the language rather than working with the data
- presented a prepared account of Aitchison's characterisation of language worries without applying to the data
- were confused about the spelling of Aitchison and what she thought about language
- described Text A as prescriptivist and B as descriptivist
- described Text A variously as Old and Middle English
- made dubious assertions about life, language and music in 1965 rather than making deductions from the text
- ignored the multimedia elements of Text B
- did not pay equal attention to the two bullet points.

Question 2

This question saw the first appearance of world English as a topic on the paper and it was answered by approximately a quarter of candidates. Examiners enjoyed and were impressed by the freshness of responses to the data and the lively thinking it produced. They also noted however that candidates often seemed less prepared for the discussion required by the second part of the task. What was most impressive was some candidates' ability to deal with challenging unfamiliar material in timed conditions, applying their knowledge to new contexts.

Candidates were asked to analyse an article from a community newspaper in South Africa by describing (AO1) and commenting on (AO3) linguistic features to explore the way language was affected by the context and meanings were conveyed. They were then asked to evaluate the likelihood of English becoming a global language or fragmenting into different languages (AO3).

Candidates found the data for this question accessible. They were able to engage with meanings and linguistic choices without being distracted by the unfamiliarity of the data. They examined the portrayal of violence and the writer's views and warnings. They were able to identify a range of non-standard features. Better responses were able to describe the features linguistically and speculate about their causes.

The second bullet point was more challenging for candidates in this first appearance of a question on world English. Not all candidates had detailed knowledge of examples, case studies, research or concepts to develop a convincing answer. Some were able to develop good arguments and many tried to use other areas of their knowledge such as dialect levelling to

answer the task. Many discussed the development of English, particularly the development of pidgins and creoles as a way of illustrating the effect of the spread of a language and as a way of exploring the birth of new languages. There was some tendency in answers to look backwards in time rather than where the present might be leading.

Key issues affecting candidates' performance positively were:
- using linguistic descriptions consistently across different levels when analysing the language of the text, thus gaining high marks on AO1
- balancing their answer between the demands of the two bullet points
- describing non-standard features and relating them to context
- being able to discuss English in a global context.

The most successful candidates:

- described language features with understanding of non-standard use and the South African context
- noted the South African nature of proper nouns for places and pubs
- identified the noun *panga* as a local word for a kind of weapon
- commented on the mixture of very formal and informal vocabulary
- examined the word order in *bodily grievous harm*
- looked at the creation of the compound *beer downers*
- commented on the use of the base *search* as a past participle and compared the addition of a suffix in standard English
- noted the variations in the form and use of noun plurals
- examined the use of determiners
- wondered if some features were typographical errors (eg *follow* and the *full stop* after very hot)
- commented on generic similarities and differences based on their experience of newspaper articles
- considered the possible nature and status of the paper, the writers and the audience
- looked at how events were seen as frequent and recurrent
- commented on the use of present participles for dramatic evocation of events
- explored the language of violence and imagery
- considered the imagery suggesting animals associated with the noun *Waterhole* and the verb *swarm*
- examined the imperatives and direct address in the appeal to parents at the end
- discussed the relative influences of British and American standard English
- examined the impact of the media and the internet on spreading English
- commented on the de-standardising power of writers' increasing ability to publish themselves
- explored the importance of a standard language for trade, business, education
- noted the effect of local circumstances on vocabulary
- explored the effect of the grammar of another language on English when it is spoken as a second language
- examined some of the negative and positive attitudes to creole and standard English in the Caribbean
- discussed the prestige of speaking a standard English
- explored the links between language variation and national and regional identity.

Less successful candidates:

- ignored the South African context
- tended to focus on only non-standard language or the meanings conveyed by the passage
- described non-standard features as mistakes or wrong, adopting a deficit model
- analysed the audience and purpose of Figure 1
- drifted into a range of marginally relevant or simply irrelevant material for bullet point two.

SECTION B – Language Discourses

Question 3

Question 3 required candidates to analyse non-academic writing about language change and respond to its ideas. Candidates were given broadsheet feature articles by Will Self and Lynne Truss. The passages were provided to allow candidates to explore how ideas about language change are produced and widely disseminated.

The first bullet point required candidates to analyse how the two passages represented different views about the use of texting and text language. The second bullet point required candidates to evaluate the writers' ideas about texting in the context of candidates' wider knowledge about language change.

Candidates were expected to analyse both texts systematically by describing (AO1) and commenting on (AO3) linguistic features to explore the way Self and Truss presented their views about texting and text language. They were then expected evaluate the ideas presented within the context of the various discourses about language change (AO2).

Candidates found the data for this question accessible, but with plenty of challenges to stretch them. Most were able to identify Self's and Truss' dislike of, and refusal to use, text language. They could also identify the pleasure both took in using texting. Good answers clearly differentiated the attitudes towards texting and the kind of language written in a text.

Some candidates seemed completely thrown by the introduction in Will Self's text to his book. Some thought that he was referring to texting causing this disaster and others did not understand that it referred to a fictional world. Better candidates saw the implied links between texting and some form of linguistic apocalypse and challenged the (Self-acknowledged) looseness of argument. Others commented on the way he positioned himself as a novelist in preparation for his dissection of text language practices.

Better responses adopted a systematic approach to the analysis of the texts as discourse. They focused initially on how Self and Truss presented their views about language. Next they looked at how the writers presented themselves as a rhetorical strategy. Finally they analysed the ways the writers constructed a position for the reader so they accepted the views of Truss and Self.

Less effective responses often betrayed an insecure understanding of the arguments presented in the two passages. They often analysed language but revealed a very general, unfocussed approach and a lack of clarity about the purpose of the analysis in this task.

The second bullet point enabled candidates to examine a range of views about texting and text language as examples of language change and develop their own argument. Candidates were frequently able to classify the different discourses about language change referred to and exhibited by Self and Truss. The best responses went on to evaluate these views, often with detailed and specific examples of text language. There were – as in Question 1 – some weaker answers that just tried to write everything the candidate knew about the history of the language

and a pre-prepared essay about attitudes to language change. The best answers were responsive to these specific passages and the focus on text language.

Key issues affecting candidates' performance positively were:
- using linguistic descriptions consistently across different levels when analysing the language of the texts, thus gaining high marks on AO1
- balancing their answer between the demands of the two bullet points
- engaging fully with the views of Self and Truss and how they expressed them persuasively
- identifying different views of language change and evaluating them by the analysis of specific examples of text language.

The most successful candidates:
- read both passages before starting to write, so that they understood their arguments, recognised their similarities and had an overview of views and strategies from the start, drawing the texts together, aiding conceptualisation and avoiding undue repetition
- established clearly what Self and Truss were actually arguing in the texts
- skilfully integrated their knowledge of the processes of, and debates about, language change with close reading and analysis of the texts
- saw a distinction between texting and txt language and realised that both authors liked the technology but not the language 'rules' of texting
- noted that the 'rules' of texting were very different from the normal prescriptive rules seen in discourses about language and analysed Truss's ironic and subversive stance
- understood what *bowdlerisation* might mean and commented on the adjective phrase *quite insufferable*
- showed how Self's use of the verb *neglect* and adverb *laboriously* revealed his attachment to writing full standard English and avoiding txt language
- analysed the connotations of *technophobic Sir Bufton-Tufton* and Self's presentation of himself as not averse to the technology through the noun *kidult*
- examined his positioning as an *oldster* and the inclusive use of 1st person plural pronouns
- explored how Self uses the abstract nouns *celebration* and *ingenuity* to convey his revelling in technology
- responded to the subtleties of tone in both writers
- explored the way Truss presented her wilful rebelliousness and the pleasure she derived from breaking the 'rules' of texting, playing with her own reputation and image
- classified and explained prescriptivist and descriptivist views clearly
- explained the metaphors of the crumbling castle, damp spoon and infectious disease views of language 'decay', attributing the views to prescriptivists, and the classifying metaphors to Aitchison
- related each metaphor closely to specific views expressed by Truss and Self in the passages
- saw how Self's verb *neglect* the way Truss texts *laboriously* with *an enormous amount of punctuation* suggested crumbling castle and damp spoon discourses
- explored a number of alternative views of the nature of language change: eg the functional and random fluctuation theories
- evaluated specific examples of change evidenced by txt language to evaluate whether it could be seen as progress or decay
- explored why apostrophe use might be different in txt language, arguing about different modes, genres and conventions
- considered the age-related nature of linguistic conservatism
- developed their own considered views about txt language
- examined the constraints on communication created by the technology and used them to explain the linguistic features of txt language
- examined the creativity of txt language features and use
- argued that txting was a style and users could adapt their language to situation.

Less successful candidates:
- did not pay full attention to both bullet points
- did not establish exactly what Self and Truss were arguing
- imposed their own preconceived ideas about what Lynne Truss would say about texting
- only saw Will Self's critical attitudes
- referred to Self as she
- thought that *err* was a filler
- described Truss as a pendant
- selected words and discussed their meaning without reference to their actual use in the texts' arguments
- wrote digressive analyses of the texts in terms of male and female language use, importing ideas about dominance and difference
- launched into a potted history of English from 400AD to the present day
- wrote about prescriptivist views of change in general, rather than looking closely at the issue of txt language
- confused prescriptivism and descriptivism and could not spell these terms.

Advice to candidates

Do:
- answer 1 question from Section A and Question 3
- spend 1 ¼ hours on each question
- read the two bullet points very carefully to see how to use the data and what you are expected to do
- give roughly equal attention to each bullet point
- read the texts very carefully before beginning to write, to ensure that you have interpreted correctly what is being said
- apply linguistic descriptions when analysing, and make sure they are the appropriate ones for the type of text, eg spoken or written
- make sure you know research, theories and ideas about all the topics which may be covered in the unit – not just those which were the focus of the previous paper
- make sure your subject knowledge is up to date
- know what the key issues and points of debate are for each topic area
- be selective about the theory/knowledge you discuss in each answer, so that it illuminates the text you are analysing as well as demonstrating your wider knowledge
- argue your own informed views on language topics, supporting them with textual or other evidence
- judge (evaluate) how far linguistic ideas are valid, and in Question 3, how convincingly they are conveyed
- think about the issues before you come into the exam - if you have clarified your ideas beforehand, you will be able to express them more clearly, which is important
- make sure you apply your knowledge to the exact focus set by the questions.

Don't:
- write answers to both Question 1 and 2 in Section A
- paraphrase the content of texts
- forget to describe important features of language technically
- make sweeping and unsupported assertions
- offload pre-prepared set responses with little reference to the focus of the question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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