



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

English Language A

ENGA1

(Specification 2700)

Unit 1: Seeing Through Language

Report on the Examination

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General

This is the sixth series of this unit and examiners reported that many candidates were able to identify the main linguistic, modal and contextual features of the two given texts as well as demonstrating a detailed 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: a government webpage giving advice to prospective university students and a transcript of part of a radio phone-in programme about why students drop out of their university courses. To access the higher mark ranges for AO1, candidates were expected to analyse both texts systematically by describing and illustrating key features of semantics, grammar, syntax and discourse. 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 and structure. Candidates were also expected to examine effects of language features and various meanings and representations both literal and pragmatic constructed by the writer of Text A and the participants in Text B.

Tasks 02 and 04 required candidates to study a data set related to children's acquisition of either speech or writing and comment linguistically on five different features of language which they found of interest. To access the higher mark ranges for AO1, candidates were expected to identify these features precisely and name them linguistically.

Tasks 03 and 05 required candidates to write an answer on either the extent to which children's linguistic development is the result of an innate capacity to learn language or the extent to which all children go through the same stages when learning 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 demonstrate understanding of and an ability to integrate and evaluate language issues, theories, research and debates as well as examining appropriate linguistic features and contexts.

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 tasks 02 and 04 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 02 or 04 takes valuable time away from the 03 or 05 answer.

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 both texts in Section A
- read both texts in Section A carefully for meaning
- identify **five** features from the data sets in 02 and 04 precisely and describe them linguistically in a brief and focused answer.

SECTION A – Language and Mode

Question 1

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The texts for analysis proved to be very accessible. The carefully planned, asynchronous, distant yet inclusive mode of the government webpage and the partially planned, synchronous, interactive mode of the radio programme were obviously genres 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, aspects, voices, 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 channel in terms of the visual reception of Text A and the aural reception of Text B, the message orientation of Text A and the expressive orientation of Text B, repetition and reformulation, turn taking and degrees of interactivity (eg direct address, synthetic personalisation, tag questions, monitoring features, simultaneous speech). Examiners noted that in general candidates' analysis of mode continues to improve. 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. For instance, in Text B Amy chooses to text whereas Hassan chooses to telephone.

The most successful candidates demonstrated clear understanding of how contexts and situations shaped the meanings created by and within the texts. In Text A they explored the writer's use of direct address and rhetorical strategies to reassure without patronising the audience while still establishing and maintaining authority. They also examined effects of clause type, tenses and modality and representations of university life in terms of workload, study methods, socialising and personal development. In Text B the most successful candidates explored views about university education, effects of tenses and modality, particular topics such as the dangers of inexperience and the value of perseverance and the management of presentation and interview. These most successful candidates also explored the self-representations of the radio presenter, Amy, Trev, Chris, Hassan and the writer of Text A.

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 A was generally brief, accurate and productive. Most candidates understood that Text B was spontaneous, interactive and immediate and that Text A was distant but that the writer was using rhetorical strategies to engage readers. Most candidates showed understanding of the purposes of the writer of Text A to explain the various benefits of going to university and participants in Text B to discuss the reasons why students drop out or persevere with their university courses. These candidates identified the potential audience for Text A as people considering applying to university or possibly their parents/carers and the audience for Text B as regular listeners to Radio 5 Live as well as prospective students both young and more mature. These candidates generally gave close attention to semantic fields and were thus able to conduct an examination of topics such as socialising and studying.

Less successful candidates made broad assertions about the texts, often without proof or exemplification. These candidates were only able to identify some graphological features, one or two pronouns or one or two semantic and/or phonological features. Some less successful candidates thought that Text A was a university prospectus. Others thought that the opinions expressed at the beginning of Text B were those of the show's presenter rather than texts sent in by listeners. 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 over-view 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
- explored the use of subordinate clauses as a means of prioritising information within a sentence, eg 'when I look back...' and 'when I was eighteen'
- 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)
- discussed the use of a range of adjective types in both texts, including qualitative/attributive/evaluative adjectives in both texts to emphasise the representation of university life in Text A ('interesting', 'unusual', 'new') and to focus on the speakers' presentation of their own views in Text B ('inexperienced', 'ungrateful', 'young')
- 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
- noted the lack of interactive features such as tabs and links in Text A

- considered the use of rhetorical devices such as triadic structures and rhetorical questions
- recognised that stressed syllables in Text B were linked to the difficulties experienced by young students in staying on their university course
- identified and described colloquialisms such as ‘really into’ and ‘stuck at it’
- examined metaphor in Text A: ‘getting a taste of student life’
- considered the reassuring effect of parenthesis in Text A: ‘or software engineering (learning to write computer software - games or other programs)’
- discussed how the writer of Text A positioned the reader in terms of educational and social preferences
- examined representations of university life in Text B in terms of work load, study methods, socialising and personal development
- examined the various opinions expressed in Text B such as the dangers of inexperience and the value of perseverance
- explored pre-planning of the radio programme topic and running order in Text B
- discussed the variety of mode in Text B: written texts read on-air by the presenter and the presenter’s spoken telephone interaction with Hassan
- examined the presenter’s expressive interpretation of the text messages
- explored the role of the radio presenter in terms of the management of the presentation of opinions and the interview with Hassan.
- wrote fluently and articulately, structuring their response carefully and logically.

Less successful candidates:

- simply identified graphology, complexity and formality
- identified features without exemplification
- made significant and frequent errors in identifying sentence types, clauses and phrases such as identifying ‘unlike school’ and ‘but in a lot of detail’ as subordinate clauses
- used linguistic methods with minimal accuracy
- paraphrased the content of the texts including unanalysed quotations
- misread Text A as a university prospectus
- 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 more 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: reduplication – ‘dog dog’, deletion – ‘ooking pussy’, declined correction – ‘woof woof’, ‘dog dog’, declarative mood – ‘ooking pussy’

adjective use – ‘big’, role of care-giver (questioning) – ‘is it upstairs’, role of care-giver (reformulating) – ‘looking for the pussycat’, consonant cluster simplification – ‘tairs’, ‘pots’, affixation/addition ‘doggy’, one word utterances – ‘pots’, meaning relation/two word utterances – ‘ooking pussy’.

The most successful candidates:

- identified accurately five clearly differentiated linguistic features
- presented each feature clearly and separately in the lay-out of their answer
- quoted the example of each feature in the answer rather than giving the line number
- gave a brief linguistic description of each 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 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 children’s linguistic development is the result of an innate capacity to learn language. These answers contained clear evidence of the study of Language Development in the form of empirical observations and specific reference to appropriate theory and research such as that of Chomsky, Pinker, Brown, Halliday, Nelson, Lenneberg and Berko. These most successful candidates examined a range of examples of semantic and grammatical features and functions, eg semantic acquisition, word classes, word order, grammatical function words, morphology, affixation, negation, tense, plurality, over-generalisation, types of over-extension (categorical, analogical and statement) and question formation. At this level of attainment, candidates gave close attention to the characteristics of Object Permanence, Seriation, Poverty of Stimulus, Critical Learning Period, 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 significance of variable input and interaction, the acquisition of language as an active and deductive process, considered the relative merits of innatist, cognitive, social interactionist and behaviourist theories of language development and evaluated these theories critically. 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 the theory of innatism.

Most candidates demonstrated some knowledge of key theories of language acquisition but often without evaluation of their relative merits and with insufficient focus on innatism. Most candidates offered only one or two examples of children's language. Examiners commented that, given the wealth of data presented to candidates in Task 02, 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 'innate capacity to learn language' at all and offered very generalised accounts 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 03 question but based their answer entirely on the data in 02, which severely limited the scope of their answers and their achievement for AO2. It is essential that candidates are made aware that tasks 02 and 03 should be answered separately.

The most successful candidates:

- explored the extent to which children's linguistic development is the result of an innate capacity to learn language
- centred their debates and critical evaluation of research and theories around innatism
- drew on personal experience (eg siblings, cousins), linked them to the question and demonstrated their contribution to the discussion of language 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)
- critically evaluated the nativist perspective whilst acknowledging the role of caregivers and the influence of the social environment by drawing on Katherine Nelson for the composition of the early productive vocabulary, 'Jim' and 'Genie' for the role of interaction
- examined the significance of some rules and principles applied by children, eg tense formation and plurality (by examining Berko and Brown's 'wug' research)
- discussed the effect of correction by examining Jean Berko Gleason's 'fis' experiment
- examined developing forms of questioning and negation
- used their knowledge of researchers such as Chomsky, Pinker, Brown, Halliday, Nelson, Lenneberg and Berko to explain and illuminate children's language development
- explained and evaluated ideas such as the Zone of Proximal Development, Child Directed Speech, the Language Acquisition Device and the Language Acquisition Support System
- 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 innate capacity to learn language
- 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 innatism 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
- spell key names and terms correctly, eg Chomsky, Bruner, Piaget, imitation, nativist
- use some examples from the data in Question 2a as well as your own prepared ones
- examine and evaluate research findings and theory, evolving a balanced and clear line of argument.

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

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A minority of candidates answered Question 3.

Most candidates 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.

The most successful candidates:

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

Many candidates clearly identified features such as: simple sentence – ‘Onday we went on on a picnikc’, complex sentence – ‘We had a delicious lunch ...’, sub-ordinate clause – ‘except we had frogs init!’, first person plural narrative – ‘we whet home, correct spelling – ‘delicious’, correct punctuation except omitted full stop ‘...picnikc We ...’, spatial dimensions of early writing – various letter sizes, past tense – ‘we went on on a picnikc’, correction and interaction – ‘whet’ = ‘went’ and tick, aspects of narrative – linear, sequential, imaginative, familial, narrative linked to drawing, irregular capitalisation – ‘Jumped’, self-correction – ‘picnikc’, co-ordinate clause used as a sentence for effect ‘And mum screamed’, aspects of narrative structure – characterisation, orientation, complication, plot development, coda.

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
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The most successful candidates explicitly explored the extent to which all children go through the same stages when learning to write. In doing so, they examined in detail theories about stages of acquisition of writing skills such as Kroll's preparatory, consolidation, differentiation, integration stages and Barclay's scribbling, mock letters, conventional letters, phonetic spelling and correct spelling stages. The most successful candidates referred confidently to the work of other researchers such as 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 answers integrated specific examples of children's written language such as handwriting, spelling, punctuation, grammar and syntax into their answers. These candidates also examined the contribution of reading, drawing and narrative to the development of writing skills, 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), 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.

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 a general account of one or two stages of written acquisition.

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 all children go through the same stages when learning 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 stages of acquisition of writing skills such as those posited by Kroll and Barclay
- 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
- drew mainly on theories of spoken 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
- discount the importance of individual learning in the context of stages of written acquisition.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

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