



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

English Language B

ENGB3

(Specification 2705)

Unit 3: Developing Language

Report on the Examination

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General

On the whole, most students were well-prepared for the paper, understanding the importance of engaging with the data and increasingly responding to AO1 demands with much accurate and even ambitious commentary on a wide range of language features. Language Acquisition elicited the best responses in the vast majority of cases, perhaps because it comes first on the paper.

Examiners were impressed with the quality of responses and candidates' knowledge given the short time period involved in preparing them for the January exam. Most candidates seem to be planning their responses before writing, using their reading time effectively to read and annotate the data. This preparation is evident in the structured responses seen. Some, however, seem to believe that just writing at length will guarantee a good mark. Shorter, focused answers were often more highly rewarded than those who required supplementary booklets to continue their description of the data.

Section A – Language Acquisition

Question 01

This elicited some superb responses, with some impressively detailed, accurate and perceptive analysis of CDS and CLA features, and intelligent application of relevant concepts (AO2), including literacy theory and gender ideas. For AO2, most responses applied Skinner and Bruner to good effect but, for range and perception in the higher mark bands, there were some thoughtful application of Chomsky and Piaget to some of Jake's utterances.

The best answers dealt with the transcripts in an open-minded manner, not looking for it to fit the patterns from other practised past exam questions. Clearly, a discriminator between candidates was their ability to see Jake's short utterances as part of the ritualised routine of sharing books and his longer utterances as evidence of his developmental stage. Because the data included spoken interaction as well as text from the books, there was scope to apply a range of linguistic methods (AO1).

Even weaker candidates could engage with CDS strategies and found plenty to comment on in relation to differing parental roles - though they were sometimes harshly critical of the father and the nature of the books. However, the tendency to describe and paraphrase the transcripts chronologically produced weaker responses, keeping candidates in the lower mark bands – despite often lengthy answers.

Context was generally well integrated with observations on language. Candidates were able to score well on context (AO3) if they considered a range of potential factors – the bedtime scenario, the routine of shared reading, the educational and fun purposes, Jake's role within the activity, his parents' roles, the books' functions and possible literacy/school experiences given Jake's age. The best answers integrated contextual awareness with specific linguistic features, mindful that the mark scheme looks for integrated analysis.

Question 02

Though answered by few students, there were some very competent responses, with the developmental focus in the data encouraging most students to move beyond surface description towards a more evaluative discussion of the child's execution of a scientific report. Stronger responses used this developmental approach to produce systematic answers, applying a range of linguistic methods (AO1), including lexis, grammar and discourse structure to good effect. There were interesting observations about pronouns with some seeing the older Tom's use of the plural pronoun as evidence for both his maturation

and pragmatic recognition of the class activity. Punctuation was superficially treated, but spelling allowed more thoughtful candidates to identify the processes children apply to their spelling. Less aware responses tended to identify all spellings as phonetic choices, not really thinking about the differences between phonemes and graphemes.

The graphological features allowed students scope to apply ideas about multi-modality and there was some good knowledge of literacy ideas (AO2) on display. This always scored more highly when they were linked to specific features, rather than paragraphs describing Kroll's stages of written development. With literacy questions, those candidates who can engage with the particular genre being demonstrated will differentiate themselves from those who overlook the child's understanding and use of genre conventions. As always, less helpful AO2 concepts were spoken acquisition ones, although Skinner and reinforcement was well applied to the teacher's feedback and cognitive development explained some of his development.

As ever, a deficit approach which considered all the 'mistakes' in the texts was not helpful. Better responses tended to compare the texts and look for patterns by taking a systematic approach. This accesses the higher AO1 mark scheme and means that time isn't wasted by repeating a similar point.

Candidates were able to identify a range of contextual factors (AO3) from the teacher worksheet and teacher input into the activity and the nature of the science activities.

Section B – Language Change

Question 03

This question provided plenty of stretch and challenge to the most able students, who were able to demonstrate a sometimes sophisticated grasp of concepts surrounding standardisation issues and language evolution. The examples of 'new' words were often a helpful focus for candidates to then comment on compounds, borrowing, clipping and semantic change – allowing students to combine their AO2 understanding of change processes with AO1 exemplification. Interesting discussions emerged of the idea of sifting for gold with secure analysis of the connotations surrounding this image. Many secure discussions of prescriptive/ descriptive views surrounding language change were seen - often more successful when an open-minded approach was taken, rather than assuming that the text writer had to subscribe to a particular view. Others took a stylistic approach to the text, somewhat side-lining the topical content, but making some valid observations along the way.

Weaker candidates did not address the data or simply made reference to the words listed at the end of it describing rather than analysing the language change process. Likewise, there were some candidates who saw this question as an opportunity to list all they knew about language change and it was difficult to award a mark which reflected their knowledge when there was such limited reference to the data. Candidates should keep in mind that they do have to consider the data and avoid doing a pre-prepared essay regardless of the data in front of them.

Most candidates could identify some contextual factors (AO3). Possible audiences for an online dictionary were considered, along with the technology that might encourage a broader readership and be an important factor in the ways the text was both received and used. Again, the 'new' words also allowed for the connection between language and context with the words highlighting globalisation/contact with other cultures, media and social influences, as well as business contexts.

Question 04

By far the most popular question, the time gap between the productions of these two texts gave candidates the opportunity to explore language change effectively. Those who performed well were open-minded and did not seek to make the data fit the data they had practised before sitting this exam.

The best candidates offered a range of linguistic features for AO1 and integrated them successfully with AO2/AO3. There were some solid and systematic accounts of orthographical changes, with better candidates attempting to analyse semantic and discourse features. Syntax was often treated formulaically, though better answers spotted the speech-like nature and narrative style of Text F. Less successful candidates tended to 'feature spot' the *long s*, use of capitals and apostrophes, but this was only really useful when discussed further. Simply indentifying such features means that the response tends to 'describe' rather than 'analyse', key distinctions between the lower to mid AO1 bands. There is still some confusion over words being archaic when they are in fact still in use, eg *indicted* and *malice*. This tended to demonstrate that a candidate was unfamiliar with a word and, although candidates cannot be expected to recognise all words within the language change texts, more assured answers could see such words as legal lexis and linked well to the Latin and French roots of English.

For AO2, the ability to see Standardisation as an ongoing and gradual process and that Text G was not more informal than Text F suggested stronger responses. Johnson and Caxton are still overused by candidates to explain language change. Many candidates recognised the synoptic nature of this unit with power concepts being useful to apply to these court texts. However, less helpful ones to illuminate discussions were attempts to apply gender and view the male criminals as evidence of an unfairly patriarchal society with women sidelined to roles as unnamed witnesses.

With context (AO3), temporal aspects were acknowledged to some degree by the majority of students, though only a few scripts really engaged with the courtroom context beyond a cursory glance at field-specific lexis or a broad discussion of capital punishment. Secure comments were sometimes made about the nature of legal documents, audience and purpose. Other interesting contextual factors were concerning society's changing attitudes to crimes and the discourse structure evidencing a changing focus in occupations. These comments were then strengthened when candidates considered similarities between the two texts that could be related to the genre. Weaker responses made little or no reference to the court context.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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