



General Certificate of Education

English Language A 2701

Specification A

ENGA3 Language Explorations

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – January series

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General

This first sitting of ENGA3 was taken by a relatively small number of candidates. It was exciting to see how candidates tackled the new style of questions. Examiners felt the materials were inviting to candidates who were able to make good sense of them and to analyse the texts and discuss the issues arising in a variety of productive ways. Inevitably there were issues of technique that will be refined as teachers and candidates become more experienced. Nonetheless candidates were able to demonstrate their grasp of the skills, knowledge and understanding required by this unit and a full range of achievement was seen.

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 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, making notes and planning their responses. There is a parity of marks between the two sections and it is recommended that candidates spend 60 minutes writing each answer.

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. There were some very short responses where candidates did not feel able to carry out the tasks fully. There were a small number of rubric infringements with candidates answering both Questions 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. A January sitting of this paper for candidates half-way through their A2 year runs the risk that they may not have fully covered all the topics that appear.

All the stimulus materials used were readily accessible to almost all candidates and provided plenty of opportunities for discussion at a variety of levels. In Questions 1 and 2 the first text will always be a major focus for the textual analysis in the first bullet. It will also provide examples which can be used in answering the second bullet point. The second text will sometimes be used to answer the first bullet but it may also be provided as a stimulus for the second bullet. This enables questions to be set that will ask candidates to respond to arrange of materials and data, including tables and graphs of research findings. In Text B there were definitions that could be used to explore the word McJob while both Text A and B contained other Mc-words that could be discussed under the second bullet. Text D was provided to give a starting point for discussion. In Question 3 the two texts will be presented for analysis in the first bullet before the wider issues are addressed in the second bullet.

The wording of the questions was clear and straightforward and the provision of two bullet points also offered a sensible way for candidates to approach and structure the task. The bullets were designed to help candidates hit the Assessment Objectives. Inevitably there was some evidence in answer to each bullet that showed achievement of the other Assessment Objectives. This was rewarded as marks were given after assessing the whole response. The first bullet in each question guided the candidates to analyse some textual data that was relevant to language change or variation in Section A and came from a discourse about language in Section B. The second bullet then asked candidates to look at wider issues raised by the data and to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of relevant concepts and issues.

Those candidates who dealt with the bullet points in order produced clearer and generally better balanced answers than those who attempted to deal with both bullet points simultaneously. Finding an appropriate balance between description, analysis, demonstrating knowledge and evaluation was crucial for candidates. Only the most successful paid due attention to all of these, and knowing the number of marks available for each Assessment Objective would help candidates considerably when deciding how much time and attention to give to each aspect of the question.

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

To improve their performance in future examinations candidates should:

- time their answers carefully to manage the demands of each element of the paper
- use the bullet points to structure an answer effectively, possibly even seeing them as separate but connected tasks
- identify exactly why and how they are being asked to use the data
- give roughly equal attention to both bullets
- read texts carefully for meaning
- make use of linguistic terminology when discussing language features
- be aware of debates about language and be able to evaluate different views.

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. These features will need to be explored to address the issues raised by the questions and assessed by Assessment Objectives 2 and 3.

Spelling, punctuation and expression were generally good (apart from some uncertainty about sentence boundaries or how to punctuate quotations). There were very few candidates who wrote unsustained or very badly organised answers.

Some centres had clearly trained candidates to describe every word they picked out as important using linguistic terminology. Candidates who looked closely at word classes and sentences functions were placed in the 5-6 band. If they could look at sentence types, verb forms, tense, aspect and voice or classify types of word class they entered 7–8. In 9–10 were placed candidates who could synthesise approaches and explore clauses, phrases and patterns.

Assessment Objective 3

This Assessment Objective 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. Texts A, B, E and F posed few problems in terms of understanding what was needed. Text C proved more problematic in terms of engagement with the experiences described. A considerable number of candidates missed the fact that they were not required to analyse the language and ideas of Text D in the same way.

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 theories and research into gender interaction 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 general concepts about attitudes to correctness. Attitudes to accent were often limited to a gloss on those described in Text D with explanation being rare. Evaluation of theories was often conspicuous by its absence: theories were often described, rather than debated.

Question 1

Question 1 focused on language change. The first bullet required candidates to analyse how two texts, an extract from a paper published by the Institute of Economic Affairs and an extract from the online Urban Dictionary, helped to define the meanings of the word McJob. The second bullet required them to explore more widely how new words and meanings enter the English language.

Candidates were expected to analyse both texts systematically by describing (AO1) and commenting on (AO3) linguistic features to explore the way meanings were ascribed to the word McJob in order to deal with the first bullet. They were then expected to consider examples to explore why new words and meanings are created and the processes by which they are formed and spread, or not as the case may be (AO3).

Candidates found the data for this question accessible and stimulating. The texts were provided to allow candidates to explore how words' meanings are actually created by the way they are used and discussed. Candidates seemed interested and often surprised by the ideas in Text A. A small minority misread this text, thinking the quotation from Coupland represented the view of Blundell, and therefore interpreted both texts as 'negative'. The second part of the task then allowed candidates to explore their wider understanding of the issues about new words. Some were able to refer back to the texts as examples to illustrate wider processes while most took the chance to show the case studies they had made. Either approach was equally valid.

Successful candidates:

- focused their analysis of Texts A and B on how they created meanings and definitions of the word McJob
- identified and quoted words and phrases from the text that helped to convey different meanings for the word McJob
- described their quoted material linguistically
- examined a range of features from the word class of individual lexical choices to the use of sentence functions and types and clauses
- examined how Blundell used the quotation from Coupland to set up a series of pejorative meanings he wanted to challenge
- explored the meanings generated by Coupland and the effect of listing, parallel structures and irony
- analysed how Blundell used a series of interrogatives to challenge the common views and imply their inaccuracy
- explored the impressions created by the first usage cited by Blundell, commenting on how it made a McJob connote access, equality of opportunity and concern by looking closely at the adjective and noun in the prepositional phrase *at great cost* and the adverb of manner *specially*
- analysed the noun *crew* and its positive connotations of a team, togetherness and youth culture
- noted how a McJob was associated with the abstract nouns *training* and *education*
- saw how the proper nouns for qualifications made the job highly respectable and well managed
- commented on how a McJob was defined in terms of abstract nouns like *advancement* and the metaphor *first rung on the ladder*
- noted how the McCheque was represented as an *important source of family income*, stressing the economic significance of the job
- examined the modality of the text and the impact of main clauses like *it is important to note* in shaping the reader's response and making certain views highly salient
- examined the Urban Dictionary's use of listing, subordination and co-ordination to produce a damning first sentence
- examined the language of degradation, lack of skills and demotivation
- explored the pejorative connotations of the adjectives and nouns used to describe the type of people who work a McJob
- conceptualised the language of mass-production, mechanisation, alienation and disposability
- gave a range of examples of new words that had entered the language, considering the causes of such lexical development and analysing the processes by which new words were coined
- discussed the functional view of word formation as a response to needs for new items
- explored the substratum theory that new words entered from contact with another variety of the language
- used McJob and the other Mc-words in the texts to discuss how words could be formed by blending and the application of a prefix by analogy
- considered the significance of socio-economic forces in creating such words, the importance of business, marketing and branding, globalisation and the hegemony of American culture, satire and social attitudes
- use the McJob examples to explore semantic processes of pejoration and amelioration and analysed how words' meanings are not fixed but change and are a site of social struggle
- considered the significance of the nature of the sources as examples of this struggle and examples of how the meanings of words are produced by their usage
- examined the roles dictionaries play as gatekeepers in the process of codification

- used the S-curve and wave models to consider how new words would spread or diffuse throughout the language and its users
- explored how words might enter the language and stay in use or how they might disappear from use
- examined how the formation of new words does not take place in a social vacuum but that they are debated and fought over
- noted that prescriptivists tended to dislike new words and applied damp spoon, crumbling castle and infectious disease metaphors to specific examples to show how and why they might disapprove
- evaluated whether such views were tenable, offering a range of arguments including the natural and inevitable nature of language change.

Less successful candidates:

- ignored texts A and B and only answered the second bullet
- only wrote about Texts A and B and ignored the second bullet
- wrote about both bullets but giving very little time to one of them, producing very little that addressed that part of the question
- wrote lengthy and unfocused introductions about the genre, audience and purpose of the texts, with little sense of why they were analysing them
- forgot to use linguistic terms to analyse how Blundell and the Urban Dictionary used language to create their meanings
- misread the role of the Coupland quotation in Text A
- made some lengthy digressions via Sapir/Whorf, the Hopi Indians and the history of PC, often stimulated by the word *retard* in Text B
- gave simple and stereotyped explanations that some people, prescriptivists, disapprove of language change, and others, descriptivists, either 'don't mind' or 'love change', rarely citing examples of who such people might be or exploring specific words
- were confused about processes of word formation which were not always applied to examples accurately (there was particular confusion between blending and compounding)
- offloaded factual knowledge about key moments in the history of the English language, such as the printing press, without really illuminating the topic of this question
- could explain the metaphors of the 'crumbling castle' etc. but almost invariably ascribed the views to Aitchison and did explore examples.

Question 2

Question 2 focused on language variation. The first bullet required candidates to analyse how a speaker with a regional dialect used language to convey his experiences. The second bullet required them to explore and evaluate attitudes to accents and dialects, with Text D providing them with some examples they could use to start.

Candidates were expected to analyse the text by describing (AO1) and commenting on (AO3) linguistic features to explore the distinctive features of the man's language use and how he used it to convey his experiences. They were then expected to consider examples of attitudes to regional dialects and accents and evaluate them (AO3).

Generally, candidates understood the main gist of the extract in Text C, and there were no basic misreadings. They were able to identify some dialect features. Most candidates successfully identified some dialect vocabulary, though some were less secure about meanings. The most frequent problem was interpreting 'tanner' as a regional pronunciation of 'tenner'. Reference to the other amounts of money mentioned, all small amounts, might have suggested that this was unlikely. Candidates were also quite successful in describing dialectal aspects of grammar, including verb forms, though many missed the use of the 'historic' present tense, as a feature of informal spoken narrative. There was some tendency to adopt deficit views of dialect features and to discuss what they should have been. More successful candidates considered how factors such as age, gender and situation might affect the use of dialect.

Some candidates purposefully used Labov's model of narrative structure to explore this text. However, there was more mechanical linguistic description in response to this question, and less engagement with the representation of the speaker's experiences, which characterised the writing of more successful candidates. These candidates responded positively, and in detail, to what the speaker was talking about, and the ways in which his humour, wit and personality were revealed by his speech, in particular, his witty conversion of Cock Robin to a verb, with an original and amusing meaning.

Most candidates understood Text D but were less certain about how to deal with it. A significant minority of candidates wasted time analysing the language, treating it as data for textual analysis, rather than commenting on the ideas in Text D. Often much of the work on the second bullet point relied wholly on repeating the information and ideas in Text D instead of explaining and evaluating the ideas offered. It was rare to see candidates who could discuss the linguistic arbitrariness of attitudes and the significance of social connotations.

Successful candidates:

- identified the narrative genre of text C, its use of personal experience and desire to entertain
- carefully noted features of dialect vocabulary and grammar
- linked these cautiously to the speaker's age, gender and class, showing knowledge of quantitative linguistic research
- examined how the text reflected the spoken situation
- commented on the use of an abstract in the first sentence
- discussed the use of second person pronouns to universalise the experience and create immediacy and identification
- examined the use of dialogue for dramatic effect
- engaged with the speaker's self-presentation and looked closely at his tone
- commented on the interjections used to structure and comment on the stories told
- analysed the use of historic present tense verbs to create dramatic immediacy
- could report on Giles' matched guise research to illustrate positive and negative attitudes to regional accents
- discussed how the social class distribution of accents and dialects affected their connotations
- referred to specific quantitative research to illustrate this
- were able to focus on very specific attitudes to particular pronunciation features
- linked the attitudes to the findings of the Aziz corporation on attitudes to accents at work
- noted changing attitudes to dialects and accents
- examined the role of the media and particular figures in promoting positive attitudes
- made useful references to popular media figures (Ant and Dec, Cat Deeley, the Hairy Bikers, Jamie Oliver) to explain the increasing acceptance of regional accents
- debated what the best response might be to accent prejudice.

Less successful candidates:

- ignored Text C and only answered the second bullet
- only wrote about Texts C and D and did not show wider knowledge and understanding of the issues raised by the second bullet
- wrote about both bullets but giving very little time to one of them, producing very little that addressed that part of the question
- wrote at length about aspects of the speaker's accent that were not represented in the transcription
- wrote lengthy and unnecessary analyses of the genre, audience and purpose of Text D
- forgot to use linguistic terms to analyse how the man from Newcastle used language to create meanings
- confused accent and dialect
- focused their discussion of the second bullet point on attitudes to RP rather than the specified regional accents and dialects
- could explain what attitudes existed but could not explain or evaluate them.

Question 3

Question 3 focused on discourse about language and gender with a specific focus on interactional styles. The first bullet required candidates to analyse how two texts, both extracts from popular psychology/linguistic self help books, represented the ways women and men communicate. The second bullet required them to explore more widely ideas about how women and men communicate.

Candidates were expected to analyse both texts systematically by describing (AO1) and commenting on (AO3) linguistic features to explore the way the communication styles of women and men were represented. They were then expected to evaluate the ideas presented within the context of the whole discourse about male and female interaction (AO3).

Candidates found the data for this question accessible and were able to locate the passages within a difference approach. The texts were provided to allow candidates to explore how ideas about male and female interaction are produced and disseminated. The second bullet enabled them to examine a range of views about such interaction.

In terms of the balance between linguistic description, analysis, knowledge and evaluation, this was often the most successfully answered question. Candidates had no trouble analysing the texts, and generally identified their purpose and audience, though some study of past ENA6 papers, which have used texts by these authors, might have alerted candidates to the status and 'reliability' of their approaches. Candidates were generally much more familiar with a range of research on this topic. The majority of candidates, however, were reliant on older, and perhaps discredited theories, and were happy to accept generalisations about differences, without considering the influence on gender interaction of other factors such as age, class, power, status and situation. More successful candidates cited the more recent ideas of Deborah Cameron, and the research findings of Hyde, but often failed to evaluate these in the light of their own experience.

Successful candidates:

- analysed the implications of the Mars-Venus metaphor
- examined the biological determinism in Text E, commenting on the authority created by the use of proper nouns naming areas of the brain
- queried the unsubstantiated reference to researchers
- noted the use of present tense to create absolute certainty in the presentation of ideas
- looked closely at the vocabulary that described men and women in interaction
- examined the implication of verbs like *activated* and *constructed* and how they represented the brain as machine like
- looked at the polarising tendencies of the text through its contrasting paragraphs on men and women, use of parallel sentence structures and use of comparative adjectives
- located the texts within a difference model of male-female interaction
- noted the emphasis on communication problems and the belief that they can be solved
- commented on the generalisation inherent in the use of the nouns *men* and *women*
- examined the language of problem solving vs relationship building
- linked some of the ideas about gender and language with research findings which tended to support or challenge ideas in the text
- used Zimmerman and West to back up the idea that men interrupted women a lot
- cited various researchers who showed that men spoke more than women
- identified Lakoff's women's language hypothesis, placed it in its period context and classified its dominance approach to language
- saw how and why the difference approach developed and located these texts within this approach
- gave examples of work that illustrated different views
- explored different interpretations of the interruptions discussed in the texts and questioned the simplistic interpretations of features like tag questions
- examined the quantitative sociolinguistic work on male and female uses of standard and non-standard language
- identified and criticised classic status-based explanations
- looked at the impact of other variables and the importance of social networks
- made reference to Cameron's *The Myth of Mars and Venus* and the research of Hyde to argue that there were more similarities than differences between male and female talk
- explored the idea that many other variables needed to be taken into account and these might cause considerable differences between the speech of any two men or any two women.

Less successful candidates:

- ignored texts E and F and only answered the second bullet
- only wrote about Texts E and F and ignored the second bullet
- wrote about both bullets but giving very little time to one of them, producing very little that addressed that part of the question
- wrote lengthy and unfocused introductions about the genre, audience and purpose of the texts, with little sense of why they were analysing them
- forgot to use linguistic terms to analyse how Gray and the Peases used language to create their meanings
- had an uncertain knowledge of who had carried out what research and what the findings were
- confused Deborah Cameron and Deborah Tannen
- used anecdotes to agree with what the texts said
- veered off into other issues about the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

Advice to candidates:

- read the instructions carefully to be certain you answer the right questions
- read the questions carefully to identify exactly what you have to do and how to use the sources
- read the texts for analysis carefully and in detail to establish significant language features and meanings
- establish clearly what texts that offer research findings say about language and then go on to evaluate its significance
- make sure you describe the language of texts for analysis using your linguistic terminology
- give roughly equal weighting in terms of time and length to each bullet point in the question
- see yourself as writing an answer in two clear stages: analysis of some textual data on a topic followed by a wider discussion of the language issues in which you show your knowledge of examples, research and theories
- familiarise yourself with pre-decimal weight, measures and currency, including informal terms for coins, since texts written earlier than the 1980s might well use such terms.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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