



General Certificate of Education

English Language A 2701

Specification A

**ENGA4 Language Investigations and
Interventions**

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – January series

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General

This was the first opportunity for candidates to submit A2 coursework for the new specification and, although the entry was small, it was clear that the majority of candidates (and their teachers) had confident and appropriate expectations about the nature of the challenge. They recognised that the language investigation component should be based on language intended to be spoken (some enquiries to coursework advisers had suggested a degree of initial uncertainty on this point) and the language interventions demonstrated, for the most part, an understanding of the key issue: to make a serious language debate accessible to a non-specialist audience.

Language Investigation

The data chosen for language investigations ranged from spontaneous, unscripted conversation (usually with a gender dimension) through more structured contexts (doctor/patient, teacher/pupil, shop assistant/customer, interviewer/interviewee, Ross/Brand and the Sachs answerphone, Gordon Brown and the sympathy phonecall) to fully scripted speeches (modification of accent in the Queen's Christmas messages considered over time, paralinguistic features of political oratory).

Candidates demonstrated the ability to identify a range of word classes and sentence functions accurately, and some made good use of their familiarity with discourse features. Secure grasp of sentence types, however, proved less common, with numbers of candidates labelling sentence fragments as 'simple' and assuming a correlation between sentence length and complexity.

Teachers were usually ready to acknowledge errors of identification, as well as successes, which contributed to reliable marking against the AO1 criteria, and assessment of AO2 was also broadly reliable. AO3, however, was more problematic, with many candidates proving less successful at dealing with the significance of context and the impact of communications, and teachers seeming to have less stringent expectations in this area than in others.

Successful candidates:

- chose data which repaid investigation in terms of its communicative significance in a specific context
- formulated precise linguistic aims and hypotheses
- selected frameworks which illuminated contextual and communicative issues
- drew linguistic conclusions related to the aims and hypotheses
- evaluated the extent to which it might be appropriate to generalise from the conclusions
- outlined promising lines of further enquiry.

Less successful candidates:

- chose data on the basis of subject content (eg apparently self-indulgent sampling of responses to taboo language)
- proposed non-linguistic aims
- paraphrased the data
- repeatedly identified examples of a narrow range of word-level features
- decided on a conclusion at the beginning of the investigation and restated it at every opportunity
- took little account of the context
- looked at what was said but not at how it was said
- demonstrated no awareness of the limitations of their findings.

Language Intervention

Candidates chose a variety of appropriate forms, including broadsheet opinion pieces, Radio 4 broadcasts and beginners' guides. In all of these cases the candidates were able to balance the demands of representing the nature of the debate and writing for a non-specialist audience, and there was much to admire in the coverage of the debate, the appropriateness of the choice of form, and the attention to detail in the creation of stylistic effects. Most pieces were accompanied by a context sheet which followed the example set in the standardising material and gave explicit information about the intended purpose, audience, genre and placement. Less productive submissions included vague 'articles' to be published 'in a magazine or newspaper' or adopted populist and partisan approaches to their chosen topic (which was not always a recognised subject of linguistic debate).

One particular form requires further comment. Candidates who submit radio scripts should distinguish clearly between presenters (whose words the candidate will rightly script) and linguistic experts (whose contributions ought to be quoted or summarised accurately, but not scripted or dramatised).

Successful candidates:

- identified a serious linguistic debate (from amongst those covered in Unit 3)
- chose a convincing form and context in which to represent the debate
- provided a clear and non-specialist account of the principal differing points of view, and the arguments and evidence used to support them
- employed a range of structural and stylistic features appropriate to the chosen genre and placement.

Less successful candidates:

- selected a favourite topic rather than a debate
- chose to write for a publication which would be unlikely to feature a serious debate
- adopted a one-sided or over-simplified point of view
- imported passages of course notes expressed in specialist linguistic terminology
- made a limited (or no) attempt to produce a coherent and cohesive text.

Administration

Almost all aspects of centre's administration were managed efficiently and helpfully, for which moderators were appreciative. However, in the few cases in which language intervention context sheets were not provided and separate marks for AO4A, B and C were not given, moderators struggled to understand how marks had been awarded. Most folders were helpfully packaged, but loose, unidentified and unnumbered pages caused some confusion.

One further administrative matter requires centres' attention. It relates to investigations with a bilingual dimension. In such cases the centre should ensure that any claims made about the additional language are validated by someone with appropriate subject knowledge. The steps which have been taken to comply with this requirement should be stated clearly in the summative comment.

Advice to candidates

Language Investigation

- keep a focus throughout your investigation on the requirement that the data is intended to be spoken
- select data which has a precise context and from which you can draw conclusions about how the audiences/participants are affected
- formulate clear and precise linguistic aims and hypotheses
- select frameworks which will help you reach conclusions about your aims and hypotheses
- draw conclusions about what you discovered, commenting explicitly on how far you achieved your aims and tested your hypotheses
- ask yourself about the extent to which you can generalise from your conclusions, and consider further lines of investigation which might allow you to refine or extend your conclusions.

Language Intervention

- choose a debate which is characterised by clearly distinguished points of view. It should be part of the subject matter studied for Unit 3
- decide where in the real world your intervention piece(s) might be published/broadcast
- use a cover sheet for your language intervention piece(s) and give clear information about what kind of piece you have written, who you see as the audience, what purpose(s) you aim to achieve and where you intend it to be published/broadcast (If your school/college does not provide such a cover sheet, design your own.)
- identify the characteristics and conventions of the genre in which you intend to present the debate
- cover the principal points of view and arguments
- use engaging, non-specialist language
- be prepared to challenge arguments and assumptions.

Try to avoid common mistakes:

Language Investigation

- do not assume that data will be linguistically interesting just because you are interested in the topic
- do not choose vague or non-linguistic aims and hypotheses
- do not paraphrase the data

- do not treat your evaluation merely as an opportunity to make claims about how much better you would have done if you had only been allowed more time, space and data.

Language Intervention

- do not choose a topic if it isn't specified as part of the subject matter covered in Unit 3
- do not expect anyone reading your work to be prepared to guess the answers to questions about audience, purpose and genre if you don't know yourself (and haven't made those answers clear)
- do not claim that you intend to place your piece in a publication which would be unlikely to print it
- do not base your piece on over-simplified or trivialised views about language
- do not use untransformed class notes.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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