



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

English Language A

ENGA3

(Specification 2700)

Unit 3: Language Explorations

Report on the Examination

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General

This was the second summer series of this unit and examiners reported seeing some excellent work as candidates responded to the feedback on last summer's examination. The questions provided candidates of all levels with stretch and challenge as they explored the unseen data illustrating language variation and change and attitudes to them. It was very pleasing to see the knowledge candidates had acquired about language and their critical skills in analysing data and responding to issues.

All the data used were readily accessible to almost all 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 changes. In Question 2 candidates were provided with an extract from a novel containing dialectal variation and a transcription of speakers' comments on their language use. These source materials in Questions 1 and 2 provided primary data for analysis and discussion. The Section B Question 3 materials were different: secondary, popular, non-academic writing about the language topic.

The wording of the questions proved clear and straightforward. The two bullet points helped candidates approach and structure their responses to the tasks. The bullets were designed to help candidates hit the assessment objectives. There was evidence that some candidates needed to consider more carefully exactly what the bullet points were asking them to do.

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. The bullets guided candidates which sources to use and for what purposes.

It was usually more successful when the bullet points were dealt with in order. Some candidates wrote two clearly separate 'mini-essays' which seemed to help them clarify the different things they were doing in their answer. Some wrote a unified answer that moved from the first bullet to second, sometimes making useful connections. Both methods were acceptable and successful. The key was to make sure that all aspects of the task were covered substantially. Less successful were answers that moved back and forth between the bullets.

Candidates generally wrote full, substantial answers having carefully processed all the data. There was a better balance this year between the length of Section A and Section B answers. Fewer rubric infringements were seen and short or incomplete scripts were rare.

Assessment Objective 1

The AO1 descriptors are designed to assess how well candidates can describe aspects of language to 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.

There was evidence of thorough teaching and learning of linguistic frameworks. Candidates reached the top band for AO1, even when their work in other areas was relatively weak. There was more accurate identification of sentence and clause types this year than before, which made it even odder that there was still widespread inability to describe the person of pronouns accurately.

Some candidates, however, described in detail endless examples of word classes without actually having much of interest to say about the role of these words in creating meaning. It is worth re-iterating that AO3 is weighted more heavily than AO1 which should be a tool for candidates' analysis.

Particular issues for significant numbers of candidates were continuing insecurity about word class identification and describing the person, number and function of pronouns. Some candidates needed to quote more precisely when identifying clauses and phrases for their descriptions to be strictly accurate.

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 and their meanings to answer the first bullet point in the questions.

For many candidates this was an area which offered room to gain more marks. One tendency was for there to be a lack of an overview of a text's meanings and arguments. Another was to list short paragraphs with disconnected points about decontextualised examples of language.

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 accents for Question 3. The big issues for improvement were the ability to select relevant information and to discuss its significance.

To improve their performance in future examinations candidates should:

- pay close attention to the wording and requirements of the bullet points and ensure they answer the task precisely
- generate an overview of texts' nature and meanings
- describe and analyse linguistic features selectively and coherently to illuminate the nature of a text and analyse the meanings that are created
- select relevant items from their knowledge about language to answer the specific question
- discuss and evaluate the significance of research findings, rather than just report them
- be willing to argue their own views.

SECTION A – Language Variation and Change

Question 1

This question used two texts about new technologies as a way of testing candidates' knowledge and understanding of how new words and meanings emerge. This question was more frequently answered than Question 2.

Candidates were asked to analyse a magazine review of new technology by describing (AO1) and commenting on (AO3) the language used to represent the video cameras. They were then asked to evaluate the idea that new words and meanings are only used to label new inventions and discoveries (AO2).

The first bullet point gave candidates the opportunity to analyse how a writer used language to review two video cameras, employing many neologisms and creating meanings in a discourse about new technology. Text A proved accessible to most candidates, though the precise purpose of a review was often misconstrued as being to sell the products, rather than to compare and evaluate them.

Text B provided a source, for the majority of candidates, of their examples of new language in the field of technology for their answer to the second bullet point. This second bullet point usually elicited responses which revealed knowledge about the varied ways in which new words are created. Candidates also showed knowledge of a variety of causes of new words appearing in English. The best responses used the task to explore the nature of language change, interrogating the notion of labeling.

Weaker candidates did not pick up the clue in the wording of the question that there might be causes other than new inventions. Others were determined to demonstrate their knowledge of the whole history of the English language. A third group gave little thought to the different attitudes which might exist towards new word entering the language.

Much time was spent analysing tenor and address, often up to half the response to the first bullet point. In some cases it was possible to see in great detail how Fry created a good relationship with the reader, but have no idea what he was actually talking about. Some candidates analysed the language of Text B in the same way as Text A, which the question did not ask for.

Some candidates did not address the second bullet point. Others had difficulty addressing its focus relevantly. A minority commented only on prescriptivist/descriptivist attitudes to language change in general. A larger number of candidates seemed determined to 'offload' everything they knew about the history of English, starting with the invention of the printing press, and in one case going back to the Roman occupation. A better focus on the precise terms of the question would have avoided wasting time on unhelpful factual knowledge.

Most candidates used the examples in Text B as a helpful starting point for their consideration of words entering the language in the field of technology. They were able to use these words to show their knowledge of word formation processes and semantic shifts. Some limited their discussion to the formation of these words. Better responses saw that the question was giving them an opportunity to show their knowledge of a range of ways of seeing and explaining lexical development.

There were two main approaches to identifying reasons for words in other fields entering the language. Some candidates looked at social/economic/political changes in each decade of the 20th/21st centuries, and showed how new words and meanings reflected these. This proved a very fruitful method as it encouraged candidates to show the links between society

and language change. Others looked at different fields, such as immigration, music, travel and war. This could be equally successful provided there was more than just a listing of examples, or just an explanation of word formations.

Some candidates argued that word creation was more than just creating a label and looked at the potential, implementation, diffusion and codification model. Some challenged the idea of creating new words by looking at semantic shifts. Another approach was to consider how opponents of language change saw new words as more than just labels but as symbols of linguistic and social decay, views most candidates challenged by looking at functional theories, ideas about lexical gaps and the obsolescence of words over time. Other candidates used substratum and random fluctuation theories as alternative explanation of vocabulary development. The most successful candidates completed their answer to this part of the question with a thoughtful overview of what is happening now to words and meanings in English.

Key issues affecting candidates' performance positively were:

- balancing their answer between the demands of the two bullet points
- using linguistic descriptions consistently across different levels when analysing the language of Text A, thus gaining high marks on AO1
- exploring how Fry generated views and attitudes to new technology through his review
- identifying how to use examples from Text A and Text B to answer bullet point 2
- responding to bullet point 2's challenge to see that new words and meanings are more than just labels for new inventions
- evaluating new words concerned with technology in the light of different views about how and why language changes.

More successful candidates:

- understood how sentence 2 posed a challenge to the need for a dedicated camera
- saw how Fry championed these two video cameras
- had an overview of his presentation of technology as fun, fashionable and a lifestyle accessory
- identified the minor sentence at the beginning of Text A and the effect of the subsequent sentence structures in paragraph 1 to introduce his overarching view of the cameras
- examined the humanizing of the cameras and Fry's enthusiasm for them
- commented on his expectation of a techno-savvy audience, relishing the features
- articulated the themes of size, capability and options
- analysed accurately Stephen Fry's comment beginning, 'Oh dear ...'
- evaluated address in Text A by looking at modality
- evaluated Fry's attitudes to the cameras through his use of adjectives ('girlie' 'cheap' 'jolly'), nouns ('pocket', 'handbag', 'fun' 'the young') and verbs ('slamming', 'dropping')
- evaluated Fry's self-presentation through his address and representation of the cameras
- understood the tone and the cultural context of 'I wouldn't throw either of them out of bed' and considered Fry's love affair with technology
- conceptualised the representation of technology in Text A
- answered the question asked in the second bullet point precisely and fully
- gave proper consideration to new words in the field of technology/invention
- used Text A and Text B as sources of labels for new inventions
- identified accurately a range of word formation processes
- explained accurately models of the spread of new words, seeing a more complex process than just assigning a label
- considered fully a range of other reasons for new words and meanings
- looked at proper nouns and branding as more than just a label but as marketing devices

- saw the social attitudes and meanings encoded in some of the words in text B that went beyond just labeling an object
- showed understanding of the social conditions/attitudes giving rise to language change
- used lexical gaps, functional theory, random fluctuation theory and substratum theory as explanations for the emergence of new words
- explored Political Correctness as a case study of a different kind of force behind lexical development
- explained and evaluated prescriptivist attitudes to new words that attributed them to laziness, cultural decay and American imperialism.

Less successful candidates:

- confused the number and person of pronouns
- identified the final compound sentence as a simple sentence
- did not use linguistic frameworks for analysis
- identified the technical information in Text A without analytical comment
- spent most of their answer analysing tenor and address
- misread the main audience as ‘the young’
- misread the main purpose of Text A as ‘to sell’
- misunderstood individual words in context, eg ‘dedicated’
- claimed that new words and meanings are only for labelling new inventions and discoveries
- described formation processes inaccurately, frequently confusing acronyms and initialisms
- confused amelioration and pejoration when discussing semantic changes
- offered no or few examples of new words in the fields they were listing
- did not address the second bullet point
- did a general textual analysis of Text B
- strayed into topics beyond new words and meanings
- confused prescriptivist/descriptivist views
- ascribed prescriptivist views to Jean Aitchison
- quoted unhelpful research on gender, history of the language or attitudes to accent.

Question 2

This question was answered by significantly fewer candidates than Question 1. Candidates were asked to analyse an extract from a novel by describing (AO1) and commenting on (AO3) the language used to represent characters and their relationships. They were then asked to evaluate the factors that might affect people’s use of Black English (AO2). The ability to describe features of patois using linguistic terminology was a key distinguishing feature in the work of candidates. The most successful candidates showed an impressive grasp of the phonological and grammatical features of patois. Others got as far as recognizing that non-standard features of English were present, and identified double negatives, though patois features were sometimes described as ‘wrong’, rather than non-standard. The most successful candidates described the implication of the spelling of pronunciation features using IPA accurately.

All candidates were able to make some comments about the social world of the characters and their relationships. Almost all candidates made some comment on the perceived gang culture of drugs and violence. There was some disagreement about the individual attributes and status of the characters. Only a few more successful candidates analysed the mediating role and the language of the narrator. Surprisingly few candidates commented on the atmosphere and how it was created. Weaker candidates did not acknowledge the fictional nature of the text and analysed the conversation as though it was ‘spontaneous and

unplanned’. Better candidates differentiated between the use of patois by different characters; weaker answers asserted that they were all foreigners whose second language was English and who ‘all spoke the same’.

Text D proved a helpful spur to candidates in addressing the second bullet point, as it helped them to identify different views of the use of patois within the British Black community. It enabled candidates to discuss a range of situational factors and to explore issues of code-switching and accommodation. The least successful candidates ignored Text D and sometimes did not cover the second bullet point.

References to overt and covert prestige were well used in answers to this question, as were references to code-switching, a concept which was well understood. Better candidates also stressed the significance of identity, pride in heritage and strong social networks. Weaker candidates were sometimes able to comment on the appeal of black culture and language to young people outside the black community.

The more successful candidates showed good knowledge of relevant research into the use of BBE, particularly in London, and the origins and development of BBE. A very few looked at changing attitudes to patois within the black community across time, though a few were aware of generational differences. Some candidates placed attitudes to, and therefore uses of, BBE in the context of its Caribbean creole origins.

Popular specific research references focused on the work of Sue Fox and Mark Sebba and very good use was made of these studies. Other interesting references were to the Ann Arbor case, and media influences such as rap music, Jamaican poets and Ali G. Those who had studied the Ann Arbor case commented on the idea of verbal deprivation, and there were some references to Bernstein and restricted code. Less well-informed candidates attempted to use less relevant studies of gender differences and language change.

Key issues affecting candidates’ performance positively were:

- balancing their answer between the demands of the two bullet points
- using linguistic descriptions consistently across different levels when analysing the language of the extract, thus gaining high marks on AO1
- having specific knowledge about British Black English.

More successful candidates:

- reached the top band for AO1 by accurately describing the phonetic and grammatical differences between patois and Standard English, using a full range of terms
- used word classes and sentence types/functions to support their analysis of the characters, relationships and atmosphere in the text
- looked closely at how characters were created, analysing differences in their language
- noted that Charlie did not use patois and speculated on his personal/ethnic background
- saw Sweetie used patois and Standard English and linked this to her perceived status
- commented on the language used by the narrator
- used textual detail to analyse the atmosphere
- made detailed and informed comments on the social world of the characters
- showed an impressive knowledge of relevant research
- explored situational factors affecting the use of BBE
- applied concepts like social networks, code-switching and accommodation
- understood the varying attitudes to patois within the Black British Community
- explained the origins of BBE and saw how these affected attitudes and patterns of use

- understood negative stereotypes of BBE speakers in terms of class, intelligence and education and saw how these affected patterns of use.

Less successful candidates:

- described linguistic features of the text, but not the patois forms
- described patois features as ‘wrong’ or ‘incorrect’
- confused the function of forms that fulfilled different roles in the patois and standard English, eg labelling Indian’s use of ‘me’ in line 4 as an object pronoun
- identified patois features broadly or inaccurately
- did not use linguistic frameworks to explain significant features of the text
- made general and stereotyped comments on drugs and gang culture
- did not distinguish the speech features of each character
- saw Sweetie as typical of women (submissive to the male characters)
- saw all the characters as foreign and unable to speak ‘proper English’
- did not deal with the second bullet point
- ignored Text D
- accepted stereotypical views of BBE speakers
- did not refer to research
- referred to theories about gender, language change and accent varieties which were only partially, or not at all, relevant to the question.

SECTION B – Language Discourses

Question 3

The distinctive nature of Question 3 is that it requires candidates to analyse non-academic writing about language. It requires candidates to engage with popular but debatable views about language. In this examination the question focussed on attitudes to accents. Texts E and F were provided to allow candidates to explore how accents are judged and evaluate what some people recommend should be done about them.

The first bullet required candidates to analyse how two texts, a newspaper problem page response and a webpage from a company selling communication skills training, presented different views about the use of accents. The second bullet required candidates to evaluate the texts’ views about how people should deal with their accents. It enabled them to examine a range of research about attitudes to accent and its implications for what people might do. Candidates were expected to analyse both texts systematically by describing (AO1) and commenting on (AO3) linguistic features to explore the way Virginia Ironside presented her views about the non-standard accent adopted by the son of the person who wrote in and the way Simply Speaking presented their case for changing your regional accent. They were then expected evaluate the ideas presented within the context of the various discourses about accents (AO2).

Better responses adopted a systematic approach to the analysis of the texts as discourse. They focused initially on how the texts presented their views about accents, before looking at the way Ironside presented herself and how Simply Speaking sought to position the reader so they accepted the need to change their accent that was holding them back. As reported last year this question enables candidates to carry forward the analytical skills and approaches they developed in ENGA2.

Virtually all candidates recognized that Text F was an advertisement promoting training to speak in an RP accent. Most candidates successfully identified the attitudes expressed in Text F. Perceptive comments were made about the likely audience for this text, and the persuasive strategies used to influence them. These invariably included the use of questions,

the reference to the BBC and the comparison with learning to drive a car. Many candidates were able to classify the prescriptivist attitudes in the text.

More successful candidates went on to challenge the view that RP is the ‘standard’ accent and that everyone ought to speak it. A few pointed out that an accent which is universally intelligible might not be a bad thing. Very few argued that, since prejudice undoubtedly does exist towards less standard accents, to learn to speak in RP might be one way to avoid personal stigma.

The ability to interpret and comment on Text E in detail, and willingness to engage in informed debate, discriminated between more and less successful candidates. Text E’s attitudes were more challenging for candidates, with most classifying Ironside as descriptivist and accepting diversity, but some finding a more complex set of views and attitudes.

There was some misreading of Text E. Candidates sometimes confused the writer, Virginia Ironside, with Chloe, (the mother she was advising). A minority thought that Chloe’s son was a working-class boy adopting an RP accent to fit in at his private school. A larger number did not understand whether or not the writer was really in favour of working class accents since she was perpetuating negative stereotypes of working class behaviour. There was some indignation with these stereotypes. Sorting out Ironside’s attitudes in detail proved quite problematic, since it also involved elements of satire and caricature for entertainment and comic purposes.

Candidates were frequently able to classify the different discourses about attitudes to accents demonstrated by the texts. Many linked Ironside’s views with ideas about developing a linguistic repertoire and the behaviours associated with accommodation. Many used matched guise findings to argue the pros and cons of being able to shift between a standard and a non-standard accent. Text F was often seen as prescriptivist and dated as candidates challenged it by looking at the way RP and regional accents received both positive and negative responses. Such answers often also considered changing attitudes to RP and regional accents. Very few challenged ideas about being able to code-switch and whether this reproduced a hierarchy of accents.

It was clear that the majority of candidates had made a thorough study of this topic and could cite a wide range of specific research findings, though the accuracy with which these were recalled varied. All candidates recognized that the question was about attitudes to accent, though this did not deter some from including research and ideas about language change, dialect, gender and almost anything else which they knew about language, relevant or not.

A recurrent problem was confusion between accent and dialect. This often led to the inclusion of irrelevant research. The same confusion was found between RP and Standard English.

A weakness in some well-prepared candidates was a tendency to show knowledge of plenty of detailed research, but do nothing with it to further any argument or debate about attitudes to accent. Knowledge of code-switching and accommodation theory, for example, did not always lead to any discussion of whether the candidate favoured changing your accent or not. Candidates are asked to evaluate ideas, not just rehearse them, to be really successful.

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 about accents in the texts and how they were expressed
- evaluating different views of accents and what speakers should do about them.

More successful candidates:

- explored Ironside's views of RP and 'new' accents
- commented on the classification of the new accent as 'working-class' and the adjectives 'odd, hybrid' to describe it
- examined the implications of the Eurocheques simile and the adjectives 'transclass' and 'universal'
- looked at the values ascribed to the son's accent by the adjectives 'useful' and 'matey'
- looked at the clothing imagery of the dinner jacket and its implications for language use
- discussed how she saw the accent as form of rebellion
- analysed the judgement expressed by the noun 'gift'
- explored her characterisation of the new accent as aiding relationships
- analysed her depiction of RP speakers as 'Lady Muck, full of snobbish graciousness' and 'bone-headed'
- analysed the depiction of upper class accents by the adjectives 'old, posh'
- understood the irony of the adjective 'impeccable' when connected to the verb and object 'spout total bilge'
- examined the significance of the noun 'pockets' to show her view of the dwindling status of posh accents and the judgements conveyed by the noun phrase 'self-destructive trap'
- considered her less tolerant attitudes to 'ghastly grammar' and the word toilet
- criticised her for her reproduction of stereotypes when detailing the impressions of a 'lager lout' generated by working class accents
- explored the ambiguity and ambivalence in Ironside's self-presentation, her dislike of class distinction alongside her clearly stated class prejudices
- analysed and evaluated the views and use of persuasive language in Text F
- looked at the effects your accent was seen to produce
- looked at the benefits conferred by RP as described by the adjectives 'authoritative and professional'
- analysed the certainty created by the use of modal verbs and parallel structures in F
- looked at the problem-solution structure created by the sentence function and structure in paragraph 1
- explored the implications of the very mechanical language used to describe how accent reduction would work
- included an impressive knowledge of a range of detailed research
- drew conclusions from this to construct and support an argument
- challenged the views expressed in Text F, and, more rarely, in Text E
- explored both positive and negative attitudes to RP and regional accents, often drawing on matched guise findings
- noted changing attitudes to accents and the emergence of Estuary English
- noted that judgements on accents are social rather than linguistic
- identified different responses to the ways accents are judged: develop a repertoire, learn to speak RP, stay with your own accent
- evaluated these different responses
- constructed coherent and cohesive arguments
- guided the reader through effective paragraphing and the use of topic sentences

- used precise, accurate, stylish expression.

Less successful candidates:

- wrote only about Text F
- confused the writer with Chloe in Text E
- misjudged the point of view in Text E
- misunderstood the social class of Ironside, Chloe and her son
- misunderstood the use of terms such as, ‘trustafarian’, ‘boneheaded’, ‘riddled’, ‘peculiarly’ and ‘classless’
- did not identify language features using linguistic terminology
- confused 1st, 2nd and 3rd person pronouns
- did not address the second bullet point
- confused accent and dialect, RP and Standard English
- did not move beyond the texts for their ideas
- were unspecific in their references, ‘There was a study which said ...’
- confused researchers and mis-reported findings
- wrote at length and unhelpfully about gendered language, new words, etc
- did not structure their answer effectively
- spelt basic words and linguistic terms (‘sentance’, ‘metaphore’, ‘similie’) incorrectly
- did not express their ideas clearly.

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, using textual or other evidence
- judge (evaluate) how valid linguistic ideas are and 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.

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
- summarise a range of research superficially with no reference to the question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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