



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2012**

English Language A

ENGA1

(Specification 2700)

Unit 1: Seeing Through Language

Report on the Examination

Further copies of this Report on the Examination are available from: aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2012 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

Copyright

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered schools/colleges for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to schools/colleges to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the school/college.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334).
Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

General

This is the seventh series of ‘Seeing through Language’ and examiners were pleased to report that all three questions enabled students to demonstrate an appropriate range and depth of skills, knowledge and understanding relevant to the Unit’s Assessment Objectives.

Question 1 required students to analyse two texts: a web page presenting part of a House of Commons debate about the Cultural Olympiad and a page from the ‘dorsetforyou’ website introducing the Cultural Olympiad to its visitors. To access the higher mark ranges for AO1, students 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), students were expected to examine the main mode characteristics of the texts such as channel, synchronicity, proximity, permanence, immediacy, planning and interactivity. To access the higher mark ranges for AO3ii (meaning), students were expected to identify and explore contextual features such as purposes, participant positioning, functions, tenor, topics, topic management and structure. Students were also expected to examine effects of language features and various meanings and representations both literal and pragmatic constructed by the participants in Text A and the writer of Text B.

Tasks

0	2
---	---

 and

0	4
---	---

 required students 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 students were expected to identify these features precisely and name them linguistically.

Tasks

0	3
---	---

 and

0	5
---	---

 required students to write an answer on either the ways in which it is possible for adults to help children acquire speech or the most important factors influencing children’s written language acquisition. To access the higher mark ranges for AO1, students 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, students 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 students on each component of the examination. There is a lot of information in this paper for students 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 students spend 45 minutes answering each question. It is important for students to realise that the data analysis in Questions 2 and 3 carries a maximum of 10 marks out of the question total of 45. Given this proportion, it is recommended that students should spend no more than ten minutes analysing the data and make five precise points.

Section A – Language and Mode

Question 1 | | | |---|---| | 0 | 1 | |---|---|

Both texts for analysis proved to be very accessible. The spoken political debate visually presented on a website dedicated to monitoring MP's activities inspired many students to explore various facets of Mode as did the 'dorsetforyou' website with its visual channel, hyperlinks and rhetorical interactive strategies. There was a wealth of linguistic, modal and contextual features in the texts for students to make purposeful and perceptive comments.

The most successful students identified and described grammatical features such as types of adjectives and adverbs, verb tenses, aspects and modality. These students also explored syntax by describing sentence types, clause types, clause elements and clause linking.

The most successful students offered a conceptualised overview of mode by discussing channel in terms of the initial aural and subsequent visual reception of Text A and the visual reception of Text B, the expressive orientation of Text A and the message orientation of Text B, repetition and reformulation, turn taking and degrees of interactivity (eg direct address, monitoring features, interruption, rhetorical questions, synthetic personalisation and hyperlinks).

The most successful students demonstrated clear understanding of how contexts and situations shaped the meanings created by and within each text. In Text A they explored views and opinions related to the Cultural Olympiad, effects of tenses and particular topics such as inclusivity, doubt/scepticism and London-centricity. These most successful students also explored the self-representations of the MPs. In Text B the most successful students explored the writer's use of direct address and rhetorical strategies to inform without patronising while still establishing and maintaining authority. They also examined effects of clause types, tenses and modality and representations of the Cultural Olympiad in terms of cultural legacy, national and regional pride and representations of various art forms.

Most students 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. 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 students responded well to the challenges of exploring the mode of Text A. It was clear in many answers that some students made a quick judgement that Text A was a written text but in the course of their answer began to identify some spoken mode features such as adjacency pairs and interruption. Many engaged well with the complexities of proximity between the original speakers and the readers of the website (one student commented that the images of the MPs gave a sense of eye contact with the reader) and with spoken language characterised by an unusual degree of formality. Most students had no difficulty in identifying Text B as written and electronic but disappointingly few discussed the level of interactivity in the text.

Most students showed understanding of the purposes of the participants in Text A to discuss the nature, progress and name of the Cultural Olympiad and the purpose of the writer of Text B to explain the various benefits brought to Dorset and Britain as a whole by the Cultural Olympiad. These students identified the potential audience for Text A as the parliamentary participants and an internet audience of concerned voters and the audience for Text B as a regional and possibly national audience of web surfers and art enthusiasts. Most students generally gave close attention to semantic fields and were thus able to conduct an examination of aspects of meaning such as statistical information about the Cultural Olympiad and details about future events associated with it.

Less successful students made broad assertions about the texts, often without proof or exemplification. These students were only able to identify some graphological features, one or two pronouns or one or two semantic and/or phonological features. Some students offered narrative commentaries on the texts sometimes including unanalysed quotations with little attention to meanings or effects.

The most successful students:

- began with an overview 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
- 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 such as 'world-renowned' and 'harmonious' to emphasise the representations of the Cultural Olympiad
- 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 interactive features such as turns and hyperlinks
- examined the visual features of both texts as part of the meaning
- explored pre-planning in Ann Winterton's questions and Margaret Hodge's answers
- explored the range of contact options offered in Text B
- considered the use of rhetorical devices such as triadic structures and rhetorical questions
- examined the contribution of metaphors such 'marriage of sport and the arts' to the creation of meanings
- considered the explanatory use of parenthesis, eg '(opens in a new window)'
- examined representations of the Cultural Olympiad in terms of cultural legacy, national and regional pride and representations of various art forms
- examined the various opinions expressed in Text A such as the perceived need to re-name the Cultural Olympiad
- integrated the discussion of language features, mode and meaning
- wrote fluently and articulately, structuring their response carefully and logically.

Less successful students:

- only identified graphology, complexity and formality
- named language features without exemplification
- attempted to read each bullet point in Text B as a separate sentence
- identified all questions as rhetorical
- misread Text A as an online forum
- made frequent basic errors which hindered clear communication.

Advice to students

Do:

- 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 graphology
- neglect to comment on mode, meanings and effects of language features.

Section B – Language Development

Question 2 | | | |---|---| | 0 | 2 | |---|---|

Examiners reported that many students were very well prepared for this component and were able to identify a range of features from the data concisely and accurately. Many students clearly identified features such as: declarative mood – ‘I washing up the dishes’, questioning by caregiver – ‘can you put some hotdog on the plate for Pooh to have lunch’, reformulation by caregiver – ‘who has one of those’, main clause with embedded subordinate clause – ‘I know who have one of these’, present progressive – ‘washing’, domestic semantic context – ‘I washing up the dishes’, irregular subject/verb agreement – ‘who have’, functions of speech, eg control – ‘what do you want to eat’, genres of speech, eg role play – ‘what do you want to eat’.

The most successful students:

- 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 students:

- wasted time and effort by writing an essay-length answer
- wrote only about perceived errors
- confused tense and person
- speculated about the speakers’ meaning rather than describing the language.

Question 2 | | | |---|---| | 0 | 3 | |---|---|

Examiners noted that this question produced some highly knowledgeable, detailed and sustained answers. The most successful students explicitly explored the ways in which it is possible for adults to help children acquire speech. They accomplished this by maintaining a clear focus on social interaction, and the role of adults in semantic acquisition, Child Directed Speech, Language Acquisition Support Systems, Zone of Proximal Development, pragmatic and social dimensions of learning language, the significance of correction, regression and functional explanations of language development. These most successful students supported their answers by referring to the theories and research of Bruner, Snow, Halliday, Nelson, Aitchison and Brown. They also examined a range of examples of semantic and grammatical features and functions, eg 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. In addition to maintaining a focus on social interactionist theory, the most successful students considered the relative merits of innatist, cognitive and behaviourist theories of language development and evaluated these theories critically.

Most students demonstrated some knowledge of key theories of language acquisition but often without evaluation of their relative merits and with insufficient focus on the role played by adults in children’s acquisition of language. Most students offered only one or two examples of children’s language. Examiners commented that, given the wealth of data presented to students in the first task of Question 2, much of which they analysed well, it seemed strange that more examples of children’s language were not forthcoming.

Less successful students struggled to address the question at all and offered very generalised accounts of one or two aspects of early sound production. A significant minority of students didn't answer the second part of the question but based their answer entirely on the data which severely limited their achievement for AO2. It is essential that students are made aware that both tasks should be answered separately.

The most successful students:

- explored the ways in which it is possible for adults to help children acquire speech
- centred their critical evaluation of research and theories around social interaction
- 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)
- considered in detail the nature of acquisition as an active and deductive process (discussing in detail over-generalisation, regression, overextension etc)
- critically evaluated the role of caregivers and the influence of the social environment by drawing on Katherine Nelson for the composition of the early productive vocabulary and research based on observations of '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 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 student's own perspectives.

Less successful students:

- wrote general essays outlining theories about child language acquisition without specific attention to the ways in which it is possible for adults to help children acquire speech
- 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 the question
- gave disproportionate attention to feral children
- confused the ideas of different researchers and theorists
- agreed with mutually contradictory models of the acquisition process
- made frequent errors, with the worst of these impeding communication.

Advice to students

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
- 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
- neglect to include examples of children's language.

Question 3

0	4
---	---

Most students were able to identify a range of features from the data concisely and accurately. Many students clearly identified features such as: simple clause – 'we enjoyb it', first person plural narrative – 'we went to the nature center', reversal of letter corrected by the teacher – 'enjoyb/enjoyed', interaction – 'Well done', past tense – 'we went ...', narrative function – 'we went to the nature centter', compounding clauses – 'and thet, we went ...', non-standard punctuation – 'fish .s', genre prompt – 'When I saw the photograph I remembered ...', patterning of clause elements – 'we' + verb.

The most successful students:

- identified accurately five clearly differentiated linguistic features
- presented each feature clearly and separately in the layout 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 students:

- 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
---	---

The most successful students explicitly explored the most important factors influencing children's written language acquisition. They accomplished this by maintaining a clear focus on 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), links between speech and writing, semantic relations, motor skills, the relationship between phonemes and graphemes and rules and principles applied by children, eg word order, negation, agreement of word classes, tense and sentence boundaries. The most successful students referred confidently to the work of other researchers such as Vann, Clay and Vygotsky and clearly identified and evaluated a variety of written acquisition models such as cognitive, physiological, interactional, experimental and developmental. These students also examined and evaluated Kroll's preparatory, consolidation, differentiation, integration stages and Barclay's scribbling, mock letters, conventional letters, phonetic spelling and correct spelling stages. These students also examined the contribution of reading, drawing and narrative to the development of writing skills. The most successful students

Most students showed some awareness of the importance of speech and reading in children's acquisition of writing skills and examined features of handwriting, spelling and punctuation as well as giving a general account of one or two stages of written acquisition.

Less successful students found difficulty in relating the issues specified in the question to anything within their knowledge or experience. These students either applied generic theory models from initial spoken acquisition or discussed, very narrowly, the imitation model.

The most successful students:

- examined and evaluated the most important factors influencing children's written language acquisition
- 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
- 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 students:

- demonstrated little or no understanding of the process of written language acquisition
- drew only 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 students

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 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.