



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

English Language A

ENGA4

(Specification 2700)

**Unit 4: Language Investigations and
Interventions**

Report on the Examination

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General

The January 2012 entry for ENGA4 provided a clear indication of the ways in which schools and colleges are responding to the opportunities and challenges which this unit presents. Although few schools and colleges entered students, there were distinct signs that teachers and students had developed their practice in response to guidance on choosing topics, on adopting productive and systematic approaches, on making explicit statements about aims and intentions and on developing critical and reflective stances.

Language Investigation

It was characteristic of the work of more successful students that they selected data and formulated aims which were likely to be a good match for each other. They recognised that in any context there were likely to be a number of different variables in operation. They were guided by a question which they wanted to answer or a hypothesis which they proposed to test. They treated the methodology as an opportunity to plan and justify what they proposed to do, and they conducted analyses which linked patterns of language to specific purposes and effects. In their conclusions they revisited their aims and made clear what light the investigations had thrown on them. In their evaluations they reflected on decisions which they had made in devising their methodologies and they looked at the significance of their investigations in wider contexts (making generalisations, refining or extending their conclusions, considering whether their investigations suggested further lines of enquiry).

Less successful students disadvantaged themselves by starting off without clear and precise linguistic aims. Commonly they thought that they could ‘prove’ the views of a particular researcher or theorist. They treated variables as forces operating independently with absolute and unambiguous effect. Their methodologies rehearsed what they expected to find rather than dealing with how best to achieve their aims. Their analyses consisted of identification of a (sometimes very narrow) range of linguistic features, either treated in isolation or summarised (not always with examples) in chart form. In their conclusions they said that they had discovered what they expected to discover (commonly that Zimmerman and West, or Lakoff, were ‘right’), and they played down or ignored the significance of variations in role and context. In their evaluations they declared their investigation to be a resounding success or, in a few cases, an abject failure.

The most successful students:

- focused on a question which they wanted to answer or a hypothesis which they wanted to test
- recognised that different variables might influence their findings
- chose data on the basis of its relevance to what they wanted to find out
- formulated aims and hypotheses in precise, detailed, linguistic terms
- explained their reasoning in the methodology
- 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
- considered how they might refine or extend their conclusions
- outlined promising lines of further enquiry.

Less successful students:

- chose data on the basis of subject content
- proposed imprecise, non-linguistic aims
- took little account of the context and the variables operating within it
- treated variables in isolation from each other
- ignored the participants' roles and intentions
- looked at what was said but not at how it was said or what effect it had
- concluded that they had proved that the views of one researcher/theorist or another were correct
- claimed that the investigation was a success because they had found what they expected to find.

Language Intervention

Students attempted a variety of imaginative responses to the demands of the language intervention task. The most successful gave a balanced account of the chosen debate, communicating views and arguments clearly, attributing them accurately and challenging them analytically and evaluatively. They recognised that their interventions needed to deal with serious linguistic issues and they identified where such issues might find an outlet and an audience. They communicated appropriately with their non-specialist audience without over-simplifying or trivialising the issues and they avoided an overly academic approach.

Many students were more successful at working within the conventions of a specific form and sustaining a chosen style than at conveying the sense of a linguistic debate for an audience unfamiliar with specialist linguistic concepts and terminology. In some cases students misunderstood the nature of the task and presented arguments for just one point of view, an approach which at its worst resulted in the venting of linguistically-uninformed prejudices and rants about 'political correctness gone mad'. There were, too, some students who were unclear about what constitutes credible linguistic knowledge and who depended exclusively on the views of Lynne Truss and John Humphrys.

The most successful students:

- 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 well-documented account of the principal differing points of view, and the arguments and evidence used to support them, in language accessible to a non-specialist audience
- established a clear line of argument leading to conclusions based on sound linguistic evidence
- employed a range of structural and stylistic features appropriate to the chosen genre, audience and placement.

Less successful students:

- 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
- used untransformed course notes expressed in specialist linguistic terminology
- made a limited (or no) attempt to produce a coherent and cohesive text.

Administration

Most marks and samples arrived promptly and in good order. In the majority of cases students' work was helpfully annotated and summative comments illuminated the assessment judgements. In a few instances, however, the supporting paperwork was not forwarded by the school/college and students' work was submitted as a stack of loose sheets.

It would be helpful if teachers would check that:

- each Candidate Record Form has been completed fully
- the breakdown of marks for the language intervention has been made clear with separate marks for AO4a, b and c
- a hard copy of the data for the language investigation has been included
- each student has provided a context sheet for the language intervention piece
- each individual student's work has been submitted as a separate folder with the pages fastened together in a secure, accessible and user- friendly fashion
- a copy of the centre mark sheet has been sent to the moderator even when all students have been withdrawn or have failed to submit work or there are only private students.

Advice to students

To maximise your success you should try to do the following:

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 with clearly identified audience/participants.
- Line number your data so that the evidence quoted can be checked easily and without risk of misunderstanding.
- Explain why you have chosen to explore and compare particular pieces of data and participants.
- Explain how you intend to control variables.
- Formulate clear and precise linguistic aims and hypotheses.
- Select frameworks which will help you reach conclusions about your aims and hypotheses.
- Focus on interactional and discourse features when analysing speech.
- Draw cautious conclusions about what you discovered, commenting explicitly on how far you have 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 appear. You should also make clear which language issue you are covering.
- 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.

Things to avoid:

Language Investigation

- Avoid data which doesn't have clear potential for linguistic analysis.
- Avoid vague and non-linguistic aims and hypotheses.
- Avoid paraphrase when you comment on the data.
- Don't treat the evaluation as an opportunity to make claims about how much better you would have done if you had been allowed more time, space and data.

Language Intervention

- Avoid topics which are not specified as part of the subject matter covered in Unit 3.
- Don't 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).
- Don't claim that you intend to place your piece in a publication which would be unlikely to print it.
- Avoid over-simplified or trivialised views about language.
- Avoid the temptation to indulge in a rant.
- Avoid an overly academic style and a reliance on 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.