



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

English Language B

ENGB3

(Specification 2705)

Unit 3: Developing Language

Report on the Examination

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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General

This was a successful series that showed students are being better equipped to address the different Assessment Objectives in an integrated manner for both Section A (Acquisition) and Section B (Change). Particularly of note was some very impressive technical analysis using precise and accurate terminology, which both bodes well for those students embarking on linguistic courses and demonstrates the stretch and challenge provided to students in their A2 English Language study. Of course, this could sometimes be at the level of features spotting but many made accurate, analytical and evaluative comments about particular features that showed a growing sophisticated appreciation of linguistics.

Contextual factors were more clearly commented upon by students, perhaps because this was highlighted in the summer 2011 report as an area where students could actively gain marks. Examiners were able to award students for identifying more than 'one or two' factors (2-3 marks), even if they didn't always explicitly discuss these in the light of language features for the 'clear, 'sound' and 'perceptive' bands (6-8).

Particularly for Acquisition, students should be steered away from discussing possible contexts in their opening paragraphs, rather than interpreting the actual one they are given in the supporting information or from inferences from the data. This was often in the style of a 'what I expect to find in the data' approach that is inappropriate for this exam. Students are *not* expected to hypothesise, but simply give a convincing account of what they see from the perspectives of language, context and theory. For example, hypothesising meant that students often said what characteristics were likely of the stages of language acquisition but didn't actually cross reference these with Ruth and Jack's actual language use.

With Change, contextual points veered from very general comments on social roles/attitudes to focused and sensible comments with language evidence on the class of the intended audience for Text F ('lordship', 'My Lady...') compared to the seemingly wider audience of Text G, where the focus was not on modes of address but manner of eating.

For spoken Language Acquisition, there were fewer examples of line-by-line analysis and students at all ability levels appeared to be spending more time annotating and preparing their ideas instead of writing running commentaries on the data. This allowed many to access the 'some' band, even if at the lower end, because their responses could not be classed as descriptive. With the literacy question, it was a shame that some take a deficit approach to children's written texts and don't access marks by describing the 'poor' handwriting or 'poor' spelling. Noticeably this series, many students who chose this question often did become descriptive in lengthy paragraphs discussing the handwriting and spelling errors with no developing analysis.

What was striking in Language Change was the wider application of language methods with more confident analysis of specific language methods such as syntax. Also, the understanding of the influences on English, the standardisation process seemed more secure than in previous series. However, it is still worth reminding schools and colleges that references to the Great Vowel Shift and William Caxton rarely add anything positive to responses. For some students trying to explain unconvincingly the spelling change from 'sawces' to 'sauces' as evidence for the Great Vowel Shift was a great distraction from the many aspects of the data they could have discussed more accurately and effectively. Students seemed to enjoy the language change data, finding much to write about in each question. This resulted in a more balanced answer booklet, with as much written on this as Language Acquisition.

Overall, this was an enjoyable paper to mark and the students clearly found both sections enabled them to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.

Question 1

All students engaged with the data and found plenty to comment on, both in terms of the children's development and the mother's input. Many responses, at all levels, were open-minded about the data and could apply knowledge and understanding to it, instead of trying to make the data fit their pre-learned ideas. This suggests that schools and colleges are preparing students in a helpful way, allowing them to respond to unseen transcripts.

Answers were often structured effectively by looking at the different participants, as much as by a methods-based approach to paragraphs. Many linguistic methods were chosen to add insight to the analysis – discourse, lexis/semantics, grammar and phonology. Discourse analysis was favoured by most, and this was a good choice and data-led as there was much to say about turn taking and the overlaps/interruptions. For lexis and semantic development, much was said on the children's choices of nouns and, for phonology, Jack's use of noises and 'chugga chugga' were interpreted in interesting ways, as well as Ruth's use of paralinguistics in pointing at the book to supplement her language, along with her deictic references.

These comments showed students' flexibility in working with some small details of the data about which they could make insightful points. They were not always concerned about hitting every linguistic method rigidly in their analysis. Whatever approach was taken, purposeful paragraphs that evidenced planning and the grouping of ideas could be rewarded.

As ever, CDS features offered fruitful analysis. Indeed the mother's use of questions, along with those from the book and Jack's questions provided much scope for students. There were subtle comments about the enabling discourse structure of the book as an active and constructed tool for caregivers to use both to encourage turn taking and to model hypothetical situations grammatically and cognitively. Some expressed disappointment with the mother, critical of her lack of CDS, but the best answers explored her more subtle strategies. These included seeing her lexical choices of 'wow' and 'golly' as expressing positively her interest in her children's utterances and her lack of correction and "overlooking" the rudeness of the interruptions as allowing the children freedom to use their imaginations in the spirit of the book activity. Moreover, these were viewed as part of the nature of spontaneous speech than a breach of rules.

Theory was generally used appropriately to support analysis, with some well-informed discussion, and less irrelevance this series. There were far fewer single paragraphs outlining theoretical views and students were finding opportunities to link theories to specific examples, allowing them to move to at least the 7-10 band. Halliday was often cited helpfully, either to exemplify Jack's imaginative use of language or to contrast to Ruth's use of different functions that were illustrative of age/development. Other effective choices were Chomsky to discuss Ruth's non-standard language. Particularly impressive were those who could see that it's not only adults who can be imitated but saw Jack's language being copied by Ruth and so could include Skinner relevantly. Bruner's LASS and ritualised scenarios, Piaget's cognitive ideas and Vygotsky's socio-dramatic play were all used validly, providing range and depth to discussions. Brown and Bellugi were also good choices to link to specific grammatical features, such as Ruth's non-standard syntactical positioning of the subject pronoun 'she' so combining AO1 understanding with a conceptual point. A less successful choice was Nelson's early lexical acquisition groupings given the ages of the children, showing that the ability to select salient concepts is a key skill.

Most students spotted opportunities to comment on gender and power, through Jack's declaratives when speaking for Ruth and his interruptions, yet the most sensitive responses offered tentative assertions that these might equally be accounted for his status as the old sibling, his more advanced linguistic development and the desire for his mother's attention.

There were plenty of obvious contextual points to be made about age, gender, relationships, activity, the nature and purpose of the book that students took advantage of, as well as interpreting the competition for attention and the mother's intentions in the interaction. For context, a few speculated wildly about what time of day it could have been consumed many lines, as if that had more relevance than the actual activity the mother and children were undertaking.

Question 2

Responses seemed to polarise between excellent, systematic and insightful commentary on Jenny's literacy development and totally uninformed description of spelling and punctuation errors. The best were structured around looking at the two texts as a whole, taking a particular method (for example, sentence complexity) and analysing features comparatively. This then produced a framework for seeing Jenny's literacy advancement, possibly within a few months. It is tempting to offer scaffolds to students' analysis of literacy data in essay construction, but there should still be freedom for them to explore the unseen texts in a way to show engagement with it. Too often paragraphs just listed Jenny's spelling mistakes.

For AO2, unlike with Q1, many concepts selected were very unhelpful and kept students in the 3-6 band for 'superficial understanding'. Much of this was down to applying spoken acquisition theories as if they directly related to literacy rather than engaging with genre and literacy development. Although Skinner and positive reinforcement could be used with teacher input, Chomsky, Nelson and Aitchison did not seem convincing. Students seem fearful of not including named theorists but they often backfired here, failing to meet the 7-10 criteria. Putting words into theorists' mouths was a tactic used by less successful students but it is highly doubtful that Skinner or Chomsky spoke about written development in the ways suggested. As suggested in the summer 2011 report, those who engage with genre and associated conventions perform well. Kroll is always helpful, but only if the stage is illustrated through discussion of the child's language use/text construction.

Contextual points have become formulaic with regards to classroom activities and the desire to impress the teacher audience. However, even this could be expressed at different levels. Some felt it was enough to say that this was a 'given', the child's desire to please. Others cited the awareness of the audience and the intended impression as evidenced through the teacher's 'unaided' notation on Text C. This led to interesting observations on the creation of the image, the neatness of the writing and other features that showed the children demonstrating their understanding of narratives to the teacher. Only a few commented that the teacher's notation clearly had another audience of a parent or for evidence of some external assessment of development.

Question 3

There were some intelligent judicious accounts that fully integrated understanding of gender representation theory with language change knowledge.

Less successful students tended to lack overview and focused describing on isolated examples of dated language use, although there was plenty to talk about in terms of lexical and semantic change. This allowed students at all ability levels to gain some AO1 (discussion of language features and AO2 (awareness of the process of change) credit. In terms of specific lexical items, students often picked 'sidecarring', 'workmanlike' and 'bonnets' to discuss. Observations on 'sidecarring' varied from simply identifying the compounding process to those who could see this noun to verb conversion. At a more conceptual and integrated level, there were some students who explored insightfully the pragmatics behind the word, with the changing social context evident as a woman was able to move from her experience in a side to being in control of a motorcycle. For examiners, it

was interesting to learn that ‘pottering about’ was mainly used by the older generation, but there is possibly some truth in this, unlike the obsolescence of ‘fallacy and ‘boon’. Other interesting points focusing on language change were discussion of the use of Roman numerals and syntactical differences that might be a different method of advice giving in the 1930s from today’s foregrounding of imperatives. Not many students started from the contextual point that this was an advisory text, but those who did could explore language features helpfully that illustrated meeting the needs of the purpose and an inexperienced female audience.

There was limited application of gender concepts and terms learned at AS, although some noted the use of the marked term ‘lady motor cyclist’. Because of the 20th century nature of the data, selection of relevant AO2 concepts was often a discriminator. As ever, summaries of standardisation are not appropriate with a more contemporary single text source question. More salient approaches chose to consider how the text illuminated the processes of change, including formality, rather than feeling constrained by off-loading their pre-learned knowledge. Students who are confident that they can leave out concepts and actively choose ones to consider produce an understanding of AO2 concepts that meet the 11-16 band descriptors.

Many became sidetracked by the ‘patronising’ tone of the writing and used quotations from the data descriptively to support their view that women were being insulted throughout. More successful students responded to the implication of the ‘expert’ lady motorcyclist offering advice and that this was in the context of women’s experiences at the time. Many became upset at the stereotype of women as interested in their appearance, interpreting this as something that it now outdated – missing perhaps the media focus on women’s appearance in the texts they themselves might be exposed to. More successful students noted more that while clearly women were being stereotyped by appearance, it was the clothes themselves that suggested an era of new technology where clothing was not designed for safety.

For AO3, the tendency here was students deviating into general social history of women’s roles at the expense of data analysis. This often allowed them only contextual marks in the mid-bottom bands. Many overlooked purpose and contexts of production and reception. More successful students considered gender, technology, social attitudes, and the manner of reception for a book chapter presumably aimed at men.

Question 4

There were many well-balanced and analytical comparisons, analysing both texts in detail. However, some students spent too long describing surface features in Text F (the long s, spelling changes, the punctuation and the length of sentences) and assumed that G exemplified features of modern texts. If the response is overly descriptive, then it is placed in the 4-9 band (AO1). Students need to offer explanations/analysis of features to move to the ‘some’ and above bands. Responses ranged from being well-structured around features/methods or AO2 ideas such as standardisation to rather uncontrolled, short and random paragraphs. There was a tendency to structure essays with conclusions but these rarely added to the overall marks, as they mostly contained repeated information. Students would have been better served by spending their time offering another analytical paragraph that made new creditable points. Although for AO1 students are assessed on their level of fluency, this is interpreted more in the quality of expression throughout their answers than their use of a traditional essay structure.

For AO1, there was much technical precision, especially in the labelling of grammatical features. Some students, pleasingly, spotted the passive voice being used in Text G. Many discussed confidently the modal verbs and explored the writers’ different use of modality in the texts as indicative of a different stance toward their readers; Text F was explored as

more instructing with ‘must’, compared to the less obligatory ‘should’. However, students could often identify the strangeness of ‘if it be’ to modern usage, but few identified this as the subjunctive. Interesting points were made about ‘the hiccup’ no longer having a determiner and being pluralised today. Pronoun usage was another area of fruitful discussion, especially if considered with the writers intended relationship with readers. Some engaged with the more detached and third person discourse of Text G, as compared to the more personal and direct address in Text F.

AO2 links to Fairclough and synthetic personalisation were frequently attempted but a little misapplied given that these are not 20th century media texts, and direct address in these texts is not used to manufacture a relationship with the audience. However, it gained AO2 credit as a concept applied to the data. Discriminators were how students applied their understanding of standardisation. There were different levels of application to data examples, from general historical paragraphs beginning with Caxton to the pinpointing of Text F as prior to Johnson’s dictionary and prescriptivism. Standardisation was explored effectively where students saw that both texts provided linguistic evidence for pre and post-standardisation and explored various methods to illustrate - orthography, graphology and syntax. Many students could describe the long sentences of Text F and the shorter sentences of Text G, the loss of the long s and noun capitalisation as exemplifying the process of language change.

For AO2/AO1 reward, it is always worth students applying their knowledge of lexical and semantic change processes to examples and many selected isolated examples such as ‘belch’, ‘hawk’ and ‘sordid’ (Text F) and ‘masticated’ (Text G) to discuss. The narrowing of ‘discourse’ was in interesting point to some, although others inaccurately suggested the obsolescence of this term and its replacement with ‘first’ and ‘second’ courses instead. Synoptically, power/politeness concepts were applied usefully to examples added to the ‘range of concepts’ in the AO2 descriptors. The most able students could identify specific features of the texts as examples of the advisory genre evolving and see this in a contextual perspective (technology, wider audiences). Some wanted to see this as evidence for informalisation, not quite convincingly given the formality of Text G. Often students want the change data to conform to their expectations of an informalisation continuum in Late Modern English to Present Day English.

Some contextual points about class, education levels, audiences, technology were all valid and gained credit, if broad but relevant. More insightful language links were exploring the attitudes shown in Text F indicating a more upper class audience. Specifically, the analysis of adjectives such as ‘mean, ungenerous’ and the noun phrase ‘your Betters’ were discussed semantically and pragmatically and relevantly exemplified students’ contextual awareness of 18th century social attitudes. Many picked up that Text G focuses more on behaviour and actions at the dinner table, rather than Text F’s focus on the hierarchical relationship with the host. Some students, however, misinterpreted Text F’s audience as women, missing the generic use of ‘Man’ in the text.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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