
AS

English Language

Paper 2: Language Varieties
Report on the Examination

7701
June 2017

Version: 1.0

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General

The second series of AS Paper 2 continued the good work seen by examiners in last year's sitting of this qualification and gave students the chance to look at some different areas.

Examiners reported positively on many of the responses that they marked and some of the impressive knowledge shown by students and the effective approaches used towards this paper. It was clear that the format of the paper was familiar to students and there were very few cases of rubric infringements or incomplete responses.

For AO1, across both Section A questions, examiners were looking for clear and organised expression which made use of relevant technical terminology from the field, focus on the 'idea' in the question (rather than just on the data), and - at the higher levels - the ability to pursue a line of argument and signpost this to the reader.

AO2 used a similar approach across all three questions. The levels of the mark scheme generally operate to differentiate how knowledge is displayed and applied to the questions, ranging from Level 1 which tends to be very general understanding displaying no obvious specialist knowledge that is appropriate for the focus of the question, through to Levels 4 and 5. These top two levels will generally show a detailed understanding of the relevant material and an ability to understand different views about language. At the highest level, students might be able to genuinely explore the 'idea' in the question, provide an overview, challenge particular ideas or evaluate the wider debates and arguments.

Question 1

This question asked students to "Discuss the idea that some accents are more attractive than others" and provided data in the form of survey results about UK and Irish accents.

Students answering this question appeared well prepared, often using the data as a springboard into wider discussion of other surveys, social stereotypes around accents and studies into accent use, social prestige and status.

For AO2, the different levels of the mark scheme were used to differentiate between those students at the lower end who could understand the rank order of accents and offer some basic comment on why some of them might be perceived in certain ways, and those at the higher end who could engage more closely with ideas around the choices people make to express identity with accents. Relevant studies were credited and examiners reported a range of useful references to Howard Giles, William Labov, Dixon, Mahoney and Cocks, Peter Trudgill and Malcolm Petyt, along with some interesting reports on accent prejudice in the media including ones by Rob Drummond and Paul Kerswill.

More successful answers:

- addressed the idea in the question and interrogated the idea of "attractive" as a description.
- looked at how judgements are often made about *speakers* rather than purely about their *speech*.
- examined social stereotypes in a way that did not recycle the stereotypes too crudely.
- considered the differences in rank order from previous or similar studies.
- explored the different attitudes that can exist towards the same accent and how those attitudes can change.
- showed awareness of how individuals can change their accents - converging or diverging - depending on the situation they are in and the perceptions they might wish to create.
- used the data to consider how certain areas might score better or worse because of the number of users of that accent.

- considered how those with particular accents might change the ways they use language to avoid stigma.
- referred accurately to relevant studies - either from similar surveys, from linguistic research or their own class work - related to attitudes to accents.
- understood and described some of the phonological features of accents that might have been either stigmatised or given a higher status in some situations.
- understood the arbitrary nature of some judgements about accents (e.g. the post-vocalic 'r' being seen as prestigious in the USA but often stigmatised as a rural feature in UK accents, or the glottal stop being viewed as 'lazy' by some listeners and 'relaxed' by others).
- showed knowledge of other accents than those in the data (e.g. phonological features of Multicultural London English (MLE), Multicultural Urban British English (MUBE) or Estuary English).
- considered the role of the media in shaping perceptions of certain accents (The Only Way Is Essex, Geordie Shore and Made in Chelsea being popular examples).
- understood that accent and dialect are not the same thing.

Less successful answers:

- confused accent and dialect.
- recycled offensive stereotypes about regional accents, without any sense of challenge.
- assumed that large areas on the map automatically led to large numbers of speakers of that particular accent.
- put forward deficit models about accents, referring to some accents "not sounding out all the letters in a word" or "not speaking properly".
- ranged beyond accent into discussion of slang and/or dialect, without understanding that accent is about sounds and not words.
- made generalised comments about individuals with accents and how physically attractive they might (or might not) be.
- recounted the rank order in the data without linguistic comment.
- referred solely to the data and did not engage with the 'idea' in the question.
- misspelt basic words, including those provided in the task or data (e.g. Received Pronunciation).

Question 2

This question asked students to "Discuss the idea that occupational language needs to be in plain English" and provided a Plain English Campaign document as data.

Students again appeared well prepared for this task, with many responding effectively to the data and the role of plain English in workplaces and beyond.

More successful answers:

- considered the data from a grammatical as well as lexical point of view, identifying not just the simplification of vocabulary but the changes to syntax and sentence length.
- pointed out that the 'after' data was not always syntactically less complex.
- engaged with the need for plain English when dealing with non-specialists.
- engaged with the competing arguments about plain English, considering that in some situations it might not be effective at all.
- understood the need for specialist lexis and jargon in some situations, providing clear examples of such terms and how they might be used.

- considered the varying functions of language in workplaces as going beyond the purely transactional into phatic, interactional and expressive.
- looked at how language can be used to exclude outsiders to foster a sense of in-group identity.
- looked at ideas of power and politeness as challenging the need for plain English.
- made reference to relevant researchers and thinkers, such as John Swales, Drew & Heritage, Janet Holmes and Almut Koester.

Less successful answers:

- treated the data as a text to be analysed (rather like in Paper 1).
- discussed occupational language without reference to plain English.
- assumed that plain English would be beneficial in all situations.
- treated 'language' as a very narrow term, only applying to vocabulary.
- struggled to formulate an argument.

Question 3

Examiners reported that the vast majority of students were producing appropriate opinion pieces for this task. While in 2016's first series a significant number of students were producing essays for this task that was much less evident this year. However, there were still some students writing in a style that suggested they had not made much use of appropriate style models. Students would be advised to have a clear sense of particular publications to write for and a good understanding of the shape and style of different kinds of opinion pieces. Rant-style pieces are probably best avoided if the AO5 marks are to be rewarded higher up the levels, and students need to be aware that part of their task is to transform linguistic ideas for a non-specialist audience. To do this, they need to have sufficient linguistic content to transform, rather than relying on "common-sense" views about language.

This task asked students to write an opinion article to "discuss the issues surrounding the ways women and men are represented in language" and provided a stimulus text that focused on sexist language. While many students wrote effectively about this, considering the ways in which language constructs particular views of women (and men) and shapes our views of gender, many others chose to write about how women and men *use* language, thus limiting their chances of accessing the higher levels of the mark scheme. There were many examples of students recycling material from last year's paper about interaction and language use and not considering the representation angle of the task.

More successful responses:

- kept representation at the forefront of the answer.
- looked at areas such as marked and asymmetrical terms (male nurse, lady doctor, fireman, bachelor/spinster), gendered titles (Mrs, Miss, Mr), gendered nouns and pronouns (mankind and he as a generic pronoun) and suffixes (-ess, -ette).
- showed understanding of common lexical and semantic patterns in labels for women and men (e.g. words associated with sexual behaviour, words linked to semantic fields of animals or food, or words that might be seen to infantilise women).
- considered the significance of language in shaping views about gender and sexual identity, for example, how language can objectify or set up expectations for gendered behaviour).
- looked at campaigns to change, challenge or reclaim sexist language, such as political correctness or the 'slutwalks' movement.

- looked at moves to introduce gender-neutral pronouns (hesh, zhe and hen), gender-neutral job titles (firefighter, police officer) or titles that do not indicate marital status (Ms and Mx).
- linked reforms of language to changing social attitudes or to concepts of linguistic reflectionism and/or determinism.
- linked ideas around how language represents gender to other campaigns around racism, sexuality and transgender issues.
- considered how women and men can represent themselves through online or spoken identity.
- examined literary representations of the roles of women and men.
- considered corpus data and research into common collocations.
- made reference to work by Paul Baker on gender and corpus linguistics, Deborah Cameron's "Verbal Hygiene" and/or Dale Spender's "Man Made Language".
- realised that the task could also be about representation of male identity.
- made reference to contemporary (or historical) events to make links to the topic under discussion.
- created a voice and argument to convey different opinions.
- transformed linguistic ideas for a non-specialist audience, glossing and exemplifying terms and concepts.
- used sub-editorial features such as a headline, strapline, byline, key terms boxes and the like.
- planned an effective opening and conclusion.

Less successful answers:

- focused purely on how men and women use language in conversation.
- relied heavily on research into interaction - Lakoff, Tannen, Zimmerman & West, Fishman, Coates, Hyde and Cameron - without considering representation as the focus.
- made reference only to the stimulus data, with no other knowledge evident.
- wrote about social roles, bullying at school and women's rights with no focus on language.
- struggled to understand the concept of representation.
- offered an opinionated piece with no support from evidence or examples.
- wrote an essay.
- referred to the stimulus data as "the text" in an article that assumed prior knowledge of the data.
- treated the stimulus data as a text to be analysed.
- misspelt basic words such as 'woman' or 'conversation'.
- ranted about "feminazis" or "triggered feminsists"

Key advice to students from this series

Think very carefully about the "idea" in each of the Section A questions. If you can approach it from different perspectives and with a clear idea about how different linguists might see it, you will be able to access the higher levels of the mark scheme and offer a more interesting and developed response.

Make sure that you plan and structure your response and guide your reader.

Think carefully about how different people, groups and communities **use** language but also about how language **represents** gender, social groups, regional and social varieties of English and occupational English.

Think carefully about different style models for the opinion piece and use these to develop your own voice and form.

Think about ways to signpost your argument and convince your audience, without resorting to cliché and/or ranting.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

Converting Marks into UMS marks (*delete if appropriate*)

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)