AQA

A-level
ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1: Language, the individual and society
Report on the Examination

7702
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General

This was the first series of 7702/1 and examiners were impressed with the high quality of work seen across responses. The questions provided students of all levels with stretch and challenge as they explored the unseen data in Section A and responded to the questions focused on children's language development in Section B.

It was clear that students had been very well prepared in terms of examination technique as they coped with the challenges of reading and responding to the questions in the time allowed. Examiners reported that very few papers did not offer responses to all questions, and rubric infringements for Section B were infrequent.

It was also evident that centres had worked hard to provide students with the technical skills necessary to label language features to a high level; examiners reported that there was a sense of ambition and focus in many responses in terms of approaches to language labelling (AO1). Examiners also noted that across all abilities, there were problems with accuracy at the top level, but that was not unexpected as students were grappling with complex clause analysis in unseen data. However, examiners were very pleased to see that many students were able to offer precise, accurate language descriptions from level 3 upwards. In terms of approaches to AO1, examiners felt that students would be advantaged by working through the levels of AO1 from word classes, to phrases, and onto clauses and more complex language labels, rather than simply hoping for success in the top band and avoiding interesting accessible features from the middle levels. This would also have the additional benefit of allowing students to explore the links to context provided in the middle levels, and avoiding overly 'feature spotting' AO1 driven responses. In some isolated cases, responses offered labels for almost every feature in a sentence without any sense of linking them to the meaning offered by the sentence. This approach had a negative impact on success, as the marks available for labelling (AO1) are less than those available for analysis and interpretation (AO3). A positive approach to data analysis is to start with the meaning of the text, and how the text's content is shaped by the context, and then use language features to evidence that analysis. This approach would then address the question asked, and allow students to access both assessment objectives for questions 1 and 2.

Responses across the ability range demonstrated that the quantity of data for both sections of the paper worked well for students both in terms of timings, and opportunities for analysis. Texts for Section A had a range of language features to consider at all levels and some interesting and subtle points for consideration in terms of context. In Section B, both sets of data provided evidence to respond to the questions and quotations, and offered range and challenge in terms of language features. Examiners felt that Section B responses were often impressive in terms of balancing language labelling and use of ideas from language study. Examiners were also pleased by the organisation of responses to the Section B questions. It was clear that centres had worked very hard to prepare students to write an 'evaluative essay' in Section B, and the quality of writing was often a positive element of responses.

A slight concern noted by examiners was the use of whole centre approaches to some of the questions. This appeared to impact most significantly on question 2, where some centres had encouraged their students to write a language change essay with little reference to the data. Although question 2 will always offer an 'older' piece of data for comparison, responses for question 2 should still focus on the meanings and representations of the text, rather than seeing the text as an example of 'older' language to use as the basis of a language change essay.

Formulaic approaches also impacted on question 4 in some centres, where responses included the same theories, offered in the same order, with little reference to the quotation, question or the data. This approach clearly had a negative impact on the quality of the response as there is equal weighting of the marks awarded for AO1 and AO2. Students should be encouraged to organise their ideas according to the demands of the question, as this will allow them to consider the validity of different theories and to synthesise their knowledge. Access to higher levels is very challenging when 'knowledge' is described rather than interpreted and evaluated. Examiners also noted that in some centres responses were exclusively focused on representations without focus on meaning or audience, purpose or genre. Although representation is clearly a central focus for questions 1 and 2, an integrated approach, synthesising representation, meaning and context is required for access to the higher levels of the AO3 assessment criteria.

Key messages from this first series:

• students' analysis should to be led by interpretation of the significance of contexts and the construction of meaning, with the technical description of language being used to evidence discussion
• students need to understand the significance of different theories and research, using examples from the data or their own learning to evidence discussion.

Section A

Question 1

The data for this question was an online Metro newspaper article about a female athlete's rule infringement when competing in the World Championships. The data offered the opportunity to consider a number of interesting representations of athletes, the Metro newspaper, the writer and the intended audience. In addition, the data included some subtle content in terms of attitudes and values towards sport, nationality and female athletes in particular. It also offered opportunities to demonstrate high level analysis of multi-modal data.

The vast majority of students responded well to the compulsory question. Responses were assessed by students' ability to examine how meaning and representations were constructed, interpreting contextual features and linking them to relevant language features. Examiners reported that there were some outstanding analyses of the blended purposes of the text linked to Veronica Campbell-Brown's mistake and her impact on the British athlete. The best responses were able to link this patriotism to the light-hearted nature of the writing, and the dramatisation of the event to entertain readers. Most students coped very well with the demands of this data. However, some responses were overly concerned with the technical aspects of the data to the detriment of comment on the narrative and representations. This was sometimes accompanied with a detailed grammatical analysis of the headline and little else. This is clearly a problematic approach that does not address the question fully. Similarly, the focus on affordances and constraints of the text without any reference to meaning was an unhelpful approach. In some responses, examiners noted that overly ambitious approaches to labelling features led to intrusive inaccuracies. This was especially noticeable with the mislabelling of 'but' and 'and' as subordinating conjunctions, and 'possibly' as a modal verb. However, these responses were balanced by many that included some very accomplished application of linguistic methods, using detail from word class to clause analysis and semantic patterns. In some responses, examiners noted that there was a misunderstanding and oversimplification of the concept of audience positioning, leading to some discussion of the audience as though they were physically placed, above, below and alongside the text/writer. This rarely led to useful analytical comment, and it was much less convincing than discussion of the

audience linked to pronoun use in the final paragraph, or patriotism connected with the British athlete.

More successful answers:

- understood the mixed purpose of the texts of inform and entertain, and used those to explain some of the language features eg capitals used in the image caption and features from the second paragraph
- identified the audience precisely without becomingly overly focused on the idea that online articles are only read by young/uneducated/lower class readers
- considered the complexities of the genre, moving on from the idea that it was a simple report of a sporting event, analysing the Metro's intentions in taking a light-hearted approach to the incident
- noted the shift in formality between the main text and that of the rule text box, often considering this alongside the move from active to passive voice in opening of the rules
- examined the representation of Veronica Campbell-Brown as an accomplished athlete in the opening paragraphs, moving onto representing her as surprisingly foolish, but not a deliberate cheat, when she ended up in the wrong lane
- examined the representation of Margaret Adeoye as a victim and British, linking this point to the British audience
- considered the use of politeness eg 'Excuse me…' as part of the humorous approach and underpinning the representation of British attitudes and values in the article. This was often usefully linked to the representation of speech and the text as multi-modal
- understood the dramatisation of the event, as overall, no rules were broken and no other athlete was 'impeded'. This was often usefully linked to the dramatisation of the headline as 'click-bait' to encourage reading of the article
- included detailed analysis of the abstract noun 'etiquette' and the notion that the error was about politeness rather than cheating, this was frequently linked to British values in sport
- considered the attitudes towards gender offered in the article, as the focus of the article was on a successful, globally famous female athlete and then compared with the use of generic male pronouns in the rule box
- examined how the audience was positioned in terms of values and attitudes in the final paragraph 'we can't imagine…' and the British interest represented in the body of the article
- considered how the online context added to the informative and entertaining purposes with the intertextual features and use of video evidence. This was also usefully linked to the representation of the Metro as a forward-thinking, popular and responsive publication, taking a relaxed, humorous approach to the incident.

Question 2

The data for this question was printed on an accompanying insert, allowing students more space to annotate the text, and this did seem to have a positive impact on the quality of responses. The data itself, was an extract from the Official Report on the Olympic Games of 1908. This provided students with the opportunity to discuss the age of the text, and the accompanying formality, as well as the specialised audience, given who would have access to the report. This compulsory question was often answered as equally well as question 1, despite the additional challenges of the older data. For some students, the distance of time proved to be an advantage and they were able to produce more accomplished and analytical responses to this question. This was particularly noticeable with AO1, where the raised formality and lexical challenge seemed to encourage students to start with more accessible language features and work their way up through the

language levels. Examiners did note that some responses became overly focused on the title page of the data, and did not consider the witness accounts in any explicit detail. This was problematic as this often led to a response that did not engage with meaning at all. Most students were, however, able to comment on the representation of royalty and the use of prestigious vocabulary. Most also discussed the authoritative register on the front page which offered a balance to the celebratory tone in the first half of the page.

Examiners reported that there were some unhelpful approaches to this question, and where they were taken, they had a significant impact on the students' ability to access the mark scheme. These approaches included: writing a language change essay as the basis of the response; considering the self-representation of the text to the exclusion of all other meaning and treating the data as a newspaper article rather than a report. The text description is included with the question to support students' analysis of the data, and overlooking it is not a sensible approach. Overall, examiners were very impressed with the quality of responses to this question. Students had clearly been well-prepared to deal with older data, and most were confident in analysing how meaning and representations worked in these more challenging contexts.

More successful answers:

- understood the precise narrow, specialised audience of the text, and the shared values and knowledge of this group
- considered the formality of the text as a consequence both of its age, the genre and purpose of the text
- considered attitudes towards gender given the generic male pronouns in the rule quotation and the absence of females in any context (the race and the officials) – this was also usefully linked to the age of the text and the audience
- analysed the representation of the Olympic event as high-status linked to lexical features and graphology offered across the whole, often including the nature of the description of officials involved in the race
- considered the first person point of view in the witness accounts and the importance of detailed descriptions, given the year and technology available. This was usually supported by discussion of first person pronouns and a spoken register
- discussed how authority was represented in the witness accounts and the body of the text, referencing the judges, institutions and rules as well as linguistic features
- commented on the use of jargon and field specific lexis linked to the representations of the witnesses and the audience – this was also linked to the positioning of the audience in some responses
- analysed the use of passive constructions in the introductory sentences before the witness accounts, contrasted with the active voice in the witness accounts
- considered the language used to explain the physical description connected to the race eg prepositional phrases 'immediately behind' and verb phrases 'nipped through on the inside' – sometimes linked with the language of sports commentary
- discussed the representation of the offence and the use of legal language features to demonstrate the seriousness of the actions – this was sometimes balanced by subtle comment on some of the more colloquial choices during the witness accounts eg 'nipped'
- analysed grammatical aspects of the witness accounts including the use of simple sentences to open Scott Duncan's evidence, and repeated use of coordinating conjunctions in both accounts and their impact
- offered relevant discussion of the historical elements of the text including archaic syntax and lexical features, and attitudes towards rule breaking, and the titles and roles of officials.

Question 3

This question required students to consider similarities and differences between Text A and Text B, and examiners reported that responses to this compulsory question were often impressive. Indeed for some students, the quality of their analysis was sometimes better in this comparative response than it was in the individual text analysis. For example, students repeatedly discussed how humour was used in their comparison, when it had been overlooked in their initial response to Text A. This suggests that students are comfortable and confident when comparing data, and that they are experienced in structuring their responses around comparison. Examiners were very pleased to note that very few responses considered texts separately, the vast majority offered sustained comparison across the response.

The better approaches to this question considered all aspects of the texts for comparison rather than only offering literal comparisons based on content and simple points about context. Examiners noted that once students began to consider language use alongside context, the quality of the response improved considerably. Occasionally students struggled to evidence points and this was problematic in terms of accessing the performance characteristics. Even when language features have been evidenced in questions 1 and 2, examples should also be offered for question 3, as examiners cannot look back at previous responses to check understanding and accuracy. Examiners noted that the very best responses to this question did not attempt to compare every aspect of the texts, but instead focused on representations and attitudes, covering 3 or 4 points in detail. This encouraged an evaluative response to the question rather than a list-like approach of similarities and differences.

More successful answers:

- discussed different attitudes towards the offence eg the light-hearted humour in Text A and the serious legal register of Text B
- analysed the different approaches to representing the event i.e. Text A gave very little detail, relying on photograph and video evidence to enhance detail, whereas Text B gave lengthy detailed descriptions – this was often usefully linked to the age of the texts, and the different purposes
- considered the differences caused by the ages of the texts, including discussion about technology and social media, visual detail, formality etc
- commented on the use of speech in both texts eg the humorous caption in Text A and the first person narrative witness accounts in B
- discussed the different attitudes towards gender in both texts, considering the focus on successful female athletes in Text A, and the absence of women in Text B - this was often linked to use of male pronouns in the rule sections
- considered the different use and effect of official rules in both texts – in Text A to show an offence had not been committed, but in Text B to confirm one had
- compared the difference in the genres of the texts, and offered language detail to support the discussion eg the graphological details of both texts, the use of headings etc
- examined the differences in audience, their positioning and their attitudes i.e. the broad audience for Text A, encouraged to be part of the Metro community with 'we' suggesting shared criticism of Veronica Campbell-Brown, and the inclusive, but narrow audience, of Text B with a strong sense of the illegality of the athlete's behaviour.

Section B

Section B requires students to take a different approach in terms of use of the data as well as responding to different styles of question. Added to this, students have a choice of question in this section. As expected, the majority of students chose question 4. However, it was clear that some centres had taught both topics, allowing students to make a choice once they had seen the questions. In these centres, the majority of students still chose the spoken data. On occasions, examiners reported that students attempted question 5 when they had not been fully prepared for this topic, and this led to unhelpful responses where students attempted to apply only spoken acquisition theories to written data. This also led to uncertainty about which language features to select and comment on. However, examiners noted that many students who chose question 5 produced extremely interesting responses, offering some varied and relevant ideas from language study.

On the whole, examiners reported that students performed very well in section B, perhaps an indication of their increased confidence because of the use of some learned knowledge as part of their answer. Examiners also noted that some individual students, and some whole centres, chose to answer their section B question first. This approach worked well for these students, but examiners did not note any improvement in quality for section B when this approach was taken.

Question 4

The data set for question 4 offered students the opportunity to comment on a very young child and his mother. The quotation set up a debate around the value of child directed speech, allowing students to use their knowledge of CDS and debate its significance using other theoretical knowledge. Examiners noted that most students produced credible responses to this question. Most students clearly understood CDS and its use and effect, allowing for extended discussion of features found in the data set, and of examples learned in the study of the topic area. Unfortunately, in some instances, examiners found that centres had encouraged students to use a pre-learned structure to the question, which included a prepared introduction and theories used without significant reference to the quotation, question or the data. This approach was self-limiting given that it did not allow students to shape their knowledge, and given the higher levels of the AO2 mark scheme require interpretation, and evaluation, pre-learned responses cannot be placed at these levels. The best responses shaped their knowledge to the question, using the data as evidence and as a springboard into language detail. Examiners remarked that there were some outstanding responses to this question in terms of knowledge and ability to extract and label linguistic features from the data-set. This suggests that students were very well prepared, and understood the approach needed for this debate style of question.

More successful answers:

- used the question and the quotation to shape an introduction, responding to the debate aspect of the quotation, developing a line of argument across the response
- used their knowledge of CDS to examine the mother's language choices and behaviour in the text eg use of names, pauses, sing song voice etc, and then considered how effective they were by analysing Jayce's responses to these features
- used the data to challenge CDS as a 'major factor' identifying where Jayce and his mother did not support CDS theories, or CDS was ineffective eg Jayce's final utterance

- used detailed and precise knowledge of theories to challenge CDS as the major factor in CLD, selecting examples from the data, or their own examples eg precise examples where Jayce appears not to understand his mother's language linked to cognitive development
- considered the different ways the mother constructed her questions and their effectiveness
- used relevant evidence from case studies to challenge and support the importance of CDS – eg approaches to language acquisition in different cultures – selecting precise details to develop their response
- analysed the impact of positive and negative reinforcement across the data, and how this linked to CDS and other acquisition theories
- included the impact of different contexts in their analysis of CDS, and evaluated the significance of the mother's use of the book, and the routines around its use
- integrated precisely labelled language detail (either from the data, or their own learning) throughout the response, never losing sight of the value of evidence
- considered patterns of repetition of lexical items and interrogatives and their various impacts on Jayce eg imitation of spoken discourse and encouraging Jayce's attention on the activity
- precisely analysed Jayce's utterances in phonological terms, offering patterns linked to the mother's behaviour
- discussed the different 'stages' Jayce could potentially be placed at and why.

Question 5

This question offered students two pieces of written data produced by a boy aged 7. Both pieces of data were produced in school, and the quotation and question set up a debate around the importance of the teacher in a literacy development. Examiners commented that the small number of students who attempted this question, produced some interesting and high quality responses. They used the data set very well as a starting point for discussion, and as evidence to support and challenge the quotation. Again, it was clear that students had been well prepared for this debate style of question. Examiners were pleased to note that there was very little evidence that students had prepared learned responses to this question. Responses suggested that knowledge was shaped to respond to the quotation, and therefore students were able to access all levels of the mark scheme. Occasionally, it was clear that students chose this question despite their lack of preparation. In these instances, responses were limited and often unhelpfully focused on spoken theories.

More successful answers:

- considered George's ability against stages from language study (eg Kroll, Rothery), using the data to evidence their discussion
- considered the teacher's responses to George's work and their effect eg comments on the lack of capitals in data set 2 and George's more standard use of capitals in data set 3
- compared the different focus of the teacher comments, and explored the reasons why this might be and the effect on George's progress
- examined the different genres of writing offered in the data, and considered George's ability to replicate the genres eg use of speech bubbles to develop the narrative, use of past tense in the recount
- analysed the use of the first person in the different genres, and George's ability to create a fictional voice in the narrative compared with his own point of view in the recount – this was linked to the teacher's response to the writing in data set 3

- attempted to explain George's spelling errors in detail and any (contradictory) patterns which could be noted – most better responses used precise phonological detail as part of their analysis
- considered George's self-correction and his attempts to improve his accuracy
- compared classroom based literacy activities and wider contexts, including situated literacy and its importance, especially pre-school and home environment
- considered the National Curriculum and its role in George's development and the teacher's use of it in the classroom – this often led to wider debate about creativity and standards
- used knowledge of other literacy theories, including modality and linked it to the data sets, challenging the importance of the teacher's role.

Advice to students

There are a number of practical considerations which would be useful to support approaches for this paper. These include:

- matching your timings carefully to the marks available for each question, and if time runs out for a question, leaving a gap after the response in case time allows you to add any further detail
- quoting precisely to support your language labels as examiners cannot credit a language feature offered in a very long quotation
- quoting to support your points in every question; even question 3 requires language evidence to support your points
- carefully planning your responses before you begin writing. It was clear to examiners which students had annotated and prepared the whole text before beginning to write, compared with those who noticed details as they were writing
- focusing your responses to questions 1 and 2 on meaning and representation i.e. 'how the story is told' – then using language features to support your understanding of the text
- offering language features from level 3 upwards is more meaningful than stating that sentences and clauses offer information and make the writer look intelligent is not a productive way into discussion of meaning
- selecting the most interesting and relevant language features to label and use. Offering a list of language features without any sense of how they create meaning does not allow you to access AO3, and there are more marks available for this assessment objective
- selecting theories and ideas from language study in response to the question and quotation for section B. Not everything you have studied will be useful in your answer unfortunately, but leaving irrelevant detail out makes answers more focused and usually results in higher marks
- constructing concise responses. Crafting a well-structured response for each task is sufficient to achieve the higher mark levels. A well-planned, well-written answer is invariably more successful than a lengthy one.

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.