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AS

# English Language

Language Varieties

Report on the Examination

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7701/2

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## General Comments

This was the third series of AS Paper 2, and it was evident that schools are becoming increasingly secure in their teaching of the required skills. Students were on the whole very well prepared. There were very few rubric infringements or incomplete responses.

In terms of AOs, AO1 in Section A required students to respond in an appropriate register, with technical vocabulary where appropriate. At the higher levels, this AO also considered structure of argument, with many students making effective use of discourse markers to guide their response. It should be remembered that AO1 also assesses accuracy, and examiners noted frequent errors in students' written communication. This was particularly the case for possessive apostrophes, spelling of key words such as 'accommodation' and 'interruption', and discriminating between singular 'woman' and plural 'women.'

AO2, across both Section A and B, assessed students' ability to apply learned knowledge. The markscheme is designed to recognise the complexity with which students apply this to the question – with level 1 indicating very general responses which may show little or no specialist knowledge. At the upper end of the range, levels 4 and 5 assess students' abilities to consider the complexities of the issue presented. The highest-scoring responses tended to demonstrate a clear understanding of the complexities of the issues presented, and were able to explore how these relate to wider concerns. These students were also selective in terms of the theories used, relating them clearly and effectively to the data.

It is worth noting that AO2 was less effectively integrated into Section B, with students at times producing very general responses.

AO5 is only assessed in Section B, and considers students' ability to transform ideas and write accessibly and engagingly. There was some impressive skill demonstrated, but infrequently. It is worth reminding students that as writing skills account for half the marks available for this question, it is worth planning and proofreading. Few students showed any evidence of this.

## Question 1

This series, the question asked students to "Discuss the idea that men's language is more powerful than women's language." The data was statistical, focusing on research into interruptions in mixed-sex conversations. Over 80% of students chose to respond to this optional question.

Many students appeared confident when handling qualitative data. This was often successfully linked to the work of Zimmerman and West, with the dominance model often considered in some detail. It is worth noting, however, that Zimmerman and West's work is now quite dated. It would be pleasing to see students making use of more recent studies, such as the work of Hancock and Rubin, or Jackobi and Schweers' US courtroom study.

Students often engaged well with other AO2 ideas, showing understanding of the different models of gendered language. Many responses were based on a clear progression from dominance and/or deficit into studies of difference and (at the higher end) diversity or gender similarities. These were often well supported with reference to relevant spoken language studies including Lakoff, Spender, Zimmerman and West, Tannen's difference model, Holmes, Cameron and Hyde. Some higher achieving students considered gender similarities and performativity to great effect. Less frequently considered, but often usefully applied, was the work of Kuiper, Fishman, or O'Barr and Atkins. Again, however, it is worth noting more recent work, including Tannen's work on managerial styles and floor holding, is not frequently being discussed.

Interesting angles included exploring the relationship between dominance and deficit models, with many students taking a 'sideways' approach and considering marked terms or the work of Dale Spender. Although this is not directly responding to the question (as it is language about genders, rather than the language of genders) some students were able to successfully consider the relationship between the two.

Many students showed some awareness of challenge to methodologies, or engaged with criticisms about the studies themselves. Whilst this was rewarded appropriately, it is important to note that simply referencing studies as "outdated," or stating that samples were "too small" is not fully "evaluating." Students who engaged explicitly with how these limitations affected the findings tended to "evaluate" much more effectively and gained higher marks.

More successful answers:

- Used the data to draw a particular view of male/female language, and used this as a 'way in' to exploring the issues. Zimmerman and West were often referenced as a starting point.
- Kept the data at the centre of the response, often returning to it and considering the same findings from different interpretive angles.
- Engaged with complexities from the data, particularly the lack of context given. This was often well linked to the distinction between interruptions and overlaps, and the purpose of the speaker in making the interruption. Many students applied Beattie's and Fishman's work well to this idea. The strongest answers often engaged well with complexities of context aside from the data, considering the direct relationship between Lakoff and O'Barr and Atkins' work, for example.
- Built up responses, working with the idea of 'power' at the centre. These responses often explored how one model builds on the concerns of the earlier model, e.g. the ways in which dominance/deficit indicate women's language as less powerful, but difference suggests there is no more 'powerful' language, but different motivations. Some students were able to use this notion critically, exploring perceived power biases within the terms used for this model. "Status" and "support" were used to argue that women's language, even when given strength, is still weaker in comparison to men's when such gender dichotomies are created. Cameron's work was often well applied here.

- Considered the notion of ‘power,’ exploring ways in which women’s language can be seen as more powerful. Trudgill was at times used to good effect, although it should be noted that some students omitted to acknowledge the complexities of class as a complicating variable.
- Challenged simplistic stereotypes of men and women, with good discussion often made of how social expectations may have shaped the language used. This was at times well developed into an exploration of gender identities more broadly.
- Considered the ‘difference’ model in some detail, with Tannen particularly well cited.
- Explored Holmes’ work on tag questions, or Fishman’s research, in some detail, effectively considering alternative uses of features associated with deficit models.
- Offered methodological challenges to the data in the question, or specific pieces of research, clearly considering how the limitation affected the findings and what the implications of this were. This was particularly well handled with Lakoff.

Less successful answers:

- Paraphrased the data, at times describing each pair in sequence, without bringing any learned knowledge to the response.
- Described men as powerful, and women as powerless, without reference to language. This often became socially-driven, and at times quite emotive.
- Made errors in associating researchers with particular models, or confused the genders of the researchers. This was particularly true of Spender and Lakoff.
- Made reference to language features without exemplification, or failed to link researchers to the specific features considered.
- Recited all the information they knew about different studies, sometimes in an almost bullet-point approach. These students tended not to shape their responses or engage with the issues raised, and answers at times read almost like revision notes.
- Made errors in written accuracy, including women’s/women and woman/women. ‘Interruption’ was also frequently spelled inaccurately, despite being included in the data.
- Misinterpreted the data, for example inferring that the 75% figure related to the number of speakers who interrupted, not the number of interruptions made.
- Attempted to engage with complexities, such as O’Barr and Atkins work on ‘powerless’ language, but without linking these explicitly to gender. This was particularly true of students who attempted to consider Cameron’s critique of dichotomies.
- Created a response which was lacking in conscious shaping, e.g. without using discourse markers or without explaining how one idea fed into the next. Some students did not use paragraphs.

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## Question 2

This question was attempted much less frequently, but on the whole was handled well. The data given was an extract from a book by Susie Dent focusing on regional variation, and asked students to “Discuss the idea that people can use both standard and non-standard English.” Whilst most students considered this at an individual speaker’s level, some preferred to consider the notion of ‘people’ more generally. Both approaches were equally appropriate and at times, effective.

Many students chose to use the data as a ‘springboard,’ and not engage with it directly. This is an acceptable approach, although it should be noted that this at times led to students steering away from the notion of ‘standard’ and ‘non-standard’ into less structured ideas relating to idiolect.

Across the responses, students made useful references to a number of studies, including Labov (both New York and, often more effectively, Martha’s Vineyard), Trudgill’s Norwich Study, Giles’ Accommodation Theory, and various Matched Guise studies. Cheshire’s Reading Study was considered at times, but this wasn’t often well handled, with many students omitting to consider the impact of other variables in this study including age, gender and specific social groups.

More successful answers:

- Focused their answers on a specific interpretation of what was meant by ‘non-standard,’ with most following the lead of the data and exploring issues relating to regional dialectal variations.
- Offered a range of examples of regional variations from their own knowledge. At times this involved an impressive technical register, with accurate references being made to various non-standard grammatical structures and phonological variations.
- Explored how non-standard language can be used to indicate membership of a social group, not just a geographical area. Cockney Rhyming Slang was often well applied, as was Multicultural London English and Multicultural Urban British English (MLE / MUBE). Some students took the opportunity to consider teens’ use of non-standard English to good effect. Students effectively considered more recent work associated with Ives and Drummond, particularly relating to urban variations.
- Explored the implications of the notion of one speaker using “both” standard and non-standard, and considered the appropriacy of specific contexts, e.g. in schools. Students often engaged explicitly with Giles’ Accommodation theory and code-switching, with good understanding of Labov’s Martha’s Vineyard study often demonstrated.
- Considered the complexities of class and the ability of individuals to code-switch according to class and access to education. Bernstein’s work, as well as the work of Petyt in Bradford, was well considered here, with higher-achieving students grappling with issues of social class, social mobility and self-presentation.
- Considered the ways that perceptions relating to either standard or non-standard language may have influenced conscious language choices. These students made clear and appropriate reference to figures including Margaret Thatcher, George

Osborne and various members of the Royal Family. Scenarios such as job interviews were also often well explored, and technical terminology including convergence and divergence was often well deployed.

- Explored how an individual's language choices may be affected by their social networks, with good discussions of Milroy and Milroy's work in Belfast, or Eckert's work in Detroit. Some students considered the impact of multiple variables on language use, including class and gender, as well as context.
- Engaged with complexities of language use, particularly the ideas of overt and covert prestige. Trudgill's Norwich study was well applied here. Some students engaged with Labov's New York study to support this idea, although it should be noted that very few considered the finer details of this study, particularly the difference between the relative class structures relating to the shop assistants and their customers. Notions of clarity were often well considered.

Less successful answers:

- Recited the variations given in the data without engaging in any comment.
- Showed confused understanding of accent and dialect, or conflated Received Pronunciation and Standard English. Similarly, convergence and divergence were often misapplied, especially ideas of 'upwards' and 'downwards' accommodation.
- Made unsupported generalisations relating to the perceptions of specific accents/dialects, or made sweeping statements about the desirability or otherwise of particular forms. This was often included in answers which took a deficit approach to non-standard use, where statements were at times made to "lazy," "unpleasant" or "snobby" forms.
- Made reference to studies but without explaining how they link to the use of standard/non-standard forms, e.g. reciting the stores used in Labov's New York study, or offering Cheshire's non-standard variations in their entirety, without explaining their significance.
- Made confused statements relating to dialect levelling, considering it on an individual rather than regional level.
- Took a simplistic approach to the question, arguing simply for the use of standard (or less frequently, non-standard) forms as appropriate and desirable.
- Considered why a person may use standard or non-standard English, but without considering why both may be deployed in specific circumstances.

### Question 3

This question assesses students' ability to write with creative flair whilst also conveying technical knowledge to readers without a linguistic background. Most students utilised some overt features of form, often recognising the need for an appropriate headline or making direct address to the reader. However, few students appeared confident replicating the style of opinion/editorial pieces beyond these surface elements. As in previous series, students at times produced 'rant-like' or overly opinionated, generalised responses which

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hindered their attainment on both AO2 (as responses were lacking in linguistic content) and AO5 (as the ideas were therefore not 'transformed' effectively).

Students are also advised to spend time proofreading, as there were noticeable and frequent errors with, for example, homophones, apostrophes and capitalisation.

This series, the task required students to produce an article which discussed 'how to communicate effectively at work,' with the prompt material coming from an advice website. Many students showed genuine understanding and insight into occupational language and its features.

Most responses centred around the idea of occupational jargon, with good supporting use made of Drew and Heritage, and Swales. Goffman and Lakoff were frequently used to explore issues of politeness, whilst Koester and Giles were often indicators of higher level responses exploring variation within an individual's occupational context. Some students engaged well with ideas of power hierarchies with some explicit reference being made to theories relating to types of power including the work of Fairclough and Wareing. However, there were many instances of students not responding to the prompts within the question and choosing to write about accent issues (as in the specimen paper). Whilst there is an argument for considering the relationship between accent prejudice and occupational success / self-presentation, this was rarely made explicit and these students tended to produce responses lacking in relevance.

More successful responses:

- Considered their intended audience, and tailored their writing consistently towards this. Particularly successful pieces tended to target school leavers or those about to start a new job, as this enabled them to introduce relevant theory in an appropriate manner. These students often made effective use of a particular persona throughout the piece.
- Used sub-editorial pieces beyond simple headlines. The most effective responses used straplines/standfirsts, bylines, text boxes with examples of jargon and/or subheadings to help guide the reader and indicate form. The most effective headlines paid very close attention to features of form, including good replication of the particular house style of The Guardian, or used rhetorical devices to good effect.
- Used examples of real life occupational language and scenarios throughout their work, illustrating their ideas clearly. Similarly, these students were careful to gloss or explain technical terminology (such as convergence, or phatic terms) where they were used.
- Considered how one speaker may adapt their occupational register according to different contexts within the work environment. This was often best handled where students drew on their own experiences. For instance, education, medical or catering environments were considered, with many exploring how teachers may use language differently to students and colleagues (and sometimes, to different colleagues). This often led to good discussion of accommodation.



- Made use of ideas such as politeness and the Plain English Campaign. Successful responses offered details about these issues, including exploring why a particular occupation, or someone occupying a particular role, may choose to use or ignore elements of them. This often enabled interesting personal opinions to come through.
- Explored ideas in relation to other ideas. Politeness was often considered in relation to influential and instrumental power, and occupational jargon was considered effectively alongside ideas of self-representation.
- Showed creativity and flair when ‘transforming’ ideas for audiences. For example, one student transformed Swales’ work on discourse communities into an analogous image of a beehive, with the worker bees all using the same language to convey information effectively (the ‘waggle dance’ as jargon). This metaphor was successfully extended and maintained throughout the piece. Other successful approaches included likening the use of transactional or phatic language to clothing choices, particularly the idea of formal ‘work-wear,’ and in one instance ‘dress down Friday’ representing the increasing informality of both occupational sartorial and linguistic choices over time. These students had clearly considered how best to explain ideas for non-specialist audiences.
- Considered the structure of their work carefully, including discourse markers (being careful not to become too academic in tone) and a sense of circularity from opening to ending. This was often achieved through the use of a personal anecdote at the start, which was then referred to at the end.

Less successful responses:

- Made a very general response to this task, with ‘effective communication’ being limited to simple features of volume, pitch, or pace.
- Offered a ‘common sense’ approach, without explicit reference to learned knowledge.
- Raised features such as jargon or phatic talk without exemplification.
- Wrote an essay, or lapsed into essay-like style after an initial headline and/or personal anecdote.
- Used academic or technical language without explanation or exemplification.
- Became overly familiar, including the occasional use of taboo or crude language. Students at times also used features of ‘txt tlk’ in an inappropriate manner. This was most notable in ‘rant like’ responses.
- Made overt reference to “Text B” or “the data,” which didn’t show recognition of an audience unfamiliar with the source data.
- Used inaccurate spelling of key words, particularly “colleagues” and “conversation.”
- Made reference to learned knowledge, but without applying it to either a specific occupational context or to language use. This was most frequently the case with Swales or Drew and Heritage.
- Attempted to steer the response towards a gender or dialect question, rather than considering the key focus of the question.

- Appeared to run out of time, without offering an appropriate ending to their work.

### **Key advice to students from this series**

- In Section A, students are advised to consider the question carefully. If the statement indicates a particular view, as in question 1, could it be considered from a different perspective? If, as in question 2, the question raises two different uses of language, ensure both are explored.
- Use discourse markers and paragraphing to develop a particular argument.
- When using data, try to explore the ‘big issues’ that it suggests. For example, in Q3, what are the issues around language at work? How might they affect an individual?
- Ensure enough time is allocated to planning, and particularly in Section B, proofreading.
- Consider using a specific publication as a style model for Section B, and replicate its house style as closely as possible.
- Remember that this is an English Language exam, and responses must be rooted in issues of language. Examples should be utilised frequently, and where necessary, explained.

### **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.