



A-level **English Language**

7702/2

Report on the Examination

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Summary

Overall performance compared to last year

The work of students this summer showed continuity with what had gone before in terms of both strengths and weaknesses. The questions provided students of all levels with opportunities to show what they had learned about language, their views and arguments as well as their writing skills. Answers showed clear understanding of task requirements, with detailed focus on debating language issues, analysing discourses about language and writing for a non-specialist audience. There were some very high-quality responses that indicated students were being very well prepared and were developing independent critical voices.

The choice of question 1 or 2 was much more evenly divided than in 2024. Question 1 was more a little more frequently chosen. Performance on the Section A questions was very similar to 2024, and the optional questions were of equal challenge.

Students seemed to find Question 3 more challenging than in 2024. This may have been because the passages did not fit into a simple prescriptivist vs descriptivist schema. Students did not find it as easy to identify what kinds of discourse the texts drew on. Some of the views about accent were perhaps not quite as expected. The layering of views was also challenging.

As before, Question 4 was the most challenging. Students' AO2 performance was lower than in the Section A. There was a tighter focus on the topic of accents than last year, but students found it challenging to go beyond a discussion of what attitudes to accents are held.

Areas where students excelled

Students excelled when they:

- explored what 'context' might refer to and the implications of 'determine'
- explored what an 'improvement' in language might be and evaluated specific examples
- analysed how RP, regional accents and the views of Leith and Rajan were represented
- analysed how Rosseinsky and Deacon conveyed their own views, exploring self-representation, modality and positioning of the audience
- identified and used the views and arguments presented in the two texts as the base for writing their own linguistically informed article.

Areas where students did less well

Students did less well when they:

- recounted a set of predictable case studies without relating them to the question
- used older ideas and research about gender uncritically
- did not engage with what the texts had to say about accents, Prue Leith and Amol Rajan
- provided very little linguistic knowledge in Question 4
- had little familiarity with the form and style of op-ed writing.

Assessment objectives

AO	Common student errors
A01 (Question 1 or 2) Use associated terminology and coherent written expression	• Recounting linguistic research without discussing its significance for the issue in the task. • Unconvincing attempts to link paragraphs to the issue by brief mechanical comments at the end, simply repeating the terms of the question.
A01 (Question 3) Apply appropriate methods of language analysis, using associated terminology	• Using the label 'verb phrase' inaccurately. • Using the label 'post-modification' inaccurately.
A02 (Question 1 or 2) Demonstrate critical understanding of concepts and issues relevant to language use	• Recounting dominance and difference views of language and gender uncritically. • Identifying Jean Aitchison as a prescriptivist who believed language change was characterised by the three metaphors.
A02 (Question 4) Demonstrate critical understanding of concepts and issues relevant to language use	• Not using enough reference to linguistic concepts, issues and research within the article.
A03 Analyse and evaluate how contextual factors and language features are associated with the construction of meaning	• Not engaging closely with the views expressed in the articles and the representation of accents and the issues involved. • Trying to force the texts into a prescriptivist vs descriptivist schema. • Being uncertain exactly how to use the term 'discourse'.
A04 Explore connections across texts, informed by linguistic concepts and methods	• Writing about the texts separately.

A05 Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English to communicate in different ways	• Not providing well-documented linguistic information. • Writing in an overly informal style. • Not making linguistic information accessible to a non-specialist reader.
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Individual questions

Question 1

Evaluate the idea that aspects of context determine how a person uses language.

How students did well

Students did well when they:

- explored what context might mean and identified different types of contexts
- examined the impact of immediate contextual factors such as audience, purpose, subject
- considered wider social contexts such as gender, ethnicity, social class
- paid attention to the implications of 'determine'
- challenged the idea that language use was constrained by context
- evaluated how far someone was free to use language as they wanted
- explored ideas about performativity
- explored how different aspects of context might work simultaneously
- evaluated the relative effect of different aspects of context
- examined the impact of audience, looking at ideas about audience design, accommodation and code-switching
- looked at how mode affected language use, considering affordances, constraints and conventions
- looked at how purposes affected language use
- used occupational language as a way of considering a range of ways in which context affected language
- explored accommodation theory
- offered a critical view of dominance and difference explanations of the effect of gender on language
- examined ideas of biological determinism critically
- explored relationships between language and social class and group membership
- examined the impact of regional, national and international contexts
- looked at how social values affected language use, eg Polari
- cited ideas about linguistic relativity and looked at how language was influenced by society and culture
- examined how attitudes to language affected language use.

How students did less well

Students did less well when they:

- devoted a lot of time to recounting older ideas and research about gender uncritically
- recounted oft-cited studies (Jocks and Burnouts, Martha's Vineyard, Ives' Bradford study) spending time explaining the case study at the expense of discussing its significance in terms of the question.

Question 2

Evaluate the idea that language change is a process of continual improvement.

What students did well

Students did well when they:

- explored what 'improvement' in language might actually mean
- evaluated specific changes as improvements, deteriorations or simply changes
- evaluated the metaphor of language evolution
- interpreted Crystal's tides metaphor with examples
- considered Deutscher's ideas of economy and creativity as drivers of change
- challenged descriptivist stances
- explored random fluctuation theory as a challenge to the idea of improvement
- looked at functional explanations of language change to enable communication
- examined cultural transmission and sub-stratum explanations of change
- examined metaphors of language change as decay, laziness, invasion, infection
- evaluated language reform and benign prescriptivism as attempts to improve how language represented society and individuals
- evaluated the effectiveness of politically correct or woke language and illustrated Pinker's Euphemism Treadmill
- assessed whether reclamations were improvements
- explored and evaluated the creation of pidgins and creoles
- evaluated changes caused by English as a colonial or global language
- weighed up the advantages and disadvantages of standardisation
- evaluated the process of dialect levelling
- evaluated the effect of new technologies from the printing press to the mobile phone
- assessed the emergence of Multi-cultural London English
- assessed borrowings, especially Americanisms
- analysed specific examples from different perspectives.

How students did less well

Students did less well when they:

- equated descriptivism with the idea that language change is a process of improvement
- veered off onto previous questions
- tacked on a link to the question after a lengthy factual discussion
- gave historical accounts of the development of English without discussion of improvement
- wrote at length about Caxton, Lowth, Swift, standardisation, the Bible without addressing the question clearly
- thought the Euphemism Treadmill showed the continual improvement of language
- believed Jean Aitchison held prescriptivist views characterised by her three metaphors
- gave confused or simple rote explanations of Aitchison's characterisations
- thought Robert Lane Greene held declinist views.

Question 3

Analyse how language is used in **Text A** and **Text B** to present attitudes to accents.
In your answer you should:

- examine any similarities and differences you find between the two texts
- explore how effectively the texts present their views.

How students did well

Students did well when they:

- presented a fully integrated analysis comparing and contrasting the two texts
- made use of AO1 linguistic analysis to facilitate AO3 analysis of meanings and representations
- engaged closely with how the texts represented RP and regional accents
- looked at how Text B drew on discourses of intelligibility, clarity, well-spokenness and accessibility
- noted how both texts drew on discourses about accents and class, status and privilege
- saw how the texts drew on binary oppositions to classify and evaluate accents: strong vs mild accents, rough vs smooth, refined vs unrefined and that accents were deemed to exist in a hierarchy
- explained how people might have fallen out of love with posh accents or RP and found them cringeworthy and how RP might have become a hindrance, though it still opened doors
- noted Rosseinsky's view of regional accents as a barrier to social mobility and Deacon's depiction of snobbery against regional accents in the past
- explained how regional accents were seen as 'too common' and subject to snobbery while RP was seen as posh
- compared how Rosseinsky and Deacon presented changes in attitudes over time
- examined the idea that regional accents were a source of mockery
- identified how some people in the media were seen to be adopting less posh sounding accents to sound more relatable
- compared Leith's hatred of her RP accent with Rajan's criticism of its unrepresentative presence in the media
- noted Deacon's rejection of Rajan's criticism about regional accents being under-represented
- compared how the writers criticised Leith for complaining about her advantages from RP and Rajan for his inverted snobbery towards RP
- compared how the writers presented their critiques of Prue Leith and Amol Rajan, looking at address and naming patterns
- analysed how Text B othered and undermined Rajan's views (*In his view, According to Rajan, he believes, he claims*) and compared how Text A belittled Leith's woes (*squirming, moaning, cringe*)
- analysed how Rosseinsky and Deacon presented their own views and arguments, noting how she saw an ongoing issue while he downplayed the issues nowadays
- saw how they both treated attitudes to accents as part of wider social values

- compared how Rosseinsky showed her annoyance with Leith's unhappiness about an accent that gave her huge advantages with Deacon's presentation of Rajan's 'inverted snobbery'
- analysed how the self-presentation of the writers and their positioning of the reader worked persuasively
- analysed modality in the presentation of ideas and views
- compared and evaluated the ways the articles began in their first paragraphs
- analysed how Text B's single simple sentence paragraphs emphasised the belittling and rejection of Rajan's views
- compared the use of challenging questions to end the articles.

How students did less well

Students did less well when they:

- tried to force a prescriptivist v descriptivist schema on the newspapers, the writers and the texts
- used the word discourse imprecisely, without full understanding of its significance in this section of the paper
- wrote about the texts one at a time in separate paragraphs with at best implicit comparisons and minimal connections at the start and end of the essay
- did not use any linguistic description to aid their analysis
- focussed on linguistic description to the detriment of engaging with the texts' meanings
- used buzz words from previous mark schemes but without applying them effectively: modality, positioning, discourse
- misread Rosseinsky's judgement of RP, thinking she was in favour of it.

Question 4

Write an opinion article on attitudes to accents.

In your article you should:

- assess the ideas and issues raised in **Text A** and **Text B**
- refer to ideas from language study
- argue your own views.

How students did well

Students did well when they:

- had a clear understanding of the op-ed genre
- referred to the articles to which they were responding and identified the ideas and issues they raised, drawing on their successful identification in their answer to Question 3
- explained why Prue Leith might hate her RP accent and how it might be a hindrance
- explained how regional accents were seen as 'too common'
- identified how some people in the media were adopting less posh sounding accents to sound more relatable

- noted Deacon's rejection of Rajan's criticism about regional accents being under-represented
- noted Rosseinsky's view of accents as a barrier to social mobility
- referred to and gave further examples of people changing their accents
- looked at a range of attitudes to standard and non-standard accents
- used various surveys and matched guise experiments to support this discussion
- explored the pros and cons of both standard and non-standard accents
- explored ideas about repertoires, code-switching and accommodation
- established that attitudes to accent were based on social not linguistic grounds
- evaluated changing accents as a response to prejudice and discrimination
- identified the phenomenon of 'accentism' as a form of discrimination
- argued that accents need to be treated as a protected characteristic
- used witty sub-editorial material that hooked a reader and indicated the line of argument
- made the issues concrete and relevant to the shared world of the writer and audience
- informed the reader about linguistic concepts and research in an accessible manner
- introduced researchers by first and second name to personalise the material and with an explanatory phrase to explain who they were
- showed close control of sentence patterns, some of which were picked up from the articles.

How students did less well

Students did less well when they:

- wrote a Section A style essay
- did not use 1st and 2nd person pronouns
- used an overly informal address to the reader
- did not provide any linguistic information to develop a response to the articles
- referred to the articles as 'Text A' and 'Text B'
- did not transform linguistic ideas and terms for the reader
- referred to linguists by their surname and gave no explanation of who they were or gave them inappropriate epithets
- lost focus on accents, often for dialects, elaborated and restricted code, attitudes to language change
- wrote long and over-elaborate explanations of how they came across the articles or scenarios
- wrote that attitudes to accents 'weren't that deep' and didn't really matter.

Further support

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