AQA

A-level
ENGLISH LANGUAGE
Paper 1: Language, the individual and society
Report on the Examination

General

Summer 2018 saw the second examination series for 7702/1 and examiners were pleased to see high quality responses in section A when responding to unseen texts and in section B for the child language development questions. Given the demands of the examination paper, it was particularly noticeable that students usually paced themselves well so that sufficient time was given to each question. Some students decided to attempt section B first and this was absolutely fine. Very rarely were rubric infringements noted, although a handful of students did attempt both of the optional questions offered in section B. As with last year's examination, question 4 was significantly more popular than question 5, though responses were seen across the performance range for both questions.

Section A provided two accessible unseen texts which allowed students across the ability range to make appropriate comments about the language in use and the meanings and representations being seen within those texts. It was very rare for students to misunderstand the meaning of the texts and it was particularly pleasing to see that students appeared to enjoy engaging with the older text and linking this text to what they understood of early 20th century England. The best responses were those when the students clearly had a sense of the text as a whole and the overarching arguments emerging (and sometimes changing) throughout. Students using this approach carefully selected those language elements on which they wanted to comment as it illuminated the analysis of the text's meaning as a whole. This meant that students were approaching the text from the perspective of meaning, context and representation, rather than starting the response as a feature spotting exercise and hoping that the contextual comments came out of this.

Students continued to use precise language labels for AO1 and it was noticeable that this precision often extended to the examples provided. This allowed for much more tightly focused labelling to occur, which then allowed for more precise contextual comments. Indeed, it was occasionally felt that students knew that they needed to refer to representation but did not always think carefully about how this representation had emerged. The close link between AO1 and AO3 comment allowed students to move away from more anecdotal or generalised contextual comment.

Occasionally, a disproportionate amount of time was spent on question 1 and this then negatively affected the rest of section A. Time often seemed to be most stretched on question 3, when students occasionally seemed not to have sufficient time to move far beyond identification of literal comparisons between the texts to provide a comparative analysis of the two unseen texts. Those students who appeared to have allowed slightly more time for this response were able to move from those literal connections seen in level 2 responses towards comparisons which focused far more on language, context and representation. This, in turn, enabled students to move from level 3 and upwards in the marks attained for this question.

Following on from the concerns noted in last year's examination report, there appeared to be far fewer formulaic responses in section A and, unlike last year, responses to question 2 were rarely disproportionally focused on language change issues. Examiners did note a slight concern over pre-planned approaches for section B. It appeared that students had sometimes memorised an introductory paragraph or perhaps decided which language theorists to include (and indeed what would be said about them) which clearly prevented these students from explicitly addressing the question from the outset or selecting those theories most relevant to the question posed. This focus on including pre-planned theory also meant that precise language labelling was not as evident in section B as A. It is worth remembering that the section B question carries 15 marks for

AO1 whereas questions 1 and 2 only carry 10 marks each for this assessment objective. It is therefore important for students to identify language as precisely as possible for section B too.

Key messages from this second series:

Whilst students are demonstrating real confidence in approaching questions 1 and 2, the comparative element of question 3 appears more challenging. Rather than re-analysing each text, time should be spent thinking carefully about points of comparison that move beyond the literal to language, context and representation comparisons.

The detail and precision required for questions 1 and 2 is also expected within section B for AO1. Students should work with the data provided to consider how features of the data feed into the response to the question offered and should apply the same level of precision and detail to question 4 or 5.

Section A

Question 1

This question asked students to consider an online newspaper article entitled 'How did Britain get so rude?' from the Daily Express in 2008. This opinion piece evaluated the causes of perceived rudeness in modern society and ways in which this differed from past generations. Most students were confident in discussing the online nature of the article and the technological affordances that come with being online.

Many students used their opening paragraph to orientate themselves into writing about the text. Whilst this is not problematic in itself, it can lead to two issues: students might then neglect to discuss context in the remainder of the response or they might tend towards a more generalised overview. When providing this initial overview, students were perhaps more confident discussing the purpose than the audience. Students worked hard to comment on who was most likely to read the article in terms of age, class and political affiliation whilst recognising that the online nature of the text would potentially broaden the audience. Whilst young people were not the focus of the text itself, many students successfully discussed the choice of modern image with a disrespectful 'youth' gesturing rudely to David Cameron and how this might effectively exclude young people as potential readers of the article, since they were being separated from both the writer and readers of the article as potentially blameworthy.

This text offered scope to take a range of possible approaches. There were some clear analyses seen of the representation of modern society, rudeness, social class, young people, commuters, the negative effect of technology and society in the past. The strongest responses often drew out comparisons between the past and present as well as the perceived perpetrators and victims of the rudeness. Many students were also able to identify the way in which the writer was represented as a voice of authority and the audience positioning that went on throughout. Students often examined the means by which Bryant aligned herself with the reader. This was when students were able to tie in the identification of first person plural pronouns and rhetorical questions with audience positioning. There was also perceptive comment on the effect of descriptive and evaluative adjectives linked to the senses adding to the audience's immersion in the off putting commuting experience.

When labelling language within the text, students were most assured when discussing word classes. Graphology for this question allowed for quite rich comparison of the juxtaposition of the two images with some astute discussion of the representation of disrespect embodied in the young person who was willing to abuse even the (then) prime minister. Students were then also able to align this reading to the assumed audience of the text.

Students seemed aware that analysis needed to move to two language levels or more to move to level 4 for AO1 and there was a clear effort made to do this. Those students who moved to level 5 were often able to identify patterns across the text in terms of semantic fields, lexical choices or grammatical constructions. As with the responses in summer 2017, some students ambitiously focused on more complex grammatical structures and discourse labelling since there was an awareness that this characterised level 5 responses for AO1. Whilst this was sometimes a highly successful approach with quite tightly focused and specific analysis, examiners found that some students had actually hampered the response by inaccurate labelling of these more complex features and an absence of discussion of those features which would have placed the student securely in L3 or L4.

More successful answers:

- Integrated the language labelling with the comments being made about meaning and representation rather than separating feature spotting and context comments.
- Explored grammatical structures in the light of representation (for example, the use of conditional clauses and asyndetic listing to reflect the fast-paced lifestyle or the syntactic parallelism and juxtapositions to demonstrate the contrast between past and present).
- Provided precise labelling of word classes and recognised patterns in use of these across the text as a whole (for example, use of the dynamic verb 'barge' in three separate places and the connotations of this word).
- Identified the shift in attitude through the text, moving from despair about modern society to later realisation that the way in which people behaved in the past was confining, explored really well by those students who analysed the meaning of the adjective 'straightjacketed' towards the end of the text.
- Identified clause types with precision and noted when sentence structures were particularly important in enhancing the meaning. The most popular example of this was 'We've all been there'. This sentence allowed for identification of the simple declarative sentence but also enabled more confident students to discuss the cataphoric reference in the adverb 'there' which encouraged the reader to find out where.
- Could cluster examples to demonstrate patterns across the text (for example semantic patterning) to make comments about representation in the text as a whole.

Question 2

The text for question two was the letter written by Mary Green in response to a previous article about the rudeness of women in modern society. Whilst students were perhaps not familiar with 'The London Evening News', they were usually confident commenting on the letter and the meaning within. The length of this text provided sufficient challenge to students but did not place them under too much pressure by giving them too much data to handle in the time available. The date when this letter was written also seemed to give students confidence to discuss gender roles within early 20th century patriarchy as well as the shifting role of women in the time of social change brought about by World War One.

Again, students often wrote an introductory paragraph to provide an overview of the text. Whilst this approach can sometimes be useful for students, it sometimes leads to quite generalised comment with little focus on language or representation. The audience for this text was sometimes misread with a number of students believing that the letter had a sole recipient rather than being aimed at the wider readership of the publication despite being addressed in letter form to the editor. Whilst this did not cause major issues for the answering of question two, it did go on to cause problems if students discussed audience erroneously when approaching question three.

Stronger responses were able to consider the contrasting representation of different women within this text, realising that the writer considered herself to be a woman of 'gentle breeding' who was set against those rude women within society. These stronger responses were also more likely to recognise the contradiction between the positive early representation of women to the metaphor used to describe all women as cats by the end of the letter. Weaker responses drew attention to the noun phrase 'women of gentle breeding' but were more likely to discuss the connotations of 'breeding' from a more modern perspective. This led to less convincing discussion related to animals on the whole.

More successful answers:

- Were able to consider the language used to describe women in the context of a changing society where women had recently become more active in the workplace and had won the vote.
- Recognised the impact of the phonetic spelling and non-standard English to represent the accent of the conductress in a negative way in the representation of speech (and with a subtext of addressing issues of social class). This was occasionally placed alongside the adverb of manner 'politely' and the standard English used to represent the speech of other women.
- Identified the double irony within the text: first from the conductress suggesting that the passengers were rude and secondly from the writer who concluded the letter by describing women as cats which could also be perceived as rude.
- Identified the characteristics of older language ('bus, conductress, 'I give') and made links to the social context in relation to formality and gender representation.
- Moved beyond discussion of 'complex and compound sentences' to discuss those sentence constructions which added to the representation. For example, the complex sentences in the narrative relating the incident with the conductress were successfully analysed as a representation of the busy, hectic situation. The final simple sentence 'They are right' was cited as an emphatic agreement with the males' perspective which in turn reinforced notions of male dominance.

Question 3

This question asked students to make connections between text A and text B. This was done with varying degrees of success. It was encouraging to see that students rarely considered the two texts in isolation. On occasion, there was a tendency to carry over too much of an AO1 focus to this question, however, labelling language elements that were not pertinent to the comparisons being drawn. It should be remembered that AO4 seeks to reward students for making those links between the texts. It is important that specific examples of language points are referred to but it is not necessary to add surplus language labelling which does not add to the comparison.

A number of students struggled to move beyond the literal comparisons of audience, purpose and genre (typical of level 2) but there were many language connections that students could make about language links which enabled them to move to level 3. These tended to be the use of questions, pronoun use, dynamic verbs and semantic fields. For the latter of these descriptions, more generalised comments sometimes prevented higher achievement if tightly focused examples were not provided. When the analysis and comparison then moved on to develop these comments in relation to context, students were then able to move to level 4.

The strongest responses integrated linguistic comparison with discussion of different representations and social contexts when responding to this task. There were perceptive comparisons of representations of rude people and rude behaviour, drawing many parallels about how this was conveyed through linguistic choices. Some candidates were able to point out that text B ironically undermined the writer's view in text A, that manners and politeness were upheld by past generations. The strongest candidates were able to compare social and historical context and their effects on language use.

Section B

This section of the examination paper offers students a choice between question 4 on spoken language acquisition and question 5 on literacy development. As expected, most candidates chose to answer question 4 and had clearly prepared well for this and demonstrated a good understanding of spoken language theory. Some examiners noted that students responded to question 5 but perhaps did so unexpectedly, since much of the theory cited was related to spoken language acquisition. Whilst there may be occasional crossover (for example through discussion of positive reinforcement), the unquestioning inclusion of only spoken language theory inevitably hampered responses.

When answering either question 4 or 5, there is an equal balance of marks to be distributed across AO1 and AO2. Examiners often felt that the focus on language theory and discussion of concepts surrounding acquisition prevented students from approaching the data with the same focused precision often seen in section A. Additionally, it is worth remembering that the AO1 mark also considers the way in which students were able to shape their responses and guide the reader. It was therefore beneficial when students had planned the response, organised it clearly and made regular reference back to the question throughout. AO2 requires students to link learned concepts to the question being posed and the data set. Sometimes students were unable to move beyond level two for AO2 because the theory made no reference to the question or the statement suggested. Those students who were able to examine theory through the lens of both the statement offered and the data were far more likely to be successful and begin to obtain the higher levels.

Question 4

This year's question presented a transcribed conversation between Theo (aged three) and his grandmother. A conversation takes place as Theo is about to have a bath and the conversation focuses on a number of areas: discussing how much Theo weighs, engaging in some play then discussing the plans for the following day and a broken plug chain. The question asked students to evaluate the statement offered that "the best way to explain children's language development is to focus on what they use it for." For many students, a successful way into the response was to consider Halliday's functions and link this to the examples seen in the data (most noticeably

imaginative and instrumental). Stronger responses then tended to contrast the idea of functional theories with ideas and concepts surrounding social interaction, cognition and innateness, all whilst referring closely to the evidence and ideas emerging from the data.

AO1 was often neglected in weaker responses or limited to labelling of two or three more general language features. More straightforward features identified were questions, prosodic features and repetition and occasionally there were quite generalised comments about how sentences were not precise or accurate (often using Theo's opening question of 'how much am I' as an example of this). Better responses outlined Theo's grammatical errors in detail and considered the discourse features of the conversation with Nana in more detail. Identification of word classes in detail and sentence construction provided scope for students to label language more precisely but in weaker responses this opportunity to include language analysis was often overlooked.

In examining concepts and issues for AO2, students sometimes began by focusing on the familiar Chomsky versus Skinner debate, regardless of its relevance to the data or task. Those students who looked closely at the data before discussing theories often found that an interesting counterpoint to the discussion of functional theory was discussion of Piaget. The cognitive development of Theo in relation to the concept of his weight (and the egocentric nature of his utterances) was an appropriate focus. Vygotsky was also discussed well with many students appreciating the role of a more knowledgeable other to facilitate further language development. It was also encouraging to see a wider range of theorists emerging this year, with consideration of Pinker, Kuhl and Tomasello appearing slightly more often.

More successful answers:

- Linked language labels to theories which were placed into the context of the question. For example, an argument against a focus on use would be Chomsky's innateness theory which was often supported by reference to the virtuous error when Theo uses the regular -ed morpheme for the irregular past tense of 'throwed'. Students rightly pointed out that Theo was unlikely to have heard this but it was perhaps more successful to comment on how the virtuous error suggests a child's efforts to make sense of the grammatical rules to which he is exposed.
- Were able to identify word classes and grammatical structures precisely to exemplify theory or functions. For example, the repeated proper noun 'Scooby Doo', the present tense dynamic verb 'jumps', the evaluative adjective 'nasty' and the use of the passive voice 'broke by the monster' all tie in to the imaginative function for language use.
- Were able to comment precisely on grammatical constructions such as the mitigated imperative 'shall we write one' as well as direct imperatives 'tell me' and 'pull that' (with deixis) to demonstrate the grandmother's dominance within the conversation as the caregiver.
- Selected the theories most relevant to the task and did not labour the description and discussion of less obviously relevant case studies like Papua New Guinea's lack of CDS or Genie.
- Provided precise examples from the data not lengthy utterances. Rather than simply feature spotting, the best responses then made this labelling relevant to the overarching argument or theory being considered.

Question 5

This question offered students two pieces of writing produced by six year old Iris, a letter and a recipe. Most students recognised that the same child had produced both pieces of writing and were able to comment on how she had been able to manipulate her language choices across different genres. When students did not recognise that Iris wrote both pieces, it had a negative impact on the success of the response. Whilst the texts were written for different purposes, they were both written at home.

The question asked students to evaluate the degree to which they agreed that children should develop their accuracy before learning to write for different contexts. Whilst this question was not tackled very often, students were readily able to access the data and made useful comparisons between the two texts in relation to genre and accuracy. Some students made a contrast between accuracy and creativity, which was slightly different from the actual question. In considering how Iris had written both pieces at home, there were some quite subtle discussions about the audience and purpose for the texts and how this might have had an impact on accuracy. Occasionally, relevant discussion emerged about the level of adult support with the tasks but lengthy discussion of this tended to become less helpful and more speculative.

For AO1, students focused primarily on spellings across the two texts, often moving beyond discussion of phonetic strategies to look at omission, overgeneralisation and patterns that Iris might have observed in other words. If students only looked at orthography, then this would prevent a higher mark for AO1 since two language levels needed to be tackled in order to reach level 4. Other successful AO1 approaches looked at the different discourse structures across the two genres, the use of capital letters and punctuation, enumeration, self-correction, precise word class labelling and identification of a simple declarative sentence.

AO2 marks were awarded when students were able to usefully apply theories to the data. This was done more noticeably through application of theories from Kroll, Barclay, Rothery, Gentry and Britton. Other students looked at the nature of the current National Curriculum and considered the home context of Iris's writing in the light of the literacy approach from school. There was sometimes a less relevant focus on learning to talk and read so that lengthy diversions into thinking about these distracted from the main focus of the question on writing development. Occasionally, the debate over accuracy versus different contexts remained more anecdotal, with generalised discussion and little precise reference to theory or the cultural context. This approach usually prevented students from moving beyond level 2.

More successful answers:

- Used both data sets and made comparisons between the two, rather than focusing on just one of the texts.
- Did not get distracted into lengthy description of different stages of writing or spelling development, rather selecting the stage or development to discuss that was most appropriate to the actual data being analysed.
- Recognised patterns across the data, for example noticing that the additional -e suffix appeared across some nouns (bowle, frute) but not others where it might have been expected (cream, spoon) and possible reasons for this.
- Considered the self-correction in data set 3 which was not evident or needed in data set 3, making links between these approaches and the audience and purpose for the two texts.

- Considered the genre conventions of letters and recipes and the degree to which discourse is altered accordingly.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.