1.3 Language: Language Change and Diversity

AQA 7702 · about 145 minutes · Write-in edition

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / _____

Answer ALL questions.

Two Voices, Two Eras: An Original Transcript and Diary Pastiche

Source written for Revision Library (original, copyright-free). Text A is an invented transcript of spoken regional/social dialect composed specifically for A-level English Language study; it does not represent a real recording or real people. Text B is an original pastiche composed in the style of mid-nineteenth-century prose to illustrate historical semantic change; it is not a reproduction of, or extract from, any real historical document. Lines in Text A are numbered for ease of reference in the questions that follow.

TEXT A: Spoken transcript (spoken mode, informal register, unplanned)

Transcript of an informal conversation between two Year 13 students, Aisha and Connor, recorded with permission in a sixth-form common room in Bolton, Greater Manchester, on the morning of a mock examination, March 2026.

Key: (.) = a micro-pause of under one second; [square brackets] = a paralinguistic feature.

1. Aisha: eh up (.) y'oreyt (.) you look proper knackered

2. Connor: aye (.) been revisin' till two (.) me mam kept mitherin' us to go to bed

3. Aisha: mitherin' (.) ha (.) me nan says that an' all (.) where's our kid gone (.) is he still in bed

4. Connor: yeah he's proper lazy our kid (.) he'll not shift for owt

5. Aisha: tell him get up (.) we're supposed to be meetin' Chelsea at the bus stop for half nine

6. Connor: he'll not listen to me (.) listens to no one that lad

7. Aisha: honestly he's mad in't he

8. Connor: [laughs] mad for it he is (.) anyway (.) you sorted for the exam (.) I'm dead worried about the change unit

9. Aisha: nah it's sound that bit (.) it's the diversity data response that does me in

10. Connor: we'll be reyt (.) we've done nowt but revise all week

TEXT B: Personal diary extract (written mode, formal register, historical pastiche)

An extract from a fictional personal diary, composed in the style of mid-nineteenth-century English prose. (Original text written for Revision Library; it is a pastiche and does not reproduce any historical document.) The diarist, a young gentlewoman, describes an evening spent at her aunt's house.

3rd April, 1852.

My aunt dined with us this evening, grown monstrous nice in her tastes, and would touch no meat upon the table save a little dressed veal, though there was cheese and bread and fruit enough to call a feast. My cousin's girl, ten summers old, sat close by her brother, a girl of six himself in our old nurse's tongue, who names every small child so, be it boy or maid. The child told of a hare, quick in the meadow not an hour since, brought down by the hounds before our very eyes, and my aunt named the sight an awful one, crossing herself as though she had witnessed something not of this earth. Mr. Hartley called after supper, silly with love for my cousin as any man I ever saw, meek and blessed in his devotion, and nothing did let him from speaking his mind, though he near starved himself with waiting these six months for her answer.

1 Compare Text A and Text B. In your answer, consider how mode, purpose, audience and historical or social context shape the way each text constructs meaning. Refer closely to language features from both texts.

(Total for Question 1 is 14 marks)

2 Explain, using examples from your wider study of language change, three reasons why the English language changes over time (for example: technological development, language contact, social/cultural change, economy of effort).

(Total for Question 2 is 10 marks)

3 'Language is always evolving; only the ignorant confuse change with decay.'
Using your linguistic knowledge, discuss this view of language change. In your answer, refer to prescriptivist and descriptivist attitudes and to named commentators (for example Lynne Truss, Jean Aitchison or David Crystal).

(Total for Question 3 is 20 marks)

4 'Language change is driven more by speakers' need to express identity than by any need for greater communicative efficiency.'

To what extent do you agree? Draw on your knowledge of both language change and language diversity in your answer, using examples from Text A, Text B and your wider study.

(Total for Question 4 is 20 marks)

5 Refer again to Text A. Analyse the pragmatic and discourse features of Aisha and Connor's conversation that create an informal, solidary conversational style. Consider features such as turn-taking, minimal responses, hedges, phatic talk and politeness strategies.

(Total for Question 5 is 10 marks)

6 Evaluate Jean Aitchison's 'damp spoon', 'crumbling castle' and 'infectious disease' images as ways of characterising prescriptivist attitudes to language change. Which, if any, do you find most convincing, and why?

(Total for Question 6 is 12 marks)

7 'Standard English is only one variety among many equally valid varieties, yet it enjoys unique institutional status.'

Discuss this statement, referring to relevant linguistic theories and named linguists (for example Peter Trudgill, or James and Lesley Milroy).

(Total for Question 7 is 20 marks)

8 Evaluate the claim that digital communication technology is 'corrupting' the English language. Use your own examples of netspeak features (for example abbreviation, emoji, non-standard punctuation) and refer to David Crystal's views on language and technology.

(Total for Question 8 is 16 marks)

Mark scheme · 1.3 Language: Language Change and Diversity

Question 1

Level 1 Simple, mostly unsupported comparison; texts largely treated separately with minimal reference to context. **1-3**

Level 2 Some relevant comparative points with basic terminology; some awareness of mode/context but underdeveloped. **4-6**

Level 3 Clear comparison of language features across both texts, using accurate terminology; sound understanding of how mode, purpose and context shape each text. **7-9**

Level 4 Detailed, well-supported comparison integrating multiple frameworks (lexis, grammar, discourse, graphology); perceptive discussion of contextual factors, including historical distance in Text B and spoken informality in Text A. **10-12**

Level 5 Sophisticated, tightly argued comparison; subtle and original connections drawn between the texts' language choices and their contexts; confident, precise use of terminology throughout. **13-14**

Indicative content:

- Mode: Text A is a transcript of spontaneous speech (features of spoken mode: non-fluency, minimal responses, phonological/eye-dialect spelling, informal discourse markers); Text B is a planned, written, first-person narrative in a formal register appropriate to the diary genre
- Purpose/audience: Text A has no real intended audience beyond the interlocutors (private, phatic talk between peers); Text B is a private diary, but its formal, controlled prose reflects the writing conventions expected of an educated Victorian gentlewoman
- Historical/social context: Text B's semantic archaisms (nice, meat, awful, silly, girl, quick, let, starve) reflect nineteenth-century usage and social class markers (references to servants, formal address 'Mr Hartley'); Text A's regional dialect features reflect twenty-first-century Northern English social/regional identity
- Both texts can be read through a diversity/change lens: Text A shows synchronic variation (regional/social dialect), Text B shows diachronic variation (historical semantic change), and comparison can draw out how identity is constructed differently through non-standard spoken forms versus period-appropriate written register
- Candidates may reference relevant theory (e.g. Halliday's field/tenor/mode framework, or Biber's dimensions of variation) to structure the comparison

Question 2

Level 1 One reason given with minimal or no example. **1-2**

Level 2 One or two reasons explained with limited exemplification. **3-4**

Level 3 Three reasons identified with some relevant exemplification and appropriate terminology. **5-6**

Level 4 Three reasons clearly explained with well-chosen, specific examples; secure understanding of why and how each mechanism causes change. **7-8**

Level 5 Three reasons explained in detail with precise, varied examples; sophisticated understanding of the interaction between reasons for change (e.g. technology driving both lexical and pragmatic change), possibly with reference to named commentators. **9-10**

Indicative content:

- Technological development: new inventions require new words, created by neologism, compounding, blending or semantic shift (e.g. 'to google', 'selfie', 'emoji'); digital communication also drives pragmatic/grammatical change (abbreviation, non-standard punctuation in texting)
- Language contact/borrowing: contact with other languages through trade, migration and globalisation introduces loanwords (e.g. borrowings from South Asian languages into British English such as 'bungalow', 'shampoo')
- Social/cultural change: shifts in attitudes (e.g. towards gender, class or ethnicity) drive semantic change and the coining or avoidance of certain terms; social prestige can cause some forms to spread and others to become obsolete
- Economy of effort: speakers favour forms that are quicker or easier to produce, leading to processes such as clipping ('exam' from 'examination'), contraction and elision
- Candidates may cite David Crystal's view that change is a natural and inevitable consequence of language being used, not a sign of decline

Question 3

Level 1 Simple, general assertions about language change with little or no linguistic terminology or named reference; largely one-sided. **1-4**

Level 2 Some relevant points about prescriptivism/descriptivism with basic terminology; limited development or support; may lack balance. **5-8**

Level 3 Clear discussion of both prescriptivist and descriptivist positions, supported by at least one named commentator and some relevant examples; reasonably balanced argument with a stated conclusion. **9-12**

Level 4 Detailed, well-structured discussion integrating multiple named commentators/theories (e.g. Aitchison's metaphors, Crystal's views on netspeak, Truss's prescriptivism) with precise examples; balanced, well-supported evaluation. **13-16**

Level 5 Sophisticated, wide-ranging and tightly argued discussion; confident synthesis of theory and example; original, well-substantiated evaluative conclusion showing critical awareness of the ideological basis of prescriptivist and descriptivist positions. **17-20**

Indicative content:

- Prescriptivist attitudes (e.g. Lynne Truss in 'Eats, Shoots and Leaves') view change as decline from a 'correct' or 'pure' form of English, often citing declining standards in punctuation, grammar or spelling
- Descriptivist linguists (e.g. David Crystal, Jean Aitchison) argue that change is a natural, inevitable and value-neutral process; all living languages change, and change does not equal decay
- Aitchison's 'damp spoon', 'crumbling castle' and 'infectious disease' images characterise, and critique, common prescriptivist metaphors for change
- Candidates might discuss specific examples of change (e.g. semantic shift in Text B's vocabulary, or netspeak abbreviations) to test the 'decay' claim
- Evaluation might note that judgements of 'correctness' are socially constructed and tied to standard language ideology, prestige and power rather than objective linguistic decline
- A convincing answer weighs both positions and reaches a substantiated conclusion, for example that concerns about change often reflect social anxiety rather than genuine linguistic evidence of decline

Question 4

Level 0 Nothing worthy of credit. **0**

Level 1 Simple, largely one-sided assertion about identity or efficiency, with little or no reference to the texts or wider study; terminology absent or inaccurate. **1-4**

Level 2 Some relevant points, with limited synthesis of language change and diversity; basic terminology and occasional textual reference. **5-8**

Level 3 Clear argument integrating both change and diversity with relevant examples from at least one text and some named theory; accurate terminology. **9-12**

Level 4 Detailed, well-integrated argument across change and diversity, with multiple named theories/examples from both texts and wider study; balanced, well-supported evaluation. **13-16**

Level 5 Sophisticated, original, tightly argued synthesis of language change and diversity theory; sustained, precise use of textual and wider examples; confident, well-substantiated overall judgement. **17-20**

Indicative content:

- Identity-driven change: dialect features in Text A (e.g. 'our kid', 'mitherin") persist and are maintained because they signal regional/social belonging and covert prestige (Trudgill), even where a 'more efficient' standard alternative exists
- Efficiency-driven change: processes such as clipping, contraction, economy of effort and technological neologism (see Q2) suggest some change is motivated by ease of production/processing rather than identity
- Semantic change in Text B (e.g. narrowing of 'meat', 'starve') may be better explained by cognitive/communicative factors, such as the need for precision or avoiding ambiguity, than by identity
- Sociolinguistic theory (e.g. Labov's studies of Martha's Vineyard, or Milroy's social network theory) supports the view that identity and group affiliation are powerful motivators of both maintaining non-standard forms and adopting innovations
- A sophisticated answer will argue that identity and efficiency are not mutually exclusive, and that most real change involves an interaction of social/identity motivations with cognitive/communicative pressures, varying by context and level of language (lexis versus grammar versus phonology)
- Best answers reach an original, well-substantiated overall judgement rather than simply listing examples on both sides

Question 5

Level 1 Basic identification of one discourse feature with little terminology. **1-2**

Level 2 Some relevant features identified with basic terminology; limited analysis of effect. **3-4**

Level 3 Clear analysis of several pragmatic/discourse features using accurate terminology, linked to informality and solidarity. **5-6**

Level 4 Detailed analysis of a range of features with precise terminology, well supported by the text; secure understanding of politeness and solidarity. **7-8**

Level 5 Sophisticated, tightly argued analysis integrating pragmatic theory (e.g. positive politeness, phatic communion) with close textual reference throughout. **9-10**

Indicative content:

- Adjacency pairs and smooth turn-taking (question-answer exchanges, lines 3-4 and 8-9) suggest a comfortable, established relationship between the two speakers
- Minimal responses and back-channelling ('aye', 'yeah') support the listener role and signal engagement without taking the floor
- Phatic talk and shared in-group references ('our kid', 'me mam') build solidarity and rapport, consistent with Brown and Levinson's positive politeness strategies (claiming common ground, using in-group markers)
- Hedging and informal intensifiers ('proper knackered', 'dead worried') soften or emphasise statements in a way typical of casual spoken interaction
- Laughter and humour (line 8, 'mad for it he is') function as solidarity markers, reducing social distance between speakers
- Overall the discourse constructs an equal, informal power relationship appropriate to peers of the same age and social group

Question 6

Level 1 Simple description of one image with little evaluation. **1-3**

Level 2 Two or three images outlined with basic evaluative comment. **4-6**

Level 3 Clear evaluation of all three images with relevant examples and reasoned judgement. **7-9**

Level 4 Detailed, perceptive evaluation of all three images, using precise terminology and well-chosen examples; confident, well-justified personal conclusion about their usefulness and limitations. **10-12**

Indicative content:

- 'Damp spoon': the idea that some usages are simply 'distasteful' rather than wrong, comparable to a damp spoon dipped in the sugar bowl; criticised as based on personal taste rather than linguistic evidence
- 'Crumbling castle': the view that English was once a magnificent structure now falling into disrepair and needing protection; criticised because it assumes a mythical 'perfect' past state of the language that never existed
- 'Infectious disease': the idea that new usages spread like a disease, 'infecting' careful speakers; criticised as dehumanising ordinary language users and ignoring that all speakers innovate
- Aitchison uses all three images to characterise, and ultimately reject, prescriptivist thinking, arguing instead for a descriptivist view in which change reflects the normal, ongoing evolution of a living system
- Evaluation might draw on examples from Text B (semantic change) or wider knowledge (e.g. attitudes to netspeak) to test whether any image accurately reflects how change actually happens
- A strong answer reaches a supported judgement, for example that the images are rhetorically effective for critiquing prescriptivism but oversimplify the complex social motivations behind attitudes to change

Question 7

Level 1 Simple, general assertions about Standard English with little or no linguistic terminology or named reference; largely one-sided. **1-4**

Level 2 Some relevant points with basic terminology; limited development or support; may lack balance. **5-8**

Level 3 Clear discussion supported by at least one named theory/linguist and some relevant examples; reasonably balanced argument with a stated conclusion. **9-12**

Level 4 Detailed, well-structured discussion integrating multiple named theories/linguists with precise examples; balanced, well-supported evaluation of linguistic versus social/institutional status. **13-16**

Level 5 Sophisticated, wide-ranging and tightly argued discussion; confident synthesis of theory and example; original, well-substantiated evaluative conclusion. **17-20**

Indicative content:

- Standard English is a dialect like any other in terms of its grammar and lexis; linguistically, no dialect is inherently superior (Trudgill's argument that all dialects are equally complex and rule-governed)
- Standard English's unique status derives from social, historical and institutional factors, not linguistic ones: its codification (dictionaries, grammars), use in education, government, law and the media, and its association with power and prestige
- The Milroys' concept of 'standard language ideology' and the 'complaint tradition' describe how society constructs and defends a 'correct' form despite its arbitrary historical origins, based on the East Midlands dialect used in London and at court
- Counter-view: some linguists argue Standard English is necessary as a shared, mutually intelligible variety for formal communication, education and international use
- Reference to Text A's regional dialect could be used as evidence that non-standard varieties are fully systematic and expressive, supporting the 'equally valid' claim
- A well-argued answer evaluates both the linguistic equality of dialects and the real-world social/institutional power of Standard English, reaching a substantiated conclusion

Question 8

Level 1 Simple assertion with little or no exemplification. **1-4**

Level 2 Some relevant points with basic examples; limited development. **5-8**

Level 3 Clear evaluation with relevant examples and named reference; sound, reasonably balanced argument. **9-12**

Level 4 Detailed, well-substantiated evaluation with precise examples and sophisticated argument; strong, well-justified conclusion. **13-16**

Indicative content:

- Popular claim: netspeak features such as abbreviations ('lol', 'brb'), emoji and non-standard punctuation are evidence of declining literacy and 'lazy' language use, echoing prescriptivist 'crumbling castle' concerns
- David Crystal's counter-argument (e.g. in 'Txtng: the Gr8 Db8') that netspeak is a highly creative, rule-governed register drawing on established processes of change (clipping, initialism, rebus/homophone spellings) that does not damage users' command of Standard English elsewhere
- Evidence that many netspeak features (e.g. emoji) serve pragmatic functions lost in text, such as signalling tone, replacing paralinguistic cues like facial expression or intonation
- Consideration of register/context: netspeak is typically used in informal digital modes and does not necessarily transfer to formal writing, so it may not represent 'corruption' of the language as a whole
- Candidates may draw a parallel with Text A, where non-standard spoken forms are equally rule-governed and context-appropriate rather than evidence of decline
- A strong answer reaches a balanced, well-supported conclusion, weighing the social anxiety behind the 'corruption' claim against linguistic evidence of netspeak's systematic nature