2015 VCE English Language examination report

General comments

The 2015 English Language examination consisted of three sections. Section A had four questions and was worth a total of 15 marks. Section B, an analytical commentary, had one question worth a total of 30 marks. Students could choose one of three essay topics in Section C, which was worth 30 marks. There was one text in Section A and one text in Section B. Text 1, in Section A, was a notice from the Classifieds section of a newspaper, consisting of 46 lines of text. Text 2, in Section B, was a transcript of a comedy routine, consisting of 99 intonation units.

Section A was completed reasonably well, but a number of students did not read or interpret the questions correctly. Students confused sentence types with sentence structures (Question 1), and were unable to use correct metalanguage to describe the functions of modal auxiliary verbs (Question 2). Many students failed to notice that Question 3 was about 'fields' or 'domains' and instead simply focused on lexical choice. Many students knew a lot about coherence (Question 4) but did not support their answers with analysis and examples from the text.

Section B required students to write an analytical commentary, and students demonstrated confidence in this particular writing skill. Students were clearly aware of the need to establish the context, social purpose and register, and most managed to cover these features in an introductory paragraph. It is critical, however, to recognise which stylistic and discourse features to prioritise in an analytical commentary: in a spoken text such as this, prosodic features, topic management and conversation strategies are of the utmost importance. Some students focused on language features that had less importance to this particular text (for example, anaphoric reference, contractions), and failed to analyse how the language reflected the relationship between the participants. Many students addressed language features from throughout the entire transcript, and not simply from one or two sections.

Section C required students to choose one of three essay topics. Question 7 was the most popular, followed by Question 8, then Question 6. Generally, most responses were well structured and adhered to essay-writing conventions (introduction, body paragraphs, conclusion). Many students referred not only to the stimulus material provided, but also to contemporary examples and recent events. Many students were obviously familiar with current issues concerning the use of language and drew on examples from politics, social media and their own linguistic environment to support their discussion. Students must be wary, however, of reproducing essays on similar topics they've written during the year; it is vital to read the stipulated essay question carefully and answer appropriately, paying attention to key words and referring to at least two subsystems in their response.

Advice to students

- This study requires a sound knowledge of grammar. Students must familiarise themselves with all aspects of metalanguage and grammar from the study design and practise answering

short-answer questions similar to those typically found in Section A of the exam. Section A often reveals students' lack of grammatical and linguistic knowledge.

- Students must engage with the texts in Sections A and B – in other words, their answers to questions and their analytical commentaries should reflect the content of those particular texts, and should not simply be generic statements that could apply to any text of a similar nature.
- Students should pay attention to the mark allocation in Section A and use this as a guide as to how much detail to include. Students should provide more detailed, thorough responses for questions with higher mark allocations.
- The careful reading of a question, or essay topic, is vital if a student is to attain high marks. Many students missed out on marks for Section A, Question 3, not through lack of knowledge, but through careless reading of the question. In Section C, students must ensure that their essay responses are relevant and on-topic.
- In Section B, it is important to ascertain which stylistic and discourse features to focus on, since it is impossible to address everything. Prosodic features and conversational strategies should always be addressed in any commentary on a spoken transcript.
- Students should not write their essays based purely on the stimulus material provided. The stimulus must be referred to in some way in the essay, but writing a paragraph on each of the stimulus prompts and nothing else is to be discouraged.

Specific information

Note: Student responses reproduced in this report have not been corrected for grammar, spelling or factual information.
This report provides sample answers or an indication of what answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

Section A – Short-answer questions

This section consisted of Text 1 – a notice from the Classifieds section of Leader Newspapers, regarding how to place an advertisement in their newspaper.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	8	26	30	35	2

A number of students failed to read the question carefully. The question required students to refer to more than one sentence type, and many students confused sentence types (for example, declarative) with sentence structures (for example, simple). Similarly, the reference to 'purposes' in the question implied that there was more than one purpose of the text. For clarity, and to be awarded full marks, students needed to identify the two sentence types (using line numbers or by quoting from the text) as declarative and imperative, and state how these reinforced the purposes of the text. Simply saying that the purposes were 'to inform' or 'to instruct' was insufficient; students needed to engage with the text and expand on these very generic responses.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

> *Declarative sentences, such as 'Publisher has … any purpose' (lines 27-9), are mostly used, although some imperative sentences, such as 'Please refer … Credit Policy' (line 36) are also used. The declarative sentences are used to convey large amounts of information to the reader, reinforcing the*

text's function of informing about the placement of advertisements. On the other hand, the imperative sentences are used to instruct the reader to undergo various actions, which reflects both the text's function of instructing how to place an advertisement and the text's social purpose of communicating a sense of authority and expertise.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	8	21	33	38	**2**

Students were required to use metalanguage to explain the functions of 'may' (lines 22, 24 and 41) and 'must' (line 30). 'Modal auxiliary', 'modal verb' or 'auxiliary verb' were suitable terms to use in this instance. The functions of these modals differed – 'may' indicated possibility on the part of the publisher, whereas 'must' indicated obligation on the part of the advertiser. For full marks, students needed to explain these functions fully by referring to the text.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

The modal verb 'may' (22, 24, 41) highlights a possibility or opportunity for the publisher to, for example, 'refuse to publish or distribute any advertisement'. These are typically found in legal documents and highlights any possibilities that could occur to the reader's advertisement. The modal verb 'must' (30) indicates an obligation by the reader to 'comply' with terms and conditions. This adds to the authoritative tone and is typically found in legalistic documents.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	27	14	20	19	20	**1.9**

This question was not answered well by students, as many failed to recognise the need to identify the various fields (domains) of the text, and instead focused on lexical choice. Once again, it is critical that students read questions carefully and ensure that they are aware of the key words of the question. There were various fields/domains represented in this text:

- Advertising: for example, targeted advertising (line 39), advertisement (lines 21, 23, etc.), campaign (line 24)
- Business: credit facility (line 35), goods and services (lines 41 and 42), Credit Policy (line 36)
- Publishing: publish (line 23), Publisher (line 22), republish (line 28), deadline (line 20), publication (line 33), print, electronic or digital form (line 29)
- Law: Privacy Policy (line 37), disclosure (line 38), breach (line 44), Australian Privacy Principles (line 44), terms and conditions (line 34), right (line 28).

Some students also referred to smaller domains such as 'contact methods' or 'times and days', and these were acceptable. Many students wrote about lexical choice and quoted from the text, but were unable to group any of these examples under particular fields/domains.

It is also critical that students provide more detailed responses for questions such as this (worth four marks). To attain full marks, they needed to explain how the lexical choices reflected at least two different fields, and they needed to use metalanguage in their answer.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

Legalistic jargon is found in 'terms and conditions' (31), 'discretion' (27) and 'Policy' (36) reflect the referential and legalistic nature of the text. This fits the context as such a document can be held against the company by law at any given time. Furthermore the use of nominalisation in 'consultation' (27) and 'correction' (43) also highlight the legal domain. The semantic field of newspapers is reflected through the use of newspaper related jargons as seen in 'publication' (20) and 'Publisher' (22). These coherently

maintain the topic of 'how to place an advertisement' in a newspaper. The online domain of the text is seen through the presence of links such as 'http:// new …' (32) and 'www.news …' (46).

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	9	12	21	25	20	12	**2.7**

This question was worth five marks, and as such, required much more than simply listing features of coherence, which many students did. Students were required to analyse the features that made the text coherent, and once again, generic answers were insufficient. The higher-scoring responses quoted from the text and demonstrated how particular features contributed to making this text coherent. At least two features needed to be discussed, and they needed to be supported with appropriate and accurate metalanguage.

Such features included:

- The formatting of information: lines 1–14 (listing in incomplete sentences/point form) and the use of a heading (lines 1 and 2) and subheadings (lines 3, 10, 15, 17, etc.) all printed in bold type.
- Logical ordering of the text (referring to the contexts of the paragraphs and why the order is logical).
- Consistency: repetition of lexical choices consistent with domains/fields; syntactic choices, such as legal terminology and constructions (lines 22, 24, 26).
- Cohesive devices: anaphoric references, repetition, collocations, conjunctions.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response.

The text is largely coherent, as it is contributed to by the discourse features. For instance, the formatting is clear, concise and conventional and allows the text to be read and understood easily. For example, the bolded text, such as the proper noun phrase 'Privacy Policy' (line 37) and adverbial 'To place a Classified advertisement' (line 3), clearly identify the subject of the following paragraphs. Additionally, the concise layout of the contact details (lines 4-9) also easy comprehension of the information. Another discourse feature present which aids coherence is that of logical order. With general information and contact details first, the text then describes more in-depth topics such as the 'advertising terms and conditions' (lines 21-31). This logical ordering means that the more important information is revealed first, with the more specialised information later for those who choose to continue reading.

Section B – Analytical commentary

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	1	0	1	1	3	4	8	10	14	16	15	12	8	5	2	1	**8.9**

The text was a transcript of an aspiring stand-up comedian, John, trying out a potential routine with his friends, Maria and Peter. John's routine involved the story of his marriage proposal to his fiancée, Kellie, and his social purpose was to seek affirmation and feedback from his friends on the appropriateness and humour of his routine. Peter and Maria's social purpose was to provide feedback and support.

Features of the text included:

- the close social distance between the friends, and how this was reflected in the text through language choices and conversational strategies

- the informal register of the text, demonstrated through colloquial language choices and the humour deriving from the anecdote
- the possibility of John's routine being semi-rehearsed or at least thought through in advance
- the different roles of the interlocutors: Maria's being one of support for John's routine and also his emotional situation; Peter's being more of a cynic, his 'heckling' suggestive of the close relationship he shares with John, where no offence is taken; and John's role as the dominant speaker, allowing his friends to interrupt and offer feedback throughout
- the prosodic features and their role in not only shaping the discourse, but reflecting the speakers' emotional states and their reactions to events
- the cooperative turn-taking, and the use of interrogative tags, interrogative sentences and back-channelling
- the vocal effects such as laughter and intakes of breath, and the elision, assimilation and vowel reduction in many words
- the semantic field of engagements/marriage/romance
- the cultural references and Australian context – 'wedgie', 'barbie' (diminutives), reference to Shepparton and 'flatmates' – and the values surrounding marriage proposals and asking permission from parents.

Many students wrote extensively on the text and provided a good discussion of the social purpose, context and register. They successfully identified a number of stylistic and discourse features for analysis, although not always the most important ones (such as prosodics and conversational strategies). A good number of students addressed the full length of the transcript and the different topic changes, demonstrating an understanding of how a comedian might deliver a narrative to an audience.

However, students are reminded to:
- note carefully the aspects of the situational context. Some students mistakenly thought this was a performance in a club, even though this was not stipulated in the contextual information
- try to address the different sections of the text rather than focus on just one section
- establish which stylistic and discourse features are most relevant for analysis. In a relatively spontaneous dialogue such as this, it was not appropriate to discuss sentence structures, for instance. A number of students spent too long on syntax and cohesion/coherence when it would have been preferable to discuss prosodic features and conversational strategies. The mode of the text is a crucial factor in determining pertinent linguistic features
- avoid paraphrasing the text. Instead, they need to closely analyse key linguistic features and link them to the social purpose, context and register
- engage fully with the text by referring to the interlocutors by name (or initial), rather than referring to them as 'the speakers'. A number of students wrote in a very generic way about the 'interlocutors' or the 'speakers', without ever stipulating their identity. Similarly, when discussing prosodic features, students should analyse the effect of particular features in specific sections of the text, referring to line numbers. Some students made general or generic statements based on their capacity to read a transcription key, rather than looking at how prosody played out in particular parts of the text. Constantly referring to 'the speakers' also does not show engagement with the text; students need to show that they know who the interlocutors are and their roles in the discourse.

The following is an example of a high-scoring analytical commentary.

The informal spoken conversation is between John, an aspiring comedian, and his two friends Maria and Peter. With the field of marriage, the conversation's function is to test out a new comedy routine of John's and also to tell a humorous narrative to his friends. The social purposes are to build rapport between the interlocutors and also to promote their friendship and in-group membership. John holds the floor for the

majority of the conversation, where his identity as a comedian and story-teller mean he holds the most power. However, Maria and Peter still hold power as John's friends and peers.

The register of the conversation is largely informal, although some features of formal language are also present. The informality is reflected by the use of casual and colloquial lexis. For instance, the noun 'barbie' (line 62), the informal Australian suffixation of 'barbecue', the idiomatic metaphor 'cutting it a bit fine' (line 16) and the Australian informal suffixation of 'old people', 'oldies' (line 14), all contribute to the text's informality. Additionally, the regularity of John's use of discourse particles, such as 'well' (lines 6, 17, 61, 71) and 'like' (lines 7, 50) also contribute to the conversation informality. However there are still some aspects of the conversation that reflect a more formal tone, such as the noun phrases 'subject matter' (line 97) and 'helicopter flight' (line 49). Despite these features, the conversation is largely informal.

The function of the conversation is for John to retell a humorous account of his engagement to his fiancé and to test out some new comedic material. The retelling function is reflected by the frequency of declarative sentences, such as 'So I … got home' (line 34) and 'He doesn't … from me' (line 95), which allow information to be convey between the interlocuters. This function is also reflected by John's successful holding of the floor. This is contributed to by the pause filler 'um' (line 1), and the introductory discourse particle 'well' (line 17, 61) and 'so' (line 34). The function of testing out new comedic material is reflected by the humour of the text, such as the ironic 'not particularly friendly' (line 31) referring to an aggressive canine. These linguistic features reflect both functions of the conversation.

All of the interlocuters in the conversation are firm friends and throughout the exchange they build rapport with one another and promote their in-group membership. Whilst John is the main story-teller in the conversation, Maria and Peter still interject with relevant sentences to build rapport and show they are listening and respecting him. For instance, the interjection 'how romantic' (line 80), with a crescendo for emphasis, reflects Maria's engagement in the story and Peter's interrogative tag 'aren't we?' (line 16) showing his respect for John. Similarly, the promotion of a sense of in-group membership is supported by the high level of inference throughout the text. For example, Maria and Peter both understand the referant of John's pronouns 'we' (line 3) and 'her' (lines 7, 10, 14). Similarly, Peter's inference that the drink should be 'strong' (line 38) is a demonstration of the common understanding between the interlocuters, as all can relate the consumption of strong alcohol to the nervous situation of John's. As illustrated, throughout the text, the participants build rapport and promote their in-group membership.

Whilst John holds the most power in the interlocuters' relationship, the other participants in the conversation still hold some power. This is reflected by John's regular use of interrogative sentences, such as 'would you … got engaged?' (lines 2-3) and 'whad'ya think?' (line 89) which are used to involve the other interlocuters and show that John values their input and opinion. Similarly the cooperative overlapping speech 'but she said yes/ I'm not surprised' (lines 82-3) demonstrates the casual and informal relationship between the interlocuters. Another illustration of this is Peter's ironic but affectionate sobriquet for John, 'our resident comedian' (line 88), which also reflects the intimate friendship between the speakers.

Section C – Essay

Question chosen	none	6	7	8
%	1	19	44	36

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	1	0	1	2	3	6	8	10	14	15	12	10	8	6	3	1	8.7

High-scoring students:

- kept to the topic and referred to some of the stimulus material
- wrote well-structured essays, with an introduction, body paragraphs and a conclusion
- included contemporary examples from 2015 media

- used metalanguage accurately and referred to at least two subsystems
- managed their time effectively and wrote a complete essay.

Question 6

Relevant topics included:

- the relevance of the written and spoken modes in society today
- the fact that register, shaped by context and setting, plays a role in determining the relevance of spoken and written language
- the increasing use of social media, leading to more relaxed and flexible approaches to communication
- the relevance of traditional modes of communication in certain contexts (for example, condolences, formal invitations, speeches and eulogies)
- the importance of context in determining informality or formality
- the reduction of formality in contemporary society (appearance, terms of address, attitudes to profanity, etc.) is reflected in speaking and writing
- the wider engagement and debate at a community level; national and international conversations and petitions.

Question 6 essentially required students to discuss whether there was a place for both modes of language – that is, written and spoken – in Australia today. However, many students wrote essays purely on the blurring of the modes, and they failed to recognise that digital communication is not a mode: it is a medium of communication that uses the written mode. High-scoring essays argued that the written mode is actually utilised very much in society today – it's just that we are not confined to traditional writing methods and that digital communication (texts, blogs, tweets, Facebook, tumblr, etc.) allows us to reach more people more efficiently.

The following is an example of a mid- to high-scoring response.

As technology develops in its own right as a mode of communication, it continues to bind spoken and written communication like never before. As e-communication becomes more popularised, it creates something of a written / spoken hybrid, but even in a modern technological society, written and spoken language remain important in different ways.

Written language retains its need and significance because it holds prestige within society. It embodies official, codified language that cannot be emulated by spoken word. It is given overt prestige in society because it is typically more formal, more deliberately constructed and adheres more closely to the standard. It is viewed as the 'official way' of doing things. In educational institutions, textbooks are the primary source of information for a topic, and written exams like this one are viewed as the most appropriate way to formally assess a student's knowledge. Law is written, terms and conditions are written, and they are very deliberately done so because their function cannot be met in speech. Written legal documents are carefully constructed and created just enough anonymity to place responsibility on the desired party through things like passive voice or nominalisation. Attempts to increase social distance are so much more effective in writing because there is no entity with which to associate the written word. Because its prestige, written language remains necessary for the successful functioning of our society. Written articles or reports reduce the inaccuracy of hearsay or embellishment. Less formal examples like letter-writing, while significantly less common than they were, remain 'infinitely preferable' in the correct contexts, such as 'extending a formal invitation, when thanking a host for hospitality, when congratulating someone or wishing them well.' In these cases, writing can help meet someone's negative face needs, and mark respect. Because of its codification and prestige, written language remains integral to our society.

Where written language is formal and constructed, the spoken language survives for all the opposite reasons. The immediate feedback and paralinguistics of spoken interactions are a primary way that humans develop social relationships and establish both group and individual identity. For example, Australians are united oftentimes by the way that they sound. While, in such a diverse society, it is near impossible to identify a singular 'Australian voice', the way many Australians sound, or groups within

Australia, is 'verbal signage that we all belong to the same mob' (Burridge). It encapsulates our national values of egalitarianism and the fair-go attitude. The use of diminutives like 'ambo' (ambulence), 'barbie' (barbecue) or 'garbo' (garbage collector) reflect this national identity. Slang words like 'bingle' (car accident), 'mate' (friend) or 'sheila' (woman) unite us through our shared understanding. The Australian accent remains a significant part of our national identity, with its elongation and diphthongs, and remains the primary way that we market ourselves to the outside world. All these act as a 'marker of identity' (Crystal) and they are all continuing trends that formed solely from the need for the spoken word, the way we express ourselves and connect with others, a need intrinsic to our survival – it's not going anywhere.

Finally though, the development of technology means that the lines between written and spoken language are blurring. An IM, email or text is neither like a letter or a conversation. It's 'neither exactly like speech nor exactly like writing' (Crystal). It is something of a hybrid that has developed as technology has. E-communication saw the creation of morphological compounds like 'b4' (before) or 'l8tr' (later) (stimulus C) which experimented with language in ways never before seen in either of the traditional modes. Sites like Twitter, or early text messaging, implemented character limits, meaning that people are forced to be succinct in a way not seen in traditional writing of the past. The creation of sites like YouTube and applications like Skype or MSN video Chat then melded the written language of IM and the spoken conversation and since then, in e-communication, the two are virtually indistinguishable. Ways have developed of conveying emotion over IM, which in the past was a large setback of messaging. In Facebook messenger, participants can send emoticons, pictures, 'stickers' (which are like emoticons but with more detail), GIF images (animated images) and voice messages. In Snapchat, pictures are accompanied by text to explain the image. In these ways, instant communication crosses the boundaries that the two modes on their own could not. Emails are now considered quite formal and have in many ways replaced letters, such as for enquiries or job applications. And as technology continues to evolve, the boundaries between these two primary modes begin to fade. Where writing was once formal almost exclusively, a text with 'in-jokes, abbreviations, and vernacular are all ways in which we signify the nature of our relationship' with others. Identity can be established online, in the form of a profile, and we can present ourselves any way we like. Slang from the internet is frequently adopted into spoken language, like 'bae' (a term of endearment), 'rekt' ('wrecked': when someone has been outsmarted and made to look foolish) or 'Netflix and chill' (a euphemism for sex), which are seen just as much spoken as written. It is indistinguishable which mode terms like this truly belong to.

In the age of technology, it is easy to see electronic communication as a threat to the individual spoken and written modes of communication and their identities reflective of the roles that they have always served in society. However, it is far more appropriate to view e-communication as a developing mode in its own right, sharing traits of both, and leaving plenty of room for spoken and written language to function in society as they always have and will continue to do for the foreseeable future.

Question 7

Relevant topics included:

- the concepts of national identity and inclusivity
- how language reflects an individual's need or desire to belong in Australian society
- the concept of conformity not only in language, but in values such as mateship and egalitarianism, which are often reflected in Australian English
- the difference between 'Aussie' and 'Australian' English
- covert and overt prestige concerning accent and lexical choice
- topics of conversation in Australia – the link between culture and language
- ethnolect use and the growing acceptance and awareness of Aboriginal English
- slang, diminutives, lexical creativity and idiomatic expressions in Australian English
- the evolution of our language and the choices we make concerning borrowings and bending things for our use.

Many students wrote this essay as purely a description of the characteristics of Australian English rather than engaging with the actual topic. High-scoring responses discussed the possible distinction between 'Aussie' and 'Australian', suggesting that the stereotypical 'Aussie' language traits were not representative of all Australians. Low-scoring essays merely accepted the

proposition of the essay topic and ignored the implied question of what Australian English was actually like. Interesting essays referred to events reported in the media in 2015, such as a high-profile senator of Scottish origin being told to 'speak Australian'. Students are reminded to engage with the ideas presented in a topic such as this, and to make their discussion relevant and contemporary.

The following essay is an example of a high-scoring response.

Australian English is an extremely diverse and unique language that is renowned globally for its creativeness and playful nature. So if one wishes to be accepted as an 'Aussie' is it essential to use language that reflects these long-standing qualities? Unique Australian slang and colloquialisms are key in creating the 'Aussie' identity, just as the Australian accent reflects changing 'Aussie' values and beliefs that play a role in forming our national identity. However in recent times, with the growth of multiculturalism and American influence on Australian culture, what defines an individual as an Australian has changed and is still in the process of changing. Therefore, to be accepted as an 'Aussie' whilst many language norms must be adhered to, some of these could not be what was once considered typically Australian.

There is no doubt that Australian English is one of the most creative and interesting languages today. Our highly informal lexicon is what sets us aside from other varieties of English and what we are recognised for overseas, therefore in order to be considered 'Aussie', it is almost always essential that one be able to speak with such innovation and uniqueness. Slang, from 'vomit bombs' (Victoria Bitter Beer) used by teenage boys in my Year level, to 'dry as a dead dingos donger' used by older generations, is integral in reflecting the playful nature of Australians, and failure to use such slang may suggest to others that one does not belong to the national group of Australians. Similarly, swearing used across a range of contexts is important in reflecting the 'Aussie' identity and it acts as a strong marker of in-group solidarity, as journalist Luke McGregor said 'It's almost un-Australian not to use the word 'bloody' at last once in a sentence.' This idea of being 'Un-Australian' suggests that swearing is a key aspect of Australian language and not swearing (even occasionally) could result in the exclusion of an individual as they are labelled 'un-Australian'. This Australian acceptance of swearing was highlighted when, in her Logie acceptance speech this year, 'The Project' presenter Carrie Bickmore said at a live, formal event, 'we were going through a really shit time' when talking about her husbands experience with brain cancer. Acceptance of this exemplified the 'Aussie' spirit and those who frowned upon it were not seen as being 'true Aussies'. So it is clear that in order to be accepted as an 'Aussie' one must conform to the Australian language norms surrounding slang that reflect our 'true blue' Australian values of creativity, uniqueness an our larrakin spirit.

As well as our use of slang, our accent and phonology also plays a role in being considered an Australian. As a British immigrant I have experienced first hand the exclusion that occurs if one does not use the Australian phonology and as such I think it is clear that being able to use Australian phonology is essential in being accepted as an 'Aussie'. When I arrived in Australia I would pronounce pasta with a hard 'a' vowel sound, however Australians elongate this vowel to 'parsta'. I too changed my pronunciation in order to be accepted by my friends as an Australian. (This was also true of the semantics behind words such as 'thongs' and 'buggy' which hold different meanings in Australian English). It was essential that I conform to these language norms if I were to be considered Australian, as even now my parents, who did not change, are seen as British, despite having Australian citizenships. Similarly the Australian shift to a more general accent reflects the idea that those with cultivated accents are not accepted as true Australians as their phonology does not reflect the laid-back and informal values so strongly held by 'everyday' Australians.

Despite these aspects of Australian English that are deemed almost essential in creating the 'Aussie' identity, it could be argued that with the increase of multiculturalism and American influence on the Australian linguistic community, our attitudes towards what it is to be considered 'Australian' could be changing. The infiltration of Americanisms into the Australian lexicon since the rise of technology in the early 2000's has seen our language change drastically, with lexemes such as 'buddy' replacing the quintessentially 'Aussie' term 'mate' or 'awesome' replacing 'grouse'. However despite this influence the values of Australians have remained unchanged and we continue to play with language in a way unlike any other nation. Even the multicultural Australian communities seem to embrace the creativity of the Aussie spirit .... So it could be argued that to be accepted as an Aussie, an individual must conform less

to the observable language norms such as lexis and phonology, and more simply to the values and beliefs behind the Australian language, those of friendliness, creativity and mateship.

'Australian English uses language to reflect its values of friendliness, informality, laid-backness and mateship.' This quote from linguist Kate Burridge epitomises what language must be in order to be accepted as 'Aussie'. Whilst aspects such as lexis, slang and phonology are key in reflecting our identity and building in group solidarity, it is the values and beliefs this language reflects that truly allows one to be considered an Australian.

Question 8

Relevant topics included:

- floor-sharing and turn-taking
- the appropriate use of vocatives and titles in certain contexts
- the use of informal language to reinforce rapport and close social distance in informal situations
- the use of formal language to acknowledge negative face needs and to reinforce social distance and authority
- positive politeness strategies such as adapting lexis and accent to the other speaker
- use of euphemism to avoid offence and adhere to the face needs of others
- the use of doublespeak or euphemism to respect the negative face needs of others, and also to conform to one's own face needs
- the use of political correctness in order to respect others' face needs
- jargon and slang and their role in shared identity and respecting positive face needs
- language strategies such as hedges, high rising terminal (HRT), indirect requests, terms of address and minimal responses.

Although students generally had a reasonable understanding of face needs, few were able to distinguish between positive face (the need to be liked and accepted) and negative face (the need to be autonomous). Many used very trite examples (for example, euphemisms surrounding death) and didn't deal with the essay topic in full – that is, the face needs of ourselves **and** others. In addition, while many students dealt with language 'choices', few dealt with language 'strategies'. Many seemed confused about the effects of obfuscation/doublespeak and also the difference between euphemism and dysphemism. Very few students discussed how social harmony might be affected when we don't address the face needs of others.

The following is an extract from a high-scoring response.

Language use is both capable of maintaining and challenging the face needs of the user and others, meaning that language users may choose to use language in such a way as to achieve either function. The use of polite, politically correct, and euphemistic language are just a sample of the plethora of linguistic choices and strategies available to language users to maintain face needs. In contrast, however, discriminatory language and swearing are capable of achieving the opposite effect, threatening the face needs of both the audience and the language user. In this sense, although language use is indeed frequently based on the maintenance of face needs, certain language used under certain circumstances and contexts is also frequently based on achieving the opposite.

One means of addressing face needs available to a language user is politeness. Politeness takes many forms, but essentially serves to uphold good manners and etiquette, thereby either showing respect and value for one's identity – addressing their positive face needs – or ensuring that you are not percieved to be imposing upon others, addressing their negative face needs. For example, to be polite, a language user may use politeness markers such as 'please' and 'thank you', use terms of endearment like nicknames or 'darling', employ hedging or high rising terminal to soften the strength of their assertions, or use syntactical structures such as interrogatives – 'could you please pass me that?' – to maintain the face needs of the interlocutor, as well as their own. Furthermore, politeness may take the form of using the term of address or honorific that the interlocutor desires. The recent codification of the gender-neutral

honorific 'Mx' by the Oxford Dictionary is one example of this. By using this honorific, not only can others show respect and value for the identity of transgender people, but transgender people can uphold their own positive face needs by showing respect for their own identity as neither male or female. Thus, politeness is one language strategy often employed to address face needs.

Politically correct and euphemistic language can also be employed for the purpose of addressing face needs. Both of these language features aim to portray something in a more positive, pleasant, or polite manner, 'covering up unpleasant or awkward realities', and politically correct language in particular aims to eliminate harmful stereotypes and prejudice from social attitudes via language. As comedian Stephen K Amos argues, despite claims by some critics that political correctness has 'gone mad', most PC language is primarily about thinking 'before you speak' to ensure that you will not offend someone, thereby addressing their face needs. PC language related to the marriage equality debate was the focus of a recent article in the Guardian by Gary Nunn, in which he argued that noun phrases such as 'gay marriage', which place the lexeme 'gay' in the role of an adjective pre-head modifier of 'marriage', as well as 'same sex marriage', are offensive to homosexual people in Australian society, as they discriminate between 'normal' marriage and the marriage of gay couples. He also notes the increasing prevalent use of 'gay' as a noun to refer to things that are 'stupid' or 'crap', which, according to Micah Scott of Minus 18, implies that 'gay people are all of these things'. To counter this, Nunn argues in favour of the more PC term 'marriage equality', in particular due to the positive connotation of the lexeme 'equality', thereby upholding the positive face needs of homosexual couples arguing for marriage rights. Euphemisms may also be used to address face needs, such as the Australian government's recent use of 'disturbance' to refer to the 'riot' at the Christmas Island Detention Centre, in order to avoid infringement of their face needs by a public concerned about the notion of 'out of control' detention centres. However, euphemisms, even in the quest to uphold face needs, do not always have positive consequences, as evidenced in the use of euphemisms such as 'restructuring' and 'downsizing' to refer to the sacking of staff by a business, or as the artist of stimulus material C suggests, 'becoming free range'. In this sense, although PC language and euphemisms often aim to address face needs, in their attempt to do so, they can lead to the distortion or misrepresentation of reality, which is rarely a positive consequence of language use.

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Ultimately, language is capable of both maintaining and challenging face needs, and although the former may more often than not be the aim, it is important to also recognise that our language use can threaten our own face needs and those of others.