2019 VCE English Language examination report

General comments

Advice for students

Students should:

- Learn and understand how to apply the metalanguage terms and concepts in the Study Design.
- Be familiar with the key knowledge and skills for all outcomes.
- Regularly search the media and contemporary uses of English to collect examples of metalanguage and concepts in this study. Read scholarly articles as well.
- Follow the instructions explicitly for each question in Section A: provide line numbers to accurately identify the language feature being discussed; refer to specific line numbers when required; and explain language features in metalanguage terms. Responding well to this section shows an understanding of how the metalanguage fits into analysis by demonstrating that students can identify, exemplify and explain how individual language features operate in the context of the selected text. This sets students up to apply the same technique in Sections B and C.
- Select the prominent features of the text for analysis in Section B. Refine the structure by putting context, purpose and register in the introductory paragraph, thus establishing a framework for the analysis. Beware of simply listing features – remember to identify, exemplify and explain the link to context and purpose. As far as possible, and keeping appropriateness in mind, select features from across the whole text.
- Pay attention to words that add depth to essay topics in Section C. In 2019, phrases such as 'always enriched' (Topic 6), 'greater influence over' (Topic 7) and 'mainly' (Topic 8) were critical in helping students rework ideas and examples from practice essays into relevant responses to the chosen topic, as well as signposting a way to add depth to the essay.
- Refer to the stimulus material in Section C topics either directly or indirectly. Reference to the provided stimulus material is one of the expected qualities for the mark range in Section C. By doing so, students can further demonstrate the development of a relevant response to the topic in the context of the examination.

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 the answers may have included. Unless otherwise stated, these are not intended to be exemplary or complete responses.

Section A – Short-answer questions

Text 1

This text was taken from the first two pages of Sophie Laguna's novel *The Eye of the Sheep*. In this imaginative text, the writer introduces the narrator, his family and context and his unique perceptions of life.

Question 1

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	10	23	35	32	**1.9**

For three marks, students needed to supply an accurate function of the text and two language features that appropriately supported the function. Functions included to entertain, to recount, to tell a story and to describe (introduce characters, setting). Since the text is establishing the setting and characters for a longer narrative, to inform could not be accepted as an appropriate function. Language features chosen had to be appropriate to the function nominated.

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

A function of the text is to entertain readers, as this is a novel. This function is facilitated by the use of exclamatives, "There! In that refinery!"(29-30), which creates excitement through the character of Jimmy. This usage draws the reader as it shows happiness and thus entertain. Moreover, the personification of the tentacles "I could hear the same tentacles" (8) enhances the storytelling by visualising the scene, which helps to entertain.

Question 2

Marks	0	1	2	3	Average
%	10	10	33	47	**2.2**

To earn three marks, students needed to identify an appropriate example of a figurative language feature, give the metalinguistic term for the feature and explain its effect. The effects included highlighting the narrator's perception of living things and machines as both being constructed, evocation of a sense of childlike imagination and the creation of vivid images for the reader.

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

Animation "It smoked grey clouds" (25) gives an inanimate object movement. The effect of this tool is to create memorability in the text and encourage the readers to develop a more vivid interpretation of the narrative. Animation also appeals to the reader's imagination and allows them to visualise the ideas explained in the text.

Question 3

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	Average
%	10	14	25	27	25	**2.5**

To gain four marks, students needed to provide two correct examples of the main sentence structure (compound) between lines 22 and 26, identify the narrator as a young boy or child and explain how the structure reflects speech (particularly that of a child telling a story), gives a child-like sense of excitement and in particular shows Jimmy's enthusiasm for everything he encounters. Many students correctly named the sentence structure.

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

The author mainly makes use of compound sentences such as "Dad left his thermos behind…and drove it in to work for him as a surprise" (lines 22-23) and "It smoked grey clouds…like a giant pilot light" (lines 25-26) which use the coordinating conjunction 'and' to string the clauses of the sentence together. This reflects the identity of the narrator as being quite young, as children's writing is less likely to show syntactic complexity, but make more use of simple and compound sentences instead.

Question 4

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	Average
%	23	18	20	20	13	6	**2**

For five marks, students needed to analyse at least three stylistic and discourse features helping to create cohesion in the text, making reference to at least one stylistic feature and one discourse feature in doing so. Cohesion in this text is established (a) through stylistic features such as lexical choices and semantic patterning (for example, repetition of metaphor) and syntactic structures (for example, consistent use of compound sentences); and (b) discourse features such as anaphoric references, hyponomy, information flow, conjunctions and repetition. 'At least three features' does not mean more than three; rather, the response is assessed holistically to give credit for choice and discussion of features which demonstrate cohesion effectively.

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

The use of semantic patterning aids cohesion. Personification is used in lines 15 and 19: "leaves drank" and "plants drinking". This effect is to liken the 'plants' and 'leaves' to humans who drink water for nourishment. This aids cohesion as it creates a cohesive tie, linking the "plants" (19) and their actions to the previously mentioned "leaves" (15). This establishes a semantic connection between the two nouns. Also, syntactic patterning is used. Parallelism occurs on lines 26-27: "the same network that was…" (26) and "the same network that was…" (27). This aids cohesion as it creates a link between the two descriptions of the 'network' allowing readers to connect the notions of the network being present in both the 'rabbit' (26) and 'my mum' (27), aiding cohesion. Also, anaphoric reference is used in line 16, "her", referring back to "Mum" (16). This establishes a link to show that the description is still relating to "Mum" and this reduces repetition and creates a cohesive tie.

Section B – Analytical commentary

Text 2

Question 5

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	0.2	0.3	0.4	1	2	5	11	14	20	18	13	8	4	2	1	0.1	**8.3**

The text for this section is a transcript of a highly informal spoken exchange between well-known radio presenters David Hughes (Hughsey) and Kate Langbroek and their production assistant Jack, in the first minutes of their Friday afternoon drive-time radio program on Fox digital radio. Hughes's wife, Holly, is also included. While the show is chatty and spontaneous in nature, it nevertheless has elements of structure. Being on radio, the presenters must keep the topic clear,

follow some logic in their discussion and manage turn-taking relatively smoothly. They also need to follow a 'no gap, no overlap' approach when possible.

The text provided a rich source of examples from all subsystems, giving students plenty of opportunities to discuss language features reflecting the informal spoken register and the social purposes of entertaining through humour, provoking interest and building and maintaining rapport between the presenters, guest and listeners.

The sample response provided below soundly addresses context, social purpose and register; and identifies stylistic and discourse features in the text. What is lacking is a more nuanced discussion of the register, participants' social purposes and their relationships. It is response that was scored in the upper-middle range.

This informal conversation takes place on the radio program Fox FM. It has the function of entertaining and a secondary function of informing it's audience, which is the general public coming home from work. It also has the social purpose of building rapport with the interlocutors, and reducing social distance between listeners.

The most prominent way the text's function and social purpose are achieved is through the register. The informal colloquialisms "friyay" (6, 10, 11) and "febfast" (40, 44) provide a relaxed feel to the conversation, thus aiding the social purpose. Also, the constant use of informal contractions such as "you've" (1,14), "we've" (17,20) and "what's" (26) contribute to the informal register. Discourse particles such as "so" (7, 9, 14) and "yeah" (24,41,48) also create an informal, friendly vibe to the conversation. The use of overlapping speech between Hughsey and Kate as in "Jot that down" "they should've already done that" (12-13) shows that they are comfortable speaking on top of one-another, also lowering informality. The lexicon and syntax are also rather informal. The lexemes "enda" (1), "dunno" (23), and "probly" (24, 39) reflect the informality of the conversation, these lexemes also cause the listener to relate the hosts if they themselves use such language. The second person pronoun is "you" (28) is used to reduce social distance between the interlocutors and the listener, directly referring to them and asking them to come chat. The playful nickname "Holly Wife" (44, 65) is employed to meet positive face needs, and entertain the listeners. All of these informal features entertain the reader with humor, while also closing distance with them.

A key element of the conversation is the prosodic features used. Emphatic stress is utilised to emphasise as in "What a week" (5) highlighting that the week has been long and tiresome, potentially causing the listener to relate. It is also used to incite humor such as in "linguistic geniuses" (8) to imply sarcasm to the obvious joke. The use of falling pitch lines 30, 33, and 34 show that Hughesy is being serious and no longer joking around, which aids the secondary function to inform about the dangers of diet soft drinks.

The cohesion and coherence of the conversation allows it to be followed and clearly understood. It has a clear introduction to the show "Yes drivin you home this afternoon…" (1) and it follows a logical ordering of topics, begins with a short introduction and slowly moves to the topic of diet soft drinks. The conversation remains coherent by using terms from the semantic field of diets and food "diet soft drink" (18, 24, 28), "diet coke" (33) "snacking" (48), "cracker" (58) and "sugar" (63). The inclusion of anaphoric references such as "her" (47, 55) reduce lexical density by avoiding repetition and remaining on the topic of Holly. These cohesion and coherence features add up to make the conversation highly coherent, and easy to follow.

Section C – Essay

Students generally illustrated the concepts embodied in the questions by using well-chosen contemporary examples explained in accurate metalanguage. When used, references to the stimuli were also incorporated effectively.

Question chosen	none	6	7	8
%	0.5	45	41	13

Marks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Average
%	0.7	0.3	0.6	2	3	6	10	13	18	16	12	9	6	3	1	0.2	8.4

Question 6

Students responding to this topic included choices of non-standard varieties of Australian English ethnolects, Aboriginal English and Aboriginal languages, work-related dialects, idiolects, age-related dialects and use of slang. Students were expected to evaluate the extent to which non-standard variations **enrich** Australian English.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response. In developing the response, the student explores the idea expressed in their opening sentence through Aboriginal English, ethnolects, colloquial language and the influence of the internet. Included here are the opening statement which firmly states the position taken in the essay; and the section on Aboriginal English. The reference to Stimulus D is smoothly incorporated.

Non-Standard English varieties do enrich Australian English and they introduce new language features into the Australian vernacular.

…

The use of Aboriginal English within Aboriginal communities enriches and enforces cultural values however, due to the prestige of Standard English, its growth is limited. In a government advertisement to reduce smoking titled 'Don't Make Smokes Your Story' the main acter, an Aboriginal man uses an Aboriginal English term when he refers to his mother's friends as 'Aunties' despite not being blood related. This enriches Australian English as it displays the common value that Australians have for speakers of Aboriginal English & it also enriches the English of Aboriginal speakers as it displays to them that their dialect is valued and encourages them to use it in their idiolect. Similarly, as displayed by stimulus d, Aboriginal words such as 'dayang' are preferred by Australian speakers rather than the English descriptive ones such as 'heath mouse.' This enriches Australian English by embracing the long history of Australia and the English associated with it.

However, in the education system, given the prestige of Standard Australian English, Aboriginal English is often devalued, meaning it is prevented from enriching the vernacular. In a study by the CEVC, it was found that in NAPLAN tests, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students scored almost 40 points below average as the students were marked on Standard Australian English conventions. As asserted by Crystal 'language provides the most natural badge or symbol of identity' & these students are being forced to conform to Standard Australian English or be penalised in their education, even if they are abiding by the conventions of Aboriginal English. Aboriginal English, when used, enriches Australian vernacular, however the education system is preventing this.

Question 7

For this question, it was essential that students addressed whether it is **true** that some aspects of situational and cultural contexts have greater influence over an individual's language choices than others. Students referred to positive and negative face needs, public and private uses of language, political correctness, language as an expression of changing social attitudes and beliefs, and how choices of language may be conscious or unconscious.

The following is an example of a high-scoring response. The essay discusses language as a 'social barometer', making reference to political correctness as a means of reflecting tolerance and social acceptance towards ethnic groups, women and people with disabilities. Included here are the last two paragraphs. Reference to the stimulus quote by Dr Howard Manns is cleverly moulded to the writer's main idea about dysphemism and amplified by the student's own examples

> *However although public language may be motivated by the desire to not cause offence, within private contexts language choices are more heavily influenced by the ambition of forging alliances and bolstering in-group solidarity and identity. The purpose of dysphemistic language is intrinsically dependant on 'who we're talking to and the setting in which we're talking to them.' (Dr Howard Manns). Within private contexts, dysphemisms and swearing have an 'important social function'. Researcher Dr Nick Wilson's investigation into New Zealand Rugby players found that the 'f-bomb was the third most common word in pre-match talk' and demonstrated high solidarity within the team environment. The expletive 'f…k' was used most often by the captain in order to energise and motivate the team. Furthermore, the importance of language in reducing social distance and establishing a sense of belonging within private contexts can also be evidenced through the employment of jargon. Being a specialised lexis associated with a discrete activity, jargon within the domain of snowboarding includes noun phrases 'canadian bacon', 'roast beef' and 'chinese salad'. While common, these nouns carry very specific semantics in regards to snowboarding movements – not only facilitating efficient, economic and effortless communication but allowing its users to establish a sense of shared belonging, camaraderie and in-group identity from the jargon. Therefore, within private contexts, language choices, as opposed to the desire to not cause offence, are more heavily influenced by the ambition to establish unity and belonging within a particular social group, thereby reducing social distance between speakers.*

> *Language has the power to clarify complexities, convey social sensitivities or construct and maintain stereotypes. While public language use in contemporary Australian society is certainly motivated by the desire to embrace tolerance and humanitarian appropriateness, within private contexts, the aspect of forging unity and shared identity within in-groups is paramount and hence plays a greater influence on one's language choices.*

Question 8

Students needed to address both parts of the topic, while paying attention to the adverb **'mainly'**, which supported the idea that formal language is an essential part of everyday life. Students referred to jargon as an effective way of ensuring clarity in professional contexts and the obverse; the importance of considering social purpose and context; as well as how and what language choices need to be considered when making texts as accessible and appropriate to context as possible. This student clearly has an impressive reserve of examples to use, so the reference to one of the stimuli is brief, but acceptable, given the quality of the material overall.

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

> *Formal language is used in contemporary Australian society to achieve a range of social purposes. It is most well-known for its ability to either promote or threaten social harmony. Formal language used to clarify meaning is a part of promoting social harmony, and this can be achieved by jargon. It can also be used to obfuscate and manipulate, which likely leads to threats to social cohesion. However, it cannot be concluded that formal language is mainly used to clarify meaning as it also holds other common purposes such as promoting inclusivity or alienating others.*

> *Formal language can be used to clarify meaning to ensure the effective communication between people. The most obvious way of doing so is through the use of jargon and "technical terminology" which is 'good' in nature. If "used well" it can serve to "provide precision and clarity" (Stimulus B) and this in turn promotes social harmony by ensuring that effective communication is enabled between language users. For example, jargon is often used in various fields in order to concisely and accurately describe objects or condition. This is evident in the field of science.*

For instance, in Chemistry. I am taught to use scientific jargon in order to communicate effectively. Examples include the nouns "mole", "equibrium" and "condensation", which refer specifically to chemistry concepts. Within this field, this use of jargon and formal language serves to provide clarity so that concepts can be understood easily and explained effectively. Without this set of jargonistic terms, harmonious interactions will be difficult as miscommunications can easily arise. However, jargon is not the only form of formal language which aims to clarify meaning. Sometimes, clarity can be upheld through the use of formal, yet less jargonistic language. An example is the recent change by the Australian Securities Exchange (ASX) in terminology from the noun phrase "social licence of operation" to the noun "reputation" and noun phrase "standing in the community". The removal of the more abstract and jargonistic phrase in preference for more understandable (but still formal) lexemes allowed for greater understanding of the meaning implied by ASX, hence clarifying meaning. Hence it can be seen that formal language can be used in some cases to clarify meaning and promote social harmony.

Despite this, formal language can also be used to obfuscate and manipulate the intended audience in order to achieve a particular purpose. This form of formal language is often seen in public contexts and can ultimately threaten social harmony. Euphemisms are sometimes like "unpleasant truths wearing diplomatic cologne" (Quentin Crisp) and hence serve to mask something unpleasant and manipulate the social attitudes of the audience. For example, earlier this year, George Pell's lawyer used the noun phrase "a plain vanilla case of sexual penetration where the child was not actively participating" to describe Pell's accused crime. This serves to obfuscate through the use of the euphemistic collocation "plain vanilla." The connotation of this adjective phrase is often linked to sweet ice-cream and hence this hides the negative associations of child sexual abuse. Furthermore, the negative marker "not" was used instead of a more active and accurate verb such as "forced". This is because "forced" encompasses negative connotations and hence an alternate lexical choice is used to avoid this. Overall, the noun phrase is an example of euphemisms obfuscating the audience. Also, another example is the euphemistic noun phrase "external development opportunities" used by Justin Milne when firing staff. It was awarded the 2018 Worst Phrase of the Year in early 2019 due to its highly manipulative nature. The adjective "development" and noun "opportunities" in this context both carry positive connotations of innovation and improvement. However, in effect they are communicating a negative message of redundancy. Hence this is an example of formal language serving to obfuscate the truth. As affirmed by the title "2018 Worst Phrase of the Year", this sort of obfuscation is a threat to social harmony.

While it is true that formal language can serve to clarify meaning, this may not be its main use. Formal language has a range of uses which are all quite common in contemporary society. These include promoting equality and alienating others. For example, politically correct language is formal in register and serves to promote acceptance and change in negative social attitudes. An example is Melbourne University's Guidelines for Non-Discriminatory Language advising the use of "student with epilepsy" rather than "epileptic student". Postmodification with a prepositional phrase is preferred as this avoids creating a hierarchy of difference, by emphasising that the subject is a student, relevant to the educational institution. Their disability is not considered what defines them and hence is moved to the end of the phrase. This serves to promote equality and social harmony and represents one of the functions of formal language. However, formal language can also be used to discriminate and alienate others, and this is evident through Alan Jones' recent comments, voicing that Scott Morrison should "shove a sock down her (Jacinda Arden's) throat". This involves the use of violent imagery and aims to insult and offend Arden and even promote animosity and violence towards her. This is a threat to social harmony, and shows that formal language can be used in some circumstances to destroy social harmony.

Ultimately, formal language involves various social purposes. It can be used to clarify meaning, but this is not necessarily the main purpose of formal language. It also serves to obfuscate the truth and can either promote or threaten social harmony.