2024 VCE English Language external assessment report

General comments

Students should:

* use correct and appropriate metalanguage from the current study design, particularly terms that have changed or been newly added; students should avoid using metalanguage not included in the study design
* for spoken texts, pay particular attention to the transcription key when selecting appropriate metalanguage, for example, when describing types of prosody
* quote examples alongside line numbers when referring to texts, even if those examples are lengthy; lengthy examples can be quoted using appropriate punctuation to mark ellipsis
* engage fully with the texts presented in Sections A and B. Specific and salient features of texts should be referred to when analysing texts. Avoid listing features or summarising the text
* carefully consider the contextual information provided in the text descriptions of Sections A and B; this provides important information that assists in the construction of nuanced analyses
* respond to the texts and the questions ‘at hand’ rather than using fixed, pre-prepared approaches; this is particularly important in Sections B and C, where higher-scoring responses provided meaningful and specific analyses and discussions
* consider the new task requirements for Section B when framing their responses, as there are many aspects of a text to consider when crafting an analytical commentary
* explore how linguistic elements complement and assist each other to support particular functions, purposes or intents and avoid analysing language features as distinct and independent elements of a text
* practise managing their ability to produce sustained responses in timed conditions
* if referencing external linguistic debates, ensure the reference is directly relevant to the question and meaningfully integrated into the discussion.

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

Text 1

For Text 1, students were required to respond to five short-answer questions on a spoken text, an interview between Sam Koslowski and Dylan Alcott. Koslowski is an owner, producer and host of The Daily Aus (TDA), an online news service, and Alcott an exceptional Australian sports figure and motivational speaker who was also awarded Australian of the Year in 2022.

The interview is informal and conversational, characterised by a warm, appreciative tenor and a colloquial register. Koslowski’s purpose is to present to listeners of TDA Alcott’s perspectives and experiences, particularly regarding his efforts to challenge perceptions around disability and create meaningful change across different sectors. Koslowski demonstrates admiration and curiosity, leading with personal anecdotes relaying Alcott’s dedication to making society better for people with a disability, while Alcott responds humbly yet passionately, articulating his motivations and broader vision. The interaction conveys camaraderie and shared purpose, blending personal insights with a broader social commentary on representation and advocacy.

Question 1

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 0 | 0 | 100 | 2.0 |

This question was invalidated because it does not align with the study design.

Question 2

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 20 | 34 | 46 | 1.3 |

Students were required to identify when Koslowski’s purpose in the interview was to establish Alcott’s identity and then discuss this using a quoted example with appropriate metalanguage. A wide variety of responses were accepted, the most common referring to the variation of domains in which Alcott has been involved, such as in the declarative listing of ‘sport … politics … healthcare’ (22–23).

While students approached this question well, more engagement with the text was warranted, particularly by providing specific details of Alcott’s contributions. Metalanguage was by and large accurate; however, occasionally students referred to how Alcott establishes his own contributions, rather than how Koslowski does, which did not answer the question.

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

Syntactic listing in L21–24 "and you started with sport and... into politics and healthcare...onto representation" illustrates the myriad of domains in society Alcott has contributed to with the overall declaration from L18 to L24.

Question 3

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | Average |
| % | 13 | 43 | 44 | 1.3 |

This question had multiple requirements, such as being able to discuss a politeness strategy, such as attending to a positive or negative face need, as well as valid discussions about how a tenor was created by that strategy. Many students neglected to do both of these successfully, and more careful revision of discussion of politeness in particular is warranted.

To receive full marks, students needed to accurately identify the type of politeness being addressed, such as the positive politeness strategy of complimenting or the negative politeness strategy of hedging. They were also required to refer to how this strategy influenced the tenor of the conversation; that is, the tenor it contributed to forming.

Most students successfully chose to discuss positive politeness, but both positive and negative politeness strategies were used within the interview. Many of the strategies used by both Alcott and Koslowski contributed to a warm, professional tenor that was both respectful and friendly.

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

K employs the positive politeness strategy of offering a compliment as he utters 'thank you for joining us' (line 2) to display his gratitude towards A in choosing to be featured on the podcast. This influences the tenor to be conversational and friendly in nature as A's positive face needs are being met because his contribution as an interlocutor on the podcast is acknowledged and recognised in an inviting manner by K.

Question 4

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Average |
| % | 10 | 16 | 33 | 29 | 12 | 2.2 |

This question allowed students to explore the situational context of the text and relate these to how, why and when the function changed. Reference to Jakobson’s functions was usually done well, but these functions were not always specifically related to aspects of the situational context as per the study design. Sometimes, more metalanguage could have been used to analyse language features that contributed to the fulfilment of various functions.

Full marks could be achieved in a number of ways, such as by discussing a change from one function to another in detail, with quotes and metalanguage to refer to the situational context, including metalanguage to discuss how that change is made, not just that it has occurred. Similarly, students could also have discussed two or more instances of a change from one function to another, with quotes and metalanguage to tie this to a situational context. They were not required to use additional metalanguage alongside the quoted extracts; it was appropriate to focus on metalanguage in terms of context.

Students should be guided by the study design when responding to these types of questions. A number of responses did not accurately refer to elements of the situational context, which include setting, field, tenor, mode and audience.

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

The shift from a phatic function to a referential function reflects the situational context of the text as an interview. The phatic function is reflected in adjacency pair 'Really appreciate you coming in' (3), 'Great to be here' (4), by which A and K adhered to the conventions of an interview. A shift to a referential function occurs when A begins explaining his career, evidence by declarative "I just wake up every day and try and be myself and in doing that, Try and change perceptions around disability' (28–29). The declarative reflects Alcott's intent to share information about himself and what he is trying to do in the world, as the interview moves into the referential phase.

Question 5

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Average |
| % | 13 | 23 | 33 | 23 | 6 | 0.9 | 1.9 |

Alcott and Koslowski both used a variety of strategies to manage their turns, assisting in constructing their identities. Students were able to link to a range of identities for each of the participants, such as Koslowski’s identities as a host, podcaster, media personality and sports fan who is respectful, friendly and encouraging, as well as Alcott’s identities as a sports figure, a motivational speaker, an entrepreneur and a disability advocate who is personable and humble.

Students require more practice determining the requirements of five-mark questions and ensuring that all aspects of the question are covered in their response. There were some very good examples of an analysis of turn-taking strategies, but the identity aspect of the question was not always fully covered. More careful revision of the difference between topic management and turn taking is required of all students, as this was a particular weakness in many responses.

Some students neglected to discuss prosodic features that would be regarded as salient in facilitating turn taking, such as pitch, intonation and tempo. There were a few examples of excellent discussion of how fast-paced tempo facilitated transitions, allowing interlocutors to complete a turn and cede the floor. Very few students considered methods that Alcott and Koslowski used to hold the floor, such as non-fluency features and continuing intonation. Quite a number of students mis-categorised declaratives that employed questioning intonation, referring to them erroneously as interrogatives.

This question was marked holistically, with students being awarded marks for discussing both speakers in detail, linking turn taking to elements of their identity, both group and individual, such as Koslowski’s identity as an interviewer who is respectful and Alcott’s identity as an interviewee and friendly person.

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

Koslowski initiates a question–answer adjacency pair in line 25 with the interrogative “is that … career?”, allowing him to then pass the floor to Alcott. His role as the primary floor and topic manager helps to affirm his individual identity as a podcast host (his occupation), as hosts are generally responsible for managing the floor. In line 5, A holds his turn with rising intonation in the utterance “fan … a while/” (5). This signals he is not finished with his turn yet, as he proceeds to elaborate with the declarative “I love the TDA” (6), this expression constructs A’s individual identity as a fan of the TDA. In line 51, A uses rising intonation in the utterance “… you know … entrepreneur/”. The rising intonation allows A to hold the floor while including K as a member of the wider community of innovative thinkers, as he describes K with the noun “entrepreneur” (51).

Section B: Analytical commentary

Text 2

Text 2 adopts a formal yet approachable register, suitable for an educational and professional audience, aiming to inform and encourage engagement with the Narragunnawali platform. The purpose is primarily referential, providing factual information about the Narragunnawali platform, and conative, as it seeks to persuade schools and early learning services to take action by engaging with the platform and its resources. The tenor is inclusive and supportive, addressing educators and institutions as key stakeholders while positioning Narragunnawali as a facilitator for positive change. The intended audience includes teachers, school leaders and early learning professionals, as well as members of the broader community interested in reconciliation and Indigenous perspectives in education with a commitment to fostering knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

Embedded within the written text, the prepared monologue by the narrator adopts a formal yet inclusive register, designed to inspire and engage listeners. Its purpose is both conative, encouraging active participation in reconciliation efforts, and poetic, with a rhythmic and evocative structure that emphasises the significance of reconciliation. Jakobson’s emotive function is also evident in the use of reflective and aspirational language to foster a connection with the audience.

Question 6

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | Average |
| % | 0.5 | 0.1 | 0.3 | 0.6 | 1 | 3 | 8 | 17 | 24 | 21 | 13 | 7 | 4 | 1 | 0.2 | 0.1 | 8.4 |

Most students used a suitable strategy for approaching this task and many responses identified how the text attempts to unite the audience and First Nations Australians and commented on the use of inclusive language. However, responses could have been more specific when discussing usage of personal pronouns and determiners, as well as adverbs. Some responses incorrectly employed the term ‘collective’ when analysing pronouns; students should revise metalanguage carefully, as this term is reserved for a particular category of nouns.

Higher-scoring responses engaged closely with the assigned text and avoided generic and formulaic comments. They provided nuanced analysis of register and shifts in register and focused on salient features of the text. Less confident commentaries resorted to summary or listing and overly relied on pre-prepared structures in their analytical approach. This limited their ability to respond with sophistication and respond to the text at hand.

More effective commentaries were able to recognise the primary audience of educators and comment specifically on how language was tailored to appeal to this audience to fulfil certain purposes and intents. They were then able to refer to secondary or wider audiences. Similarly, there were some very good references to the cultural context, with some responses relating the concept of reconciliation to Australia’s history and changing values in society. More successful responses referred to specific language features using precise metalanguage.

Students across the board appeared to struggle with the multi-modal nature of the text. Higher-scoring responses referred to spoken discourse features and prosody when analysing the content of the narrator’s monologue. For the written component, responses did not always engage with the text – generic discussions of discourse factors such as cohesion and coherence were not considered salient. If considering the inclusion of this type of discussion, students must provide relevant discussions, in particular about the nature of the content itself and how discourse factors are used to complement it.

In particular, Question 6 required a sustained analytical commentary of the text, focusing in particular on functions, purposes, intents, contexts, register, tenor and audience. To score highly, all language features analysed needed to be meaningfully linked to one or more of these elements.

The following high-scoring response demonstrates a thorough understanding of what was required of the task and critically engages with the text’s linguistic features and their functions. It successfully identifies specific examples of language use, linking these to the broader purposes of the text. The response identifies and discusses specific linguistic features, linking them explicitly to their communicative effects and text functions. This demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of how language choices serve to achieve referential, conative and emotive functions. The response effectively integrates textual evidence with precise metalanguage. This showcases a high level of control over the terminology required for analysing texts in VCE English Language. Further, it consistently relates linguistic choices to the cultural and situational context of the text, particularly in highlighting the incorporation of Indigenous values and terminology to establish credibility and foster trust. This shows an appreciation of how texts reflect broader cultural and ideological underpinnings. The analysis of how the text maintains a moderately formal register that implies authority, solidarity and profundity is nuanced. The response explains how these elements work in concert to reinforce the audience's trust and engagement with the company’s programs.

Through their linguistic choices in the written section of the text and peppered throughout the spoken section, RA achieves their referential and conative functions. They employ the imperatives "Join" (54) and "Read" (65) when referring to webinars they offer and their impact statement. The unhedged nature of these order assists in engendering a didactic tone of command, galvanising audiences to take action and engage with the company further - bolstering the conative function.

RA employs hyperlinks of the noun phrases "Narragunnawali...Plan" (11) and "professional learning" (14) when referring to their programs. In addition to adhering to the expectations of the text type as a website article, thus bolstering the accessibility of the text and its coherence, such hyperlinks also assist in achieving the referential function by delineating where audiences can access further information to better apprise themselves on the programs that the company offers.

RA employs listing of the common nouns "principal, teacher, parents, student or community member" (38–39) when referring to demographics that the company is willing to support in their decision of choosing a program. By layering this common nouns, RA is able to achieve an all encompassing effect throughout this cohesive thread of nouns, ensuring that all demographics of their readers feel supported and guided through this process - something that bolsters the conative function of galvanising them to choose a program.

The function of the text shifts slightly in the spoken section, where RA bolsters their emotive function. RA employs the antithesis of the noun phrases "some new, some old, some yet to be heard, some yet to be told" (19) when referring to the multitude of Indigenous stories. By echoing these noun phrases in a cohesive thread, RA is able to highlight the juxtaposing nature of the contrasting adjectives "new" and "old" and the verbs "heard" and "told". As such, RA is able to construct a time continuum that catalogues the rich and profound history of the Indigenous community through their numerous traditions and stories, whilst also extending a hand to audiences to encourage them to continue bolstering this rich history through their own contribution. In turn, RA fosters sentiments of empowerment and agency among their audience to shape the future of the not only the Indigenous community, but the alliance between the First Nations people and the broader Australian community. As such, RA induces a paradigm shift towards rectifying injustices against Aboriginal members of their past where they have been shunned by wider society, and disseminates a clarion call to audiences to change this landscape and leave their legacy. By rousing such sentiments, RA achieves their emotive function, as well as their conative function of further compelling audiences to take part in programs that will enact this goal. In conjunction with the pauses “(...)” (19) after each of these noun phrases, RA further engenders a tone of profundity and solemnity, encouraging audiences to recognise the immense gravity of this task so they take it seriously. RA employs the adverb 'Together' (45) in conjunction with the first person pronoun 'we' in "we're shaping..." (45) when referring to the legacy that RA aims to leave by collaborating with audiences. The inclusive nature of these lexemes assists in rousing feelings of unity among the audience, as well as bolstering a sense of solidarity and equality with Indigenous people over this shared goal to shape the future legacy of Australia. Furthermore, RA evokes values of patriotism and collective pride for Australia by pandering to Australian values of egalitarianism and concordance, in a common desire to enact change – attending to their emotive function. As such, RA poses the audience as indivisible in their future goals, unifying both the broader Australian audience with Indigenous audiences – achieving their conative function.

RA shapes their discourse to reflect their cultural context. They employ the Indigenous borrowing "Narragunnawali" (68, 20, 8) throughout the text. As such, RA is able to establish a degree of credibility in their familiarity with the First Nations community, fostering trust among audiences that their programs are grounded culturally. Furthermore, through the explanation via the positively connoted abstract nouns "alive, wellbeing" (71) such language enables them to align their brand ethos with values of the Indigenous community, such as life and community.

Numerous stylistic features coalesce into a moderately formal register that is consistent throughout all modes of the text. RA employs the abstract noun phrases "professional learning" and "curriculum resources" (14) when referring to the programs they offer. The elevated nature of this lexis raises the formality of the discourse and assists RA in establishing a degree of expertise, experience and credibility as a company, fostering trust and reliance in audiences that their programs are backed by professional insights.

Section C: Essay

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | Average |
| % | 0.6 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.8 | 1 | 3 | 9 | 16 | 23 | 20 | 13 | 7 | 4 | 2 | 0.5 | 0.1 | 8.4 |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Question | 0 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| % | 0.4 | 59 | 29 | 11 |

For Section C, students were required to select one question and craft a sustained expository response, demonstrating their familiarity with the topics covered in Units 3 and 4 of the study design alongside their ability to use relevant, descriptive and appropriate metalanguage. Also required was reference to the stimulus provided.

Students should be commended on the wide variety of contemporary examples they discussed when responding to the essay topics. However, some responses neglected to briefly contextualise their examples, which occasionally detracted from the clarity of their discussion. More careful unpacking of the topic and planning would enhance essay success. Essays that began with poorly developed introductions often struggled to recover, whereas stronger introductions that clearly outlined a response to the topic led to more cohesive and focused essays. Similarly, responses with slightly more substantial introductions and conclusions that directly fulfilled their purposes were generally higher scoring.

There were examples of essays that only partially addressed the topic, sometimes because key words in the topic’s proposition were overlooked. More consistent and explicit references to these key words and their synonyms throughout body paragraphs would strengthen the link between ideas and the essay question. Effective essays achieved this naturally and articulately.

Some students appeared to rely on pre-prepared essays, regurgitating content without reshaping it to address the specific topic. While drawing on previous ideas can be valuable, it is crucial to adapt them thoughtfully to meet the demands of the question. Time management also proved an issue for some students, with responses left unfinished. Writing with concision and precision, tailoring ideas to examination conditions and being discerning about what to include would help ensure more polished final responses.

Question 7

In this question, students explored our perceived national identity and how language helps to demonstrate this. They also explored the circumstances in which language distinguishes key groups within contemporary Australian society and how those groups influence the changing of language in Australia.

Some responses explored the changing nature of Australian Englishes, such as SAE and AAE, or how ethnolects have played a role in establishing nuanced cultural communities in Australian society. Others discussed identity in terms of class, education, occupation, social status and aspirations, including other factors of personal variation such as age, gender, sexuality and interests. Core to these explorations was how the use of language changes according to the elements of identity.

Student responses explored the range of personal and group identities we hold and the context in which these identities are formed. How we make connections and build community in Australia can be reflected in the language that we use. The language that we use can also work to highlight power dynamics as well as play a role in defining Australian identity through features such as slang, informality and situational variation.

This topic allowed for an examination of how linguistic tools, such as jargon, create in-group knowledge and maintain social order. Social media’s influence on personal and shared identity was also relevant, with some responses exploring online language use, generational change and how context-specific features like emojis, punctuation and informal context-specific graphemes mirror spoken language and construct camaraderie.

The evolving nature of our language was central to the question, where our perceived national identity may not always match what our actual Australian identities are, with some responses considering imported linguistic elements, such as borrowings, and showing how language intersects with ethnicity, gender and other facets of identity, while addressing the tension between diversity and unity. Similarly, cultural varieties of English, including migrant ethnolects and how second-generation migrants express identity through unique English features, help to show the changing nature of language that is linked to the preservation of cultural strength.

Overwhelmingly, this was the most popular topic answered by students, with a large variety of acceptable approaches in responding to the question. Some higher-scoring responses spent meaningful time exploring what it means for language to actually ‘define’ our Australian identity, rather than merely reflect it.

A notable number of responses did not explore the topic in full, not fully engaging with a discussion of the key verbs within the question – ‘defines’ and ‘changing’. These were fundamental elements of the question and required careful thought.

The following extract from a high-scoring response covers important elements of the question. The introduction to this response explores the idea that language does not always define identity and that it can instead reflect identity and values, particularly in Australian society. In two of the body paragraphs, shown below, the response successfully explores these core points, with the first paragraph examining how language evolves to reflect social diversity and unity, highlighting its role in shaping and expressing contemporary Australian identities. The second extract of the response explores how linguistic resistance to change can reinforce rigid cultural norms, limiting inclusivity and the ability to adapt to a dynamic and multicultural society. The response as a whole successfully demonstrates the dynamic relationship between language and identity in contemporary Australia.

Within the multicultural and multi-faceted contemporary Australia, language is constantly evolving to best reflect the more diverse Australian identities. For instance, an increase in open gender diversity is evident in modern Australia, with the LGBTQ+ community becoming more comfortable in sharing that aspect of their identity. As such language is evolving to accommodate this, such as the 2023 Macquarie Dictionary word of the year shortlist “gendy nooch”. In order to reflect the identities of gender neutral people and simultaneously showcase their Australian identity, archetypal features such as the hypocoristic suffix “-y” and the shortening “nooch” from “neutral”, are employed. This meets the Australian goals of celebrating “our diversity” whilst “[striving] for a unified … nation” (Stimulus C). Hence, language is always shifting to be the best representation of a gender-diverse Australian identity, simultaneously.

…

However, due to the fact that language defines our Australian identity many become overly protective of preserving values preventing the constant change. For instance, in July 2024, an Australian swimming coach for the Olympics was denounced for supporting the Korean team and labelled as “un-Australian”. The use of the derivational prefix “un-“ indicates the existence of a set of hard rules as to what being an ‘Australian’ consists of, such as unwavering loyalty to the Australian swimming team. By prohibiting the support and encouragement to other international teams, the values of sportsmanship and mateship between nations is compromised. This implication of set rules as to what being an Australian consists of prevents necessary social, and consequently, linguistic change that more accurately defines the Australian community. The use of a term like “un-Australian” prevents growth and development in what defines an Australian, which is critical in promoting social harmony and inclusivity between cultures, like between Australians and Koreans.

Question 8

Question 8 required students to explore the variations in language that are created and used by individuals or groups within society, and in particular how variations in language reflect those who are accepted within a group and those who are not. Student responses considered how these variations can act to complement a purpose or counteract it, focusing on interactions with others; how connections are made, or not made, and the different types of interactions that result. Ultimately, this question produced responses that explored how our use of language ‘supports’ different purposes as well as how ‘contradicting purposes’ also occur, such as when language does not achieve what we want, particularly when there are unintended effects.

Student responses explored how language use reflects and adapts to generational social and cultural expectations. Stimulus A focuses on workplace communication, highlighting the importance of rapport-building and solidarity through language, while acknowledging generational differences in communication styles. It explores potential conflicts between values like “cultural competence” among younger generations and “respect” valued by older ones, emphasising the need for accommodation to maintain effective interactions and meet differing social expectations.

Responses also examined the dynamic influence of technology, education and age on language variation and societal norms. Online platforms foster unique linguistic practices that, while sometimes adopted by older generations, can be seen as contrived or ineffective when not authentic. Age and education influence our tolerances for outdated or discriminatory language, with societal shifts normalising once-taboo expressions and rejecting offensive terms. These changes underscore language as a marker of identity and the importance of adapting to evolving social expectations.

Some responses highlighted broader linguistic diversity, including the influence of globalisation, technology and AI on language. There is increasing acceptance of linguistic variety in public contexts, though remnants of judgment persist. Commonly used examples such as Fatima Payman’s use of teen slang in Parliament and institutional renaming practices (e.g. “Family Day Stall”) illustrate how language choices can achieve inclusivity or backfire, depending on their alignment with audience expectations. These ideas emphasise the responsibility of individuals and institutions to navigate evolving values and communication norms thoughtfully.

The following is an extract of two paragraphs from a high-scoring student response. This response demonstrates a strong ability to analyse language variation in relation to context and audience, effectively highlighting how language choices can support or contradict communicative purposes. The response’s exploration of linguistic features such as jargon, idiom and colloquial language is insightful and well-articulated, showing a clear understanding of how these choices fulfil different functions depending on audience expectations and contextual demands. The response effectively uses contemporary linguistic examples to support the points being made, connecting linguistic theory with how it is demonstrated in Australian society.

The use of language in the news illustrates that choices must be made with the audience and other factors of context in mind in order to successfully support purposes. This is clear through an article found under the “economics” section of the ABC News website in March 2024. The heading read “Tepid GDP extends Australia’s per capita recession”. This use of jargon, as illustrated through the initialism “GDP” and adjective “per capita” allow the ABC to effectively establish their expertise in the field of economics. Furthermore, they are able to successfully fulfil the referential function and build rapport with their audience, who also understand economics, and therefore the inference required to understand the jargon. This is ensured through the ABC’s clear understanding of context; because the article is on their website underneath “economics”, readers must actively go out of their way to locate this article, meaning only those who understand economics will read it. This can be held in contrast with the ABC’s use of language in a live TB broadcasted interview with Dr Karl Kruszelnicki regarding the “Aurora Australis” phenomenon of July 2024. Kruszelnicki describes the phenomenon as the sun having a “hissy fit”. The personification of the sun using this idiom demonstrates a starkly different register to that of the economics article, however, this choice effective builds rapport with the audience and fulfils the referential function regardless. Again, this is due to the understanding that viewers of this interview are everyday Australians, who do not necessarily have a scientific background. By explaining complex phenomena in relatable, colloquial terms, Kruszelnicki can build rapport with this specific audience. Therefore, context is the determining factor in whether language choices support purposes or not.

Politicians often show great variation in their language in order to build rapport with certain voting demographics, however, attitudes towards these politicians, as well as the broader context must be assessed for these to be successful. This is clear through leader of the Greens, Adam Bandt, who attempts to use “new slang words and slang phrases (to) earn at least grudging respect” (stimulus b). This is clear through a post on Instagram from August 2024, which reads “fishing for people, not corporations, very demure, very mindful”. The latter adjectival phrase is reflective of current Generation Z slang, allowing Bandt to exploit covert norms in order to successfully build rapport with this audience. Furthermore, this is assisted by his understanding of young people’s political frustrations and attitudes towards the current leading parties who seemingly don’t care about “the people”. Thus, by reflecting Generation Z’s language and reflecting their ideals, Bandt successfully builds rapport. This can be held in contrast with Anthony Albanese, who attempts to do something similar, however fails. In July 2024, he posted an image of a Spotify playlist with a title reading “high voltage power bill relief Thursday morning bangers”, which was an attempt to appeal to the covert norms of Generation Z by reflecting the humorous, incoherent syntax of algorithm generated Spotify playlists. This humour requires inference to understand, supposedly building rapport. However, he is ultimately unsuccessful, clear through a comment reading “no-one thinks you’re cool albo”. Instead of building rapport, he contradicts his purpose, making himself appear as an incompetent leader. This is ineffective due to the audience’s attitudes towards Albanese, who believe he is an incompetent leader, which is reinforced by the fact he is posting “silly memes” on Instagram instead of fixing problems as a PM should be.

Question 9

In this question, student responses explored how power and status (social standing) are demonstrated and exploited through changes in register and politeness. They explored language used in public contexts, as well as language used in other language forms that are publicly viewed or received. Some responses considered social standing in the more micro sense, such as complying with covert norms when it’s expected, flouting overt norms; this was acceptable. Similarly, responses also considered the various levels of politeness used depending on context and how we can, deliberately or not, manipulate our register to assert or decrease power and authority and achieve various purposes. It was also relevant to consider the various attitudes towards the causes of these variations of language.

Some responses explored how shifts in non-discriminatory language and changes in register reflect evolving societal norms and hierarchies. Politeness and register, while traditionally tied to asserting power and authority, have become more informal in Australia, with terms like ‘man’ and ‘bro’ replacing rigid honorifics. A number of students explored this shift through examples like Tasmania’s parliamentary change to ‘Honourable Speaker’ or the backlash to policing language too strictly. Additionally, some responses investigated how breaking politeness conventions, especially through covert norms, can bolster social standing, such as using humour to navigate taboo topics or anger in artistic and political expression to challenge societal norms.

Navigating public language involves balancing solidarity, expertise and sensitivity through register and politeness. Satire, parody and euphemism are used to negotiate taboo topics in politics, reportage and bureaucracy, where jargon signals authority but may threaten the audience’s negative face. Student responses explored how politicians like Senator Lidia Thorpe or Leader of the Opposition Peter Dutton gained or lost social standing depending on their linguistic choices, employing obfuscatory language or doublespeak to manipulate perceptions. Broader discussions also addressed how language is used to clarify or obscure meaning, exclude certain groups, or maintain authority in professions where clarity and expertise are critical, such as law or media, alongside issues of informality and misogyny in public discourse.

Higher-scoring responses appropriately answered the question ‘To what extent is this true?’. As part of this discussion, responses were required to consider how true it is that register and politeness go hand in hand with social standing. Not all responses did this. Higher-scoring responses argued that register is less important than effective politeness strategies, or that politeness strategies have a reduced importance in some contexts, such as when a register is highly informal or intimate and/or when complying with covert norms.

A number of responses struggled to adequately deal with all key words in this topic – ‘register’, ‘politeness’ and ‘social standing’. Nevertheless, there were some very high-scoring responses that were able to do so well and discuss different types of social standing among different groups in society. These responses discussed in some detail how overt and covert prestige can be derived in different contexts.

Some responses demonstrated a good understanding of how contextual factors determine the appropriateness of the language that one should use to reinforce one’s social standing and exemplified what can occur when misjudgments are made related to register and politeness.

Below is an example of a high-scoring response. This response demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of linguistic concepts, particularly register, politeness conventions, and their influence on social standing, integrating these ideas competently and with sophistication. By providing detailed examples, such as referring to Breast Cancer Network Australia's use of euphemisms to attend to face needs and the Victorian Government's inclusive language to foster politeness, the response effectively illustrates how language choices impact social perception. The analysis is nuanced, recognising both the benefits and limitations of adhering to politeness conventions, as seen in the discussion of political correctness and person-first language. Furthermore, the formal and coherent writing style reflects a strong grasp of linguistic principles, culminating in a conclusion that synthesises the unpredictable nature of language and its effect on communicative outcomes.

Included below is the introduction, one body paragraph and the conclusion.

One's formality and ability to adhere to politeness conventions are hallmark characteristics of our language, and undoubtedly influence how one is perceived in the eyes of others, both those they are close to as well as strangers. Whether it be through the success of euphemisms to ensure formality and the attendance to others' positive face needs to better bolster one's social standing, or through the overwhelming backlash towards individuals who do not adhere to such linguistic expectations such as through discriminatory language, there is an obvious need for awareness around one's register and politeness when addressing others. However, in some instances, even when one does employ a degree of circumspection around both of these factors, the fickle and unpredictable nature of language means that often users can end up with unwanted or unexpected outcomes. Ultimately, caution around one's register and politeness is vital to secure one's social standing in contemporary society, however, it should not be relied upon as a guaranteed indicator of success, given the fickleness of language.

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Conversely, a lack of attention to one's register and politeness can be detrimental for the social standing of the user in society. Discriminatory language, such as that of racist and sexist rhetoric is such an example, resulting in immense criticism and backlash for its users. In 2024, three male students at Yarra Valley Grammar were suspended after compiling a highly offensive list rating the attractiveness of female peers, using the term 'unrapable'. Where a tone of respect and slight formality is expected around the taboo subject of rape and female equality, the non-Standard usage of the derivational prefix "un" lends an disturbingly relaxed and playful tone to the horrific mindset where women are objectified to mere tools of carnal pleasure for their male counterparts. Such informality serves to normalise the heinous crime of rape as a commonplace standard of consideration of female attractiveness, suggesting that women only exist in society for the pleasure of men and that their consent or autonomy is inconsequential. Such lack of reverence towards their female peers saw the boys receive immense backlash by their classmates and students countrywide on social media for such flagrant undermining of the role of women in society –something that diminished their social standing as previously popular and respected members of their cohort. Traversing beyond the playground, if such lack of adhere to basic politeness remains uncurbed, it intensifies and continues into society among adults, propagating similar prejudicial social attitudes. In 2024, a notable Australian doctor was banned from registering for another year as a GP after sending Indigenous ophthalmologist Rallah Baker a discriminatory email that read "You are not full blood are you? Half? A quarter? One eight? Like a watered down bottle of Grange". The pejorative vocatives "Half? A quarter? One eight?" engender a dehumanising tone by affronting Baker's positive face needs and qualifying his identity on the sole basis of genetic composition – a metric often used for animals. Likewise, the simile "Like a watered down bottle of Grange" takes on a belittling tone, minimising Baker's holistic identity to simply the colour of his skin. In turn, such racist rhetoric undermines Baker's professional prowess and invalidates his identity. Furthermore, it panders to and propagates stereotypical caricatures of Indigenous people where they are considered 'low-intellect' or inherently undeserving of their position in society. Such flagrant lack of respect towards the Indigenous identity of both Baker and other First Nations doctors, in conjunction with an absence of awareness around basic politeness, saw this previously acclaimed Australian doctor, blacklisted and shunned by colleagues, diminishing his once prestigious social standing. Ultimately, when politeness and register are not considered, in preference instead for expressing one's prejudicial attitudes, backlash and a decrease in social standing becomes inevitable.

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Ultimately, one's formality and ability to adhere to politeness conventions have direct correlation with how one is perceived and their social standing, as seen when usage of euphemisms gains its user rapport with a certain demographic, and when usage of discriminatory language causes offense and decreases others respect towards the user. However, the fickle and unpredictable nature of language means that despite such awareness and caution around these factor, users can end up with unwanted or unexpected outcomes. Thus, although an important metric, register and politeness should not be relied upon as a guaranteed indicator for communicative success with all audiences.