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Examiners' Report June 2010

GCE AS English Language 6EN01 01

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June 2010

Publications Code US023827

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Introduction

It was pleasing to see that most candidates were managing their time appropriately across the five questions. These are designed to allow candidates to show what they know in a series of short tasks, with an opportunity for extended analysis and discussion in the final question, which has, therefore, the largest number of marks.

Centres should note that the amount of space provided in the booklet for each answer is more than we would expect an effective answer to take, not a recommendation of the amount candidates should write. It is important, however, for candidates to analyse the two longer texts in sufficient detail in their response to the final question.

The approach to each individual question is considered in detail in the report. However, some general points of examination technique may prove of benefit to centres.

Before beginning to answer the questions in Section A, candidates should not only read all the texts, but also read through the four questions. This would help to avoid any overlap or confusion between Questions 2 and 3.

In Question 1, nearly all candidates provided suitably concise responses to each section, leaving a blank and moving on, where necessary. It is vital that candidates focus on the word, phrase or clause indicated in bold font and underlined. There are no marks awarded for comments on other parts of the example.

In Question 2, candidates should consider the contextual factors of the overall type of text presented in Section A - in this session, service encounters - rather than comment on individual examples in turn.

In Question 3, the focus moves to particular sub-groups of texts for more detailed comment.

In Question 4, the focus is on one or more individual texts, which should be analysed in detail according to the wording in the question. Candidates should also note that there are more marks awarded for this question (15, as opposed to 10) so should allocate their time accordingly. A few candidates did not notice the requirement to comment on only two of the four texts.

Question 1

This task has 15 marks at AO1, as it tests candidates' knowledge of appropriate terminology for the key constituents of language. The use of bold font and underlining indicates to candidates the scope of the example. Although credit is given for valid identification of individual words within the example, candidates should aim to comment on the entire text indicated.

In this session the expected responses were as follows:

- a (grammar) interrogative form; modal auxiliary verb and / or (pragmatics) mitigated imperative; politeness / hedge
- b (discourse) overlap; adjacency pair (grammar) interrogative + negative response
- c (lexis & semantics) colloquial / regional term (discourse) term of address / vocative
- d (lexis) proper noun (grammar) pre-modifier
- e (discourse) deixis / context-bound (grammar) adverbial phrase

Candidates should expect to be given examples from a variety of levels, which often include the opportunity to comment on semantics or pragmatics, and generally including lexis, grammar, discourse. There may occasionally be examples relating to phonology, graphology or morphology. Marks were awarded, for example, where candidates commented on the use of capitalisation for the proper noun 'Rowntrees'. The comment that it used a plural suffix 's' was not credited.

As the examples from this session show, candidates can achieve full marks on this question, if they have the toolkit of linguistic terminology recommended for AS English Language study. Example (a) showed that there is some confusion between the form (an interrogative) and the function (polite request), with a significant number claiming 'could you just get into' was an imperative. Example (e) proved to be the most challenging, with few candidates producing the term adverb or adverbial for 'over there'.

As in previous years, candidates were not credited more than once for a particular term, for example 'context bound' or 'politeness feature', which could be validly applied to several examples.

Question 2

The focus in this question moves to the context of the texts provided - service encounters at a variety of retail outlets - but AO3 also requires some brief reference to the impact of context on the language use. Many candidates used an accepted framework for their analysis of contextual factors, such as mode, field, function, tenor. Although not always used to full effect, it was always more successful than an unstructured response, relying on general knowledge of the retail world.

2 Explain the contextual factors that influence the use of language in service interactions.

(AO3 = 10)

In your response, you must refer to the data provided on pages 2–5 of the Source Booklet.

The first contextual factor that influences the use of language in service interactions is the mode. In this case the mode is spoken and therefore to a certain extent it is spontaneous and unplanned. This results in fillers such as, 'er'. This is in order to give the cashier time to think of what they are trying to say. However this is not overly common as though much of it is spontaneous there are still aspects which appear to be more planned as the cashier has most likely been asking similar questions to all customers for example, "Have you got a Boots card?" This is down to regulations they follow for their job.

• Perhaps one of the major factors affecting this type of interaction is the function. The function of these interactions is for a customer to buy goods, however, the underlying function is to make sure that the customer returns to the shop/cinema/stall again. This means that cashier's use

This candidate makes systematic use of a framework for analysing context: mode, function, field, tenor.



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Examiner Comments

Each contextual factor is dealt with in some detail, extending the initial comment, eg. 'spoken' to specify further factors: 'spontaneous', seeing that there may be some variation in the degree of planning. General reference to the impact on language use is sufficient, eg. 'this results in fillers'.



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Examiner Tip

Candidates should try to use judgement in the way they 'select and apply' relevant concepts. They should consider, for example, which of the four contextual factors has the most impact. It may be better in some cases to begin by consideration of function or tenor.

Question 3

This question is assessed at AO2 as well as AO3, so candidates should display their understanding of relevant concepts. Most were aware that there was a difference in levels of formality between the two groups of texts. The ability to explain this notion with more clarity was a distinguishing factor. Reference to concepts and theories such as 'politeness', 'convergence', 'face' proved successful, providing these terms were understood. It is not necessary in a short answer to use more than one of the concepts mentioned, nor to refer to theorists by name.

Marks for AO3 are awarded for the use of appropriate supporting linguistic evidence. Clearly, identifying one or two isolated words, such as the use of 'thanks' v 'ta', cannot achieve the full 5/5 marks. Candidates should attempt to refer to features of grammar or discourse as well as a lexical item.

- 3 Identify and explain differences you notice in language use between the exchanges in Group A (large retail chains) and Group B (small traders).

(AO2 = 5, AO3 = 5)

In your response, you must refer to Groups A and B on pages 2–4 of the Source Booklet.

Firstly I noticed that in Group B the small traders ~~are~~ specialise in particular products. ~~as everyone generally~~ so there is shared knowledge:

"dogg you keep FibFax refills"

"(i) yes just..."

The customers generally go into the ~~large~~ small traders looking for a specific good e.g. the sweet shop compared to the large retail shops e.g. tesco who sell just about everything.

This ~~is~~ may be the reason they small retailers ^{usually} always greet their customers with a "can I help you" or "you all right." The cashiers in the large retail chains ~~always~~ ^{mostly} use an attention signalling "hiya" "hi love" as people are coming to their till ^{just} to pay for their good ~~compared~~ after maybe waiting in a queue.

In the group B there is less workers and they ~~are~~ know more about what they are selling

Another difference in the language use is that group A cashier are always asking if the customer need a bag or if

they have a company card.
"do you have a Tesco card"

This response gains some credit for awareness of differences, but needs to display more linguistic knowledge.



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Examiner Comments

The candidate makes a series of points about differences, followed by reference to a feature in the text.



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Examiner Tip

Try to move from specific points of difference to make some general points, using linguistic concepts, such as degrees of formality and politeness. Use terminology to refer to examples quoted from the text. Rather than 'are always asking', use the term 'interrogative'.

Question 4

This question generally includes an element of forensic linguistics, asking candidates to speculate on an unknown contextual factor. Marks are not awarded for a correct answer, but for the quality of the reasoning provided in support of the decision.

Although it is not possible to give a definitive rank order for the degree of personal rapport in these four exchanges, many candidates felt that Example 13 (in the post office) had the highest, and Example 10 (in the cinema) the lowest. AO2 marks required some use of appropriate concepts to comment on rapport. Apart from those mentioned for Question 3, a number of candidates found the area of pragmatics, with notions of implied meanings, useful here. Some made interesting comments about Example 12 (the Big Issue Seller), noting a probable gap between the overt friendliness and the actual sincerity. Fewer candidates commented on Example 11, where the use of first name was the most commonly noted feature. Although this suggests a more personal rapport, candidates who explored the text in more detail sensed some lack of friendly interaction. General advice for candidates in this exam would be to look beyond the obvious, surface interpretation of any language text, as this allows more probing analysis.

The 10 marks at AO3 require some detailed analysis of the two chosen texts. Candidates should attempt to support their decision with textual evidence from a range of key constituents. It is important to move beyond reference to a lexical item, such as 'Ma'am', to comment on features of grammar and/or discourse. Some candidates, for example, made the valid point that greetings and terms of address were absent in Example 10. They also noted the preponderance of declarative structures in this exchange, with the absence of interactive interrogatives and the lack of appropriate response to the customer's turn (explaining she had been before).

Text 13 is likely to be a female cashier using terms such as 'dear'. There is a higher level of informality as the customer ~~she says~~ ^{the customer} ~~that~~ ^{cashier} greets the customer with 'hello' in non-standard English. She is from the northern area of ^{Britain} ~~English~~ suggested by the IPA with the lack of pronunciation of the letter 't' and the use of 'love' and 'dear' is stereotypically northern. Both participants laugh which shows their interactional conversation and promotes a relaxed informal tone. They also discuss the gift of the Christmas present. The fact that the customer shares details with the cashier shows that the cashier was friendly enough to do so. The term 'you're welcome dear' is also politeness however ~~also uses~~ informal.

This candidate chose Text 10 as having the least personal rapport, providing some detailed reference to the text; the briefer comments on Text 13 are reproduced.



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Examiner Comments

In a brief response, the candidate manages to cover many of the main points, including a variety of language levels. There is a mention of the paralinguistic feature of laughter, but also an attempt to comment on the level of phonology. The lexical items 'love' and 'dear' are suggested as features of regional dialect or idiolect. There is also reference to the aspect of shared knowledge.



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Examiner Tip

Try to include a comment at the level of grammar. A few candidates managed to include such points within comments on rapport, for example 'a socially-oriented declarative'; 'adding an intensifier to suggest that they have gone beyond the call of duty'.

Question 5

Candidates are now aware that this question involves more than a comparison between the expected features of spoken v written language. The wording 'presentation of self' should lead candidates to focus on the writer's (or speaker's) aims and their interaction with the target audience. It recognises that every language user can adopt a variety of registers, depending on the particular situation: a more business-like or a more humorous persona, for example. Many candidates structured their response with a framework for contextual analysis, but should remember to tie this into the primary focus and explicitly refer to presentation of self. In many cases, such a phrase only occurred towards the end of the response, suggesting it was an afterthought.

Some candidates were sidetracked into conjectures about the actual identity of each writer: whether male or female, young or old, educated or not. These dichotomies generally lead to assertions of stereotypes and the mis-use of theories studied. Various names, most often Lakoff, were attributed to the claim that women have no sense of humour. Lakoff's name was also cited in support of tag questions and empty adjectives being characteristic of female language, with only a few candidates offering such hypotheses with due caution.

In this series, Text A and B both clearly adopted a persona, the former signed by 'Precious and Comfort Cleaver', the latter by 'Santa Claus'. Candidates who focussed on the reasons / effects of such decisions as their starting point, gained marks at AO2 for their conceptual understanding. For the higher bands, it is necessary to show further awareness of appropriate concepts and theories from linguistic research. Reference to one theoretical framework or concept generally tends to be more effective than the attempt to mention a number of theories, partially understood.

AO1 marks are awarded for ability to express ideas clearly with the use of appropriate terminology. The caveat 'appropriate' obviously links to performance at AO2 and AO3.

Candidates who produced some detail in their analysis of texts and their contexts tended to score highly at both AO1 and AO3. All candidates identified the modes of Text A and B as electronic and written, with many seeing a considerable degree of overlap re planning, as well as some similarity in persuasive / informative purposes and the wide audience of previously identified sympathisers. It was pleasing to see most candidates analysing differences in terms of address in both texts, with some extending this point to comments on the salutations at the end of each letter.

Text A proved more difficult to understand. Even though a number of candidates felt the style suggested a lack of education, the terms 'panache' and 'a capella' were clearly unfamiliar. The tip to look beyond the obvious would have been a useful reminder to candidates who quickly associated a mention of 'knitting' with an elderly writer and audience, even though the references to MySpace may also have been noted. Many candidates were aware of elements of humour in this text, but fewer were able to extend this point further with precise analysis and comment. Although a number of candidates used the term 'multi-modal' for Text A, they focussed more on its overlap with the written mode; features of spoken language were noted by fewer. Gender discussions were common for this text; the most perceptive kept in mind the notion of a persona and were aware of the deliberate, exaggerated nature of some features of repetition and vagueness.

Text B provided opportunities for some analysis of graphological features, linked to the use of a fictional persona, persuasive purposes and the child-centred subject-matter. Most candidates

commented on the serious underlying purposes and were able to identify some emotive connotations or semantic fields in support of this point. Many also noted the use of interrogative and imperative structures. Some candidates made the simple assumption that, because the letter was signed by 'Santa', the audience must be children. Those who explored the fact that the addressee was an adult were able to make some pertinent points about presentation of self.

There is not time in the hour allotted to analyse each text in exhaustive detail. Candidates cannot make every possible point, but should attempt to demonstrate their ability to analyse language beyond the levels of lexis and graphology, including some analysis of features of grammar and discourse.

SECTION B: PRESENTING SELF

Read the two Texts A and B on pages 6–7 of the Source Booklet and answer the following question.

- 5 Analyse and compare the ways in which each of the speakers and writers of Texts A and B presents himself or herself.

(AO1 = 10, AO2 = 15, AO3 = 25)

In your response, you should include reference to any relevant theories and research.

The writer of text A presents themselves as a friendly person. The use of colloquial language such as "four" and "boogie woogie" indicate how easily the reader can relate to the email, they have chosen to use less formal language to create a lively atmosphere which is what the email is promoting to the reader. The writer has also used a lot of elision e.g. "I'm and He's". This also shows how informal the email is. ~~happy~~

The writer of text B presents themselves as a caring member of the community. The use of a rhetorical question, relates to the audience by getting them to think about the consequences of not answering ~~this~~ this question. The writer grabs the readers attention as they don't want to be perceived as the "bad" person compared to the writer.

In text A, includes their contact details, to this the audience feels that they can, if necessary talk to the writer if they wanted to. Creating an approachable characteristic. The use of italics at the end of this newsletter allows the audience to take this last message as lightheartedly as they wish.

In text B, the writer has used an intensifier at the end of the letter, "thank you (so) much". Women are more likely to use intensifier than men, according to Lacoff theory. The use of one intensifier helps to make the thank you more sincere to which the audience would gain more respect for the writer.

Both ~~the~~ writers in texts A and B are writing to gain the respect of the audience.

This response gains credit at all three AO's, but there is room for more thoughtful consideration of presentation of self and more breadth and precision of textual analysis.



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Examiner Comments

These extracts all show the candidate focussing on the wording of the task. The comments tend to begin with an observation about the writer (friendly, caring, etc), or about the way the writer positions the readers. The candidate then offers some evidence from the text, using linguistic terminology (eg. elision, intensifier). At some points, the candidate refers to a theory or concept from linguistic research.



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Examiner Tip

Use the phrase 'the writer (or speaker) presents themselves as ...' regularly to ensure you stay focussed on the question. Then refer to language features that help to create this effect. Also consider how this style / register fits in with other contextual aspects, such as function or rapport with audience.

Most candidates performed well on this paper, however, performance could be improved by increasing the detail of their textual analysis and by taking a more tentative stance towards any theories quoted.

Grade Boundaries

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E	N	U
Raw boundary mark	100	75	67	59	51	43	35	0
Uniform boundary mark	120	96	84	72	60	48	36	0

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