

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2011

GCE

GCE English Language (6EN03/01)

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General comments

This paper focussed on language change and diversity with a British English text from the early 1600s and two American political speeches of very different styles in Section A and a mixture of written and spoken child language in Section B.

Candidates seemed more comfortable with children's language development - especially spoken language but there appeared to be less variation of achievement across the questions than previous series. A number of candidates lacked confidence with the application of key constituents, especially at the level of grammar and phonology, and often failed to identify a large enough range of issues to be awarded top bands.

There was also great variability in the amount candidates wrote. Many of the responses to Q1b and Q2b started well but only covered two sides of the answer booklet which meant that in all but the most succinct responses valuable discussion was missing. At the other end of the spectrum some wrote at great length, but often did not keep the focus clearly on the data or spent too long discussing a single feature. Such responses were self penalising as the range of features covered was narrow. In the longer responses (Q1b and Q2b) candidates should use the answer booklet as a rough guide to the expected length of a response and attempt to cover a range of features from each relevant key constituent (at least two or three where the data allows) as briefly and succinctly as possible.

For Q1a too many candidates were still ignoring the question. These candidates wrote on too many features or didn't select relevant key constituents that allowed them to display the full range of their linguistic knowledge.

For Q1b candidates need to remember the importance of covering a range of key constituents as weaker responses tended to limit themselves to one or two issues or merely listed features with little attempt to explain. There were also a number of candidates who were determined to show their knowledge of the standardisation of British English, Dr Johnson's dictionary and the vowel shift even though the texts didn't really allow for extensive discussions of these events.

In Q2a candidates needed to discuss the links between spelling and sound with reference to key theories. Candidates should be reminded to read the question carefully to ensure they have the correct focus as some discussed issues not related to spelling (such as linearity).

Q2b required knowledge of theories and key constituents but candidates need to respond carefully to the demands of the question. Merely identifying features in a list-like fashion or discussing theories without clear and explicit links to the source material is not likely to achieve higher band marks.

Question 1a

Q1a followed the same pattern as the previous two series of the specification by asking candidates to focus in depth on two examples from Text 1. The candidate was expected to demonstrate a firm grasp of the key constituents and the ability to relate the examples to context while referring to any related theories or concepts. The 10 marks available for this question (5 marks per example analysed) reflects the length of response that is expected from candidates with many candidates scoring well having written just over a single side.

Despite an emphasis on how to approach this question in previous reports, there were still a number of candidates who did not respond as the question intended. Instead, they covered several key constituents very briefly (a sort of mini-analysis) or discussed a number of examples from a single key constituent. Candidates need to be reminded of the importance of reading the question carefully to ensure they are meeting its demands. Such responses seldom scored well as they exhibited a lack of depth. It is worth noting, that there was little to be gained on this question by opening with a long mechanical discussion of context in terms of mode, tenor, field and function as this meant candidates didn't have enough time to focus on the language differences between this text and modern English.

In the lower mark bands, answers tended to be quite superficial and descriptive (for example merely stating that *hath* is no longer used and so is archaic) and/or contained errors such as confusing grammar and punctuation or believing the interchangeable letters such as <u> and <v> affected pronunciation. Often candidates demonstrated choice of one or even two unsuitable key constituent or made general comments about the formality of the lexis or sentence type. Overall, candidates whose work was in the lower bands lacked awareness of the key concepts underpinning older language forms.

Candidates in the higher bands selected examples which allowed for detailed exploration, most commonly the interchangeable letters, the final <e> and the archaic verb ending <eth>. These were then analysed closely using appropriate terminology. Unlike at the lower bands, candidates at this level described the feature, offered plausible explanations of its function and when/why it disappeared from Standard English. They also attempted to spot patterns of use in the extract (such as the use of the long <s>), offered plausible explanations of why the selected feature was present and often gave other related information such as when and why it was lost and how it relates to modern Standard English.

Question 1b

This question focussed on two American political speeches from different eras and the vast majority of candidates took the perfectly valid approach of writing on each text in turn with the comparison being integrated into the response with the use of phrases such as 'unlike/similarly to Text 2/3'. Many candidates found these to be challenging texts but nevertheless there were a number of insightful and detailed answers. On the whole, student responses seemed to indicate that centres had prepared candidates well for American English texts and that they had explored persuasive language forms and rhetorical techniques. Although there was significant variation in the quality and length of responses, the majority of candidates were able to comment on the different audiences for the speeches, distinctive features of American English (such as lexis) and to make some accurate comment on the purposes of the texts.

Responses in the lower bands, although often showing a clear awareness of the function of the texts were often very narrow in range with only a few features for discussion and showed limitation and uncertainty in the application of key constituents. Areas for analysis were often limited to pronoun use and some general comments on lexical choice being related to the text's American origin. Additionally lower band candidates often failed to link their chosen features clearly and explicitly to the different audiences and contexts of the speeches meaning high scores in AO2 and AO3 were elusive. Errors in terminology (such as labelling 'we' as 2nd person or

confusing accent and dialect) were common at this level and restricted the marks available in AO1.

Higher band answers had much greater security in their responses and approached the texts through a flexible linguistic framework which allowed them to apply a wide range of relevant key constituents to each of the texts. They acknowledged and explored how the different time periods, audiences and the speaker had affected the texts but were also careful to discuss the similarities they shared as political speeches. It was disappointing that even amongst higher scoring candidates the discussion of the implied phonology in Text 3 was underdeveloped with very few candidates employing key symbols from the IPA effectively. Although terms like elision were used, most discussed phonology only in terms of missing graphemes leading to general comments about missing the <g> sound of the end of words.

Question 2a

Like Q1a, this is a short answer response worth 10 marks. Far fewer candidates missed the wording of the question as completely as Q1a but a number of candidates explored issues such as linearity and use of pictures as prompts which could not be awarded under the mark scheme. Candidates should be reminded to read the question carefully and to ensure that they are meeting its specific demands.

On the whole, candidates seemed to feel comfortable with analysing a child's written language. Although the quality of responses varied from narrative descriptions to more incisively analytical answers, most candidates selected productive examples with 'sed' and 'wontit' and 'sgeyel' being the most popular. Centres had clearly spent some time on theories and the stages of written language development and many candidates were able to employ this information successfully in the course of their analysis.

Lower band answers tended to identify some relevant features but offered vague narrative accounts by merely observing that Jake spelt that way because that was how he said the word. In some cases they discussed more than two features or discussed areas not strictly linked to the question.

Stronger responses for this question stuck to describing two features and used terms like grapheme and phoneme, as well as the IPA, to make clear links between Jake's spelling and the sounding out method associated with phonics (although few mentioned phonics by name). Such candidates looked at the spelling of other words in the text to support their argument, citing examples such as the <ai> in 'rainbow' and 'said' making different sounds despite their identical appearance or made plausible links to regional accent. In some cases candidates used terminology associated with place and manner of articulation to try and explain why Jake may have confused certain sounds in his writing.

Question 2b

Once again, centres had clearly spent some time teaching and exploring child spoken language and candidates seemed to approach this question with more confidence than Q1b. This may be because they were able to adopt a more universal framework for the analysis of spoken child language than they were for the diversity questions in Section A.

In many instances, weaker responses tended to either discuss theory without clear links to the data or would merely list the different speech patterns found in the text with very few links to theories or how interaction with others can aid the developmental process. At this level, the discussion of the mother's influence was usually solely around her use of questions. Discussion of issues like pronunciation tended to be limited to reproducing the IPA representations in the data with little attempt to say what area of phonology was causing difficulty and no plausible explanations of why the child had pronounced the word in the way it had.

At higher bands a much more confident knowledge of how the family influenced the younger children was clearly evident with the main focus being, quite correctly, on how Madeline was influenced by her mother and brothers. Such candidates demonstrated a secure knowledge of many theories, both developmental and functional, and were careful to use fully explored specific examples from a range of key constituents to illustrate their discussion. Many candidates exhibited confident, accurate and productive use of linguistic terminology to describe issues such as the type of interrogatives used by the mother, the type of lexis she used and speech sound terminology allowed them to describe why Madeline used omitted or substituted certain phonemes.

Summary

It was clear that centres had worked hard preparing candidates for Unit 3 and they were eager to display their knowledge. Many candidates showed they had expanded the scope of their linguistic knowledge over the course of their A2 studies and there were very few who did not identify at least some issues in the data provided.

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