

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2013

GCE English Language (6EN03/01)
Language Diversity and Children's
Language Development

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General comments

This paper focused on language change with Section A consisting of an extract of an Early Modern English piece and two examples of scientific writing from different times and a mixture of written and spoken child language in Section B.

Candidates seemed equally prepared for both sections of the paper but there was some significant variation in the length of responses. 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 succinctly as possible. It is unlikely that writing two sides would allow high scores in the 40 mark questions. Typically, lower band answers illustrated a lack of confidence with the application of key constituents at the level of grammar and phonology, and often identified only a very narrow range of issues. Higher band answers showed more confidence with linguistic issues and terminology and were able to offer analysis based on a range of key constituents.

Each individual question is considered later in this report but a general summary may be of benefit.

For Question 1(a) there were still a number of candidates selecting more than two features to discuss and a number did not focus on the differences between the data and Standard English, instead discussing features still found in English today. Many candidates awarded marks in the lower bands merely noted or observed the differences with little or no attempt to explore and explain. Higher band responses showed more assured knowledge of language from this period and were able to comment on patterns of use across the data for the selected feature as well as offering explanations for their presence, clearly linked to historical context.

For Question 1(b) candidates need to remember the importance of covering a range of key constituents, including areas such as grammar, as weaker responses tended to limit themselves to semantic field and graphology and often made little attempt to explain. Candidates at mid and lower bands tended to focus on the basic historical differences shown by the data and did not consider other contextual factors such as function, how this form of writing has changed in response to a changing society and the evolution of science as an area of academic study. Such responses also tended to neglect text 3 because it had no obvious historical features on which to comment.

In Question 2 (a) candidates needed to discuss two examples from the data that would allow them to display knowledge of the development of the written language, with reference to key theories. This type of question has appeared before and caused candidates few significant difficulties in approach, although there was a great deal of variety in the level of detail offered in the responses.

Question 2 (b) required knowledge of theories and key constituents but candidates need to respond carefully to the demands of the question (in this case discussing how the children's language allowed them to engage in imaginative play).

Responses which just identified a list of features and discussed theories without clear and explicit links to the source material were unlikely to achieve high bands.

Question 1(a)

Q1(a) 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 show specific linguistic knowledge of the selected feature and to demonstrate a firm grasp of the key constituents, as well as the ability to relate the examples to context while referring to any related issues or concepts. The 10 marks available for this question (5 marks per example analysed) reflects the length of response that is expected from candidates.

There were still a number of candidates who covered more than one key constituent and so produced a mini-analysis generally characterised by a lack of depth but far fewer discussed the mode, tenor, field and function. Candidates need to be reminded of the importance of reading the question carefully to ensure they are meeting its demands.

In the lower mark bands, answers tended to be superficial and descriptive and seemed to lack knowledge of the period, with many describing the data as being Old or Middle English. Although low band answers tended to select relevant features they often did little more than observe the differences with no exploration and little evidence of subject specific knowledge. There was also an over reliance on a few key pieces of information such as Caxton's introduction of the printing press, or the influence of the Normans, with such information applied indiscriminately regardless of relevance to the example under discussion. Effective exploration of historical features requires a secure knowledge of the history of English before this period. Although they will not be asked to analyse such data, candidates need some knowledge of the features of Middle English in order to put later forms in context.

Candidates in the higher bands selected productive examples from the data and were able to develop and analyse these in some detail using appropriate terminology. They had more knowledge of the features of Old and Middle English that affected language development and were aware that standardisation was a gradual process influenced by a number of factors.

Question 1(b)

This question focused on two pieces of scientific writing from different eras. As usual, the majority of candidates took the perfectly valid approach of writing on each text in turn with the comparison being integrated into the latter half of the response. Many candidates seemed comfortable with exploring diversity over time and there were a number of detailed answers. The majority of candidates were able to offer varying degrees of comment on the different audiences for the texts, their purpose and what the data illustrated about the changes and evolution of this type of writing over time.

Responses in the lower bands, although often showing a clear awareness of the function of the texts, were generally very narrow in range, with only a few features selected for discussion. Many showed limitation and uncertainty in the application of key constituents meaning high scores in AO2 and AO3 were elusive. Areas for analysis were often limited to describing only some lexical issues (such as development of semantic field) and graphology (paragraphing and scientific symbols) but failed to demonstrate their knowledge of other key constituents and all but ignored the other contextual factors. There was also a tendency to rely on distant and not wholly relevant historical knowledge such as Caxton but the number writing long narrative accounts about the history of English was markedly reduced and the majority limited themselves to sensible and brief references to issues which were more directly relevant such as the Renaissance. Errors in terminology or very limited quantity were common at this level and restricted the marks available in AO1. It was also noted that many candidates were not using capital letters appropriately and that they should be reminded that even in an exam situation Standard English grammar is expected. Candidates in the lower bands sometimes lacked the confidence to explore text 3 in any depth.

Higher band answers had much greater security in their responses and applied a wide range of relevant key constituents to each of the texts (usually two or three points per constituent) as well as considering a range of contextual issues. Unfortunately, comments on higher level grammatical issues (such as the use of passives and adverbials) were surprisingly absent and it would be worth drawing candidate's attention to the potential range identified in the mark scheme if using this data to prepare for future series. Candidates acknowledged and offered some exploration of how this form of writing has changed and evolved while simultaneously acknowledging the similarities the two texts shared.

Question 2(a)

Like Q1(a), this is a short answer response worth 10 marks. 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. The open nature of the question in this sitting meant few candidates had difficulty interpreting it but there was still a significant minority attempting to analyse more than two features. Most candidates selected productive examples such as phonological spelling (the most popular), use of capitals and various aspects of narrative structure.

Lower band answers usually identified some relevant features but tended to be vague narrative accounts with little attempt to explain why the feature was present. In other instances, the examples selected were not a significant feature of this stage of development and did not allow candidates to display their knowledge fully (such comments on linearity and directionality, both of which would be almost taken for granted at this stage). Candidates should always consider which features allow them to best display the breadth and depth of their learning when selecting examples and planning their responses. Candidates in lower bands typically demonstrated limited knowledge about the development of written language, the influence of education (especially teaching through phonics)

and attempted to discuss spelling without reference to the IPA. References to theories tended to be very general and in some cases implausible with some candidates insisting that children had an innate knowledge of written language.

Stronger responses for this question selected productive features explored them with confidence but even at this level few candidates made specific links to the phonic method of teaching spelling in schools. However, higher band responses tended to demonstrate a firmer grasp of phonology, especially the IPA, and understood this was needed to explore spelling effectively. Such candidates were also able to integrate reference to theories of development, although there was some over-reliance on Vygotsky's 'more knowledgeable other'.

Question 2(b)

Many candidates seemed to approach this question with confidence but should be reminded of the necessity to fit their responses to the specific demands of the question.

Generally speaking, responses in the lower bands tended to either discuss various theories at great length without clear links to the data or would merely list the different speech patterns found in the text with very few links to theories and what aspects of the children's language allowed them to engage in imaginative play. Many failed to follow the basic approach of quoting an example, analysing it and relating it to research. The middle stage tended to be left out with examples only linked to a theorist (often stating, 'this proves the theory of...') but with no accompanying analysis. Like previous series, exploration of issues like pronunciation tended to be limited to reproducing the IPA representations in the data with few plausible explanations of why the child had pronounced the word in the way it had or any issues concerning how this may relate to the context of the conversation. Comments on grammar (where present) were limited to observations on what the adult form would have been and there was often little attempt to also discuss how their grammar allowed them to achieve their purpose despite the non standard aspects. Pleasingly, there was little evidence of a judgemental approach but a number of candidates muddled basic terminology (such as grapheme/phoneme and person when discussing pronouns) and tried to discuss inappropriate features such as environmental print.

Higher band answers were careful to consider the contextual factors such as the environment (both that in which the conversation took place, as well as the effect of other environments the children had experienced, especially visits to the shops), issues surrounding imaginative play and the relationship between the children. Candidates demonstrated secure and confident knowledge of a range of theories (both developmental and functional) and were aware of grey areas where a number of theories could be applied. The approach to the data was often systematic and candidates worked through a wide range of key constituents. For areas such as grammar and phonology there was awareness that variation from the standard form may not have been wholly developmental and could instead be explained by other factors such as region or the influence of carers and other language users.

Summary

It was clear that centres had worked hard preparing candidates for Unit 3 and that the students were eager to display their knowledge. 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. However, candidates need to be made aware of the importance of covering a range of key constituents, especially grammar, if they wish to achieve top band.

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