Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2022

Pearson Edexcel GCE Advanced Subsidiary GCE

In English Language (8EN0)

Paper 1: Language: Context and Identity

Introduction

As everyone will be aware, this has been a unique year. The Covid lockdown has meant that candidates have had their education disrupted and have had only limited experience of sitting externally marked exams. However, it was very clear that candidates had been well-prepared for this exam. In both sections, candidates understood what was required and focused clearly on language use. Candidates used a range of linguistic terms and showed understanding of a range of linguistic concepts. Stronger candidates used terms precisely in a way which showed an ability to discriminate between different linguistic forms and functions, while weaker responses used a more limited range of terminology showing only a broad understanding of the data. While candidates did use linguistic terms well in general, there were a number of candidates who had difficulty in identifying grammatical functions accurately. It is important when analysing texts to be able to use basic terms such as 'noun', 'verb', adjective' and 'adverb' accurately. Some candidates clearly understood complex linguistic theories related to language and power, discourse or pragmatics, but were still struggling with the identifying basic word classes.

The majority of candidates were able to support their ideas with examples from the texts.

For both questions, candidates understood the need to analyse contextual factors and most were able to comment with some insight on mode, field, audience and function.

Section A

For this section candidates were required to analyse and compare how contextual factors influenced language choices in three texts related to tea and coffee. Candidates engaged well with the texts and most worked methodically through the language frameworks. The great majority of candidates recognised the need to make comparisons across the texts. The most successful candidates were those who dealt with each text in turn but at the same time were able to keep all three texts in mind, so that they were able to comment on similarities and differences between the texts and therefore show a consistent awareness of comparisons across the data.   Weaker candidates dealt with each text separately and then added a paragraph of comparisons at the end which meant that while they did show awareness of connections across data, it wasn't consistent or sustained and so wasn't able to achieve the higher mark levels for AO4.

Most candidates recognised and commented on the playful aspects of Text A. The strongest candidates were able to drill down into the way the text uses verbs from the lexical fields of birds and flight ('swoop', 'glide',' flock') to create an association with freedom and non-conformity for the brand, in contrast to the 'dull' products of their competitors. Most candidates commented on the use of pronouns and direct address in Texts A and B. Some referred to the Fairclough's theory of 'synthetic personalisation' identifying strategies for establishing a relationship with the consumer/viewer. Many candidates commented on the adaptation of the birthday song in Text A as a way of adding a 'feelgood factor' to the text. Candidates recognised the different modes of writing and speaking in Texts A and B. The most able candidates were able to comment on the way Text B, because of its function as an accompaniment to an animation, was far more formally organised grammatically, through the use of imperatives and timed pauses, than everyday conversation. When commenting on lexis, candidates recognised the relatively accessible language of Text B with its high proportion of monosyllabic words. However, the strongest candidates were also able to comment on the occasional use of less familiar, more specialist terms, such as 'course filter style' and 'steam valve' which were related to the brewing of coffee.

Text C was the text that caused candidates most difficulty. The text is discursive and informative, with the author presenting an opinion about recent High Street developments supported by statistics and facts. Most candidates recognised the informative function of the text and commented on the use of facts and numbers to establish expertise.

The majority of candidates recognised and commented on the way the author used language from the field of war and conflict in order to dramatise what would have otherwise been a quite dull, technical exposition. The more insightful identified an element of seeking to entertain here. More able candidates were also able to identify the full range of registers included in this text with familiar, informal, colloquialisms such as 'fad' and 'kicked off' appearing alongside sophisticated field specific terms from the business world such as 'high street penetration' and 'aggressive cluster policy'. Weaker candidates were not clear on the function of Text C. Some read it as a criticism or promotion of certain named businesses rather than a discussion of a development. All candidates would benefit from having some experience of texts like this which present complex arguments or points of view.

When comparing across texts, candidates often made use of successful theoretical frameworks such as Accommodation Theory. Some candidates used the theoretical model of 'Aristotle's Triangle (Pathos, Logos and Ethos) as a way in to looking at function. This was helpful where candidates were able to link the theory to specific examples from the texts to show understanding of how context effects linguistic choice. Able candidates were able to identify some similarities in terms of function between Texts A and B in that they were each seeking to promote a particular product (although this was less explicit in Text B) and that Text C was entirely different in terms of function, as it was not promoting a product but discussing changes in the way that businesses were operating on the High Street.

Section B

In this section, candidates were required to analyse the presentation of self/construction of identity in a single piece of data. This year the data consisted of an extract from the speech given by Michelle Obama to the Mulberry School for Girls in 2015.

Again, as in section A, many candidates referred to Giles' Accommodation Theory and used concepts such as 'convergence' and 'divergence' as a way into talking about how Obama presents herself and begins to establish a particular kind of relationship with her audience. Most candidates were able to comment on the different identities Obama presents here, relating to different points in her life and were able to show how this was designed to inspire her audience.

Stronger candidates were also able to comment on the different degrees of formality within the piece, with the use of informal language such as 'kids' and cliches such as 'whole lot of Love' to add colour and to establish a rapport, while at the same time showing status and expertise through the use of use of formal titles such as 'First Lady of the United States' or 'NGO director'.

Some of the better responses used concepts from the study of language and power to discuss the way Obama tries to mitigate the unequal power balance in her relationship with the audience by using 'child friendly' language, for example, by using repeated adjectives and intensifiers like, 'little, tiny room', 'my absolute very best'. Better responses also commented on how Obama uses repeated grammatical structures to build rhetorical momentum and a list of noun phrases identifying job titles to establish the contrast between her identity as an adult and her identity as a child.

Weaker candidates tended to make general comments that were broadly descriptive and relied on a limited understanding of how identity may be constructed through language. The very weakest candidates did little more than paraphrase what Obama was saying.

Many candidates incorporated ideas about language and gender recognising that the confident and assertive style adopted by Obama contradicted some earlier theoretical assertions about gendered language.