



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2023

Pearson Edexcel GCE Advanced Subsidiary
In English Language

Paper 1: Language: Context and Identity
(8EN0_01)

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Publications Code 8EN0_01_2306_ER

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Introduction

This year we saw the beginning of a return to pre-pandemic examination standards. Candidates came to the AS examinations with some experience of GCSE examinations and it was clear from the response this year that the examination technique of the candidates was much sharper and more focused. Candidates had been well-prepared for the exam and had a clear idea of how it was structured and what they needed to do. For section A, candidates were clear about the need to analyse ways in which context influenced language choice and for section B they understood the need to focus on how language was being used in the presentation of self. Candidates also understood the need to talk about field, mode, audience and function. Most candidates were able to support their ideas with relevant examples from the texts. Relevant theoretical frameworks were often referred to in their answers.

The use of linguistic terminology was in general more secure this year than last year. Candidates were able to call on a wide range of concepts from language theory and they were more confident and accurate in using a variety of linguistic terms, for example when identifying word classes. One area, however, where weaker candidates seemed to struggle, was at sentence level. When discussing groups of words some candidates had difficulty distinguishing between sentences, clauses and phrases.

Section A

For this section candidates were asked to analyse how language choices were affected by contextual factors in three texts related to climate change and global warming. Candidates responded well to the texts and most were able to comment with some insight on mode, field, audience and function. Candidates recognised the need to make comparisons between the texts. The strongest candidates kept all three texts and the need to draw comparisons in mind as they analysed each text, rather than dealing with each text separately and leaving comparisons to the end. The need to compare made the analysis of each individual text more effective. This also enabled candidates to achieve higher marks for A04.

Candidates engaged well with Text A, a talk by a teenage climate activist to an audience of primary schoolchildren. Most candidates recognised that the speaker was employing a casual, informal style with some fillers ('kind of') and some vague lexis ('stuff') typical of semi-spontaneous speech. Candidates were able to relate this convincingly to audience and function. However, the strongest candidates recognised that a variety of registers were actually being employed and the speaker was using statistics and terms from specialised scientific fields like 'environmental immigrant' and 'climate crisis' to add authority to the presentation. Most candidates were able to identify links between Text A and Text C, the lecture by Al Gore. (There were a few candidates who were not clear that a printed text of a speech is not the same as a 'transcription', and this which led them to comment on the absence of pauses and other spoken language features in Al Gore's speech.)

The playfulness of the language in Text B was recognised by most candidates as was the attempt by the authors to link two independent functions (i.e. to raise awareness of climate change and sell ice cream). Strong candidates commented on how the attempt to raise awareness of the issue of climate change by intertextual allusions and word play

contrasted with the more conventional use of food and taste related imagery for advertising purposes. In their discussion of this text the relevance of function offered the most room for conjecture and some interesting interpretations. There were clearly ways this text differed from the other two texts, obviously, in terms of mode, but also in the positive promotion of a specific corporate brand, which candidates were often able to recognise and comment on in interesting ways.

Text C was the most challenging text for many candidates. Candidates identified the context of the Nobel Prize awards ceremony as one which would influence the formality of the language and identified Gore's status as a former USA vice-president as highly significant in terms of the authority of his speech. Most candidates commented on the use of specialist terminology from the field of science, but not all noticed the occasional colloquialism such as his use of the word 'dumped'. Also not all candidates picked up his use of figurative language, for example in his use of an extended metaphor of 'a fever' to draw his listeners' attention to the plight of the planet. Candidates commented on his use of pronouns to encourage a sense of shared responsibility and commented on his use of short sentences. (Only a few candidates recognised that some of these were minor sentences).

Candidates referred to a range of theoretical frameworks in their responses. Many made links to Giles' Accommodation Theory and Goffman's Face Theory when looking at how authors sought to position themselves in relation to their audience. Ideas from the study of language and power also helped candidates to work towards coherent analyses of the texts. Norman Fairclough was frequently referred to by candidates and in particular his concept of 'synthetic personalisation'. These theoretical ideas were helpful when accompanied by relevant quotations from the texts supporting or challenging the theory. Many candidates also found Shan Wareing's analysis of different kinds of power in discourse helpful, and were able to apply these theories to the data in a way which led to more discriminating analysis in the stronger candidates.

Section B

In this section candidates are presented with a single piece of data and are required to analyse the strategies used by the authors to present themselves. This year the data was from a website promoting the services of a personal trainer, Nick, and his organisation LEP fitness.

Most candidates were able to identify the variety of identities that Nick was promoting in this text. For example, the competent professional with a wide range of relevant experience, the personal friend who truly cares about the well-being of his customers, the well-trained expert prepared to put extra time and effort into his job. Many candidates commented on the sense of an underlying drive to present himself as superior to his competitors ('not just a personal trainer').

Interestingly, very few candidates commented on the fact that the author introduces himself by only his first name without any surname given in the text at all, which is clearly a key factor in the presentation of self.

Candidates commented on the author's extensive use of pronouns, especially the frequent use of 'I' and 'you' and were able to link this to mode and function. Similarly, candidates recognised the frequent references to his qualifications and his experience

were a way to make himself appear trustworthy and authoritative. Although candidates were clear that this was a piece in the written mode, stronger candidates recognised that there was an attempt to simulate the language of face-to-face interactions. They often commented on the authors use of non-standard orthography, such as the use of capitals and the use of bracketed 'asides' to create a sense of intimacy. In addition, candidates noted the use of ellipsis and exclamations helped create the sense of a spoken interaction. The strongest candidates reflected on the use of non-standard orthography as a way of compensating for the limitations of the written mode.

Candidates used many of the same theoretical frameworks as they did for section A when discussing this text. Some candidates considered the text in relation to theories of language and gender, such as those of Lakoff and Coates, in the case of this text the resulting analysis was not convincing.

While most of candidates were able to confidently analyse the way the author of this text uses language to construct a variety identities and so fulfil his function, weaker candidates did find it hard to find things to say specifically about the language. The very weakest resorted to paraphrasing parts of the text and commenting on what it revealed about the character of the author. In these cases, it was hard to award marks above the lowest two levels of the assessment objectives.