



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel GCE Advanced Subsidiary
In English Language
Paper 1: Language:Context and Identity
(8EN0/01)

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Introduction

It was clear this year that candidates had been well-prepared for the exam and knew exactly how it was structured and what they needed to do. For section A, candidates were aware of 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. It was also evident that candidates had been taught relevant theoretical frameworks which they often referred to in their answers. Most candidates were able to support their ideas with relevant examples from the texts.

The use of linguistic terminology was generally secure. Candidates were able to call on a wide range of concepts from language theory and they were confident and accurate in using a variety of linguistic terms, for example when identifying word classes. However, some candidates still found it hard to identify groups of words at sentence level, particularly when distinguishing between sentences, clauses, and phrases. For example a simple sentence might be referred to as a 'noun phrase' or 'verb phrase'.

Section A

In section A candidates were asked to read three texts concerning birds and then analyse how language choices were affected by contextual factors. Candidates responded well to the texts and most were able to comment with some insight on mode, field, audience, and function. Most candidates were aware of the need to make comparisons between the texts. As in previous years the strongest candidates were those who kept all three texts and the need to draw comparisons in mind as they analysed each text. This was better than dealing with each text separately and making comparisons at the end. The need to compare often helped to sharpen the individual analysis of each text. It also enabled candidates to achieve higher marks for A04.

Text A was an extract from a website which was addressed primarily towards gardeners. It offers advice and the possibility of buying a variety of garden related products, including food for feeding wild birds. The majority of candidates recognised that the text was fulfilling more than one function. It was presented as offering advice and information on the one hand, while at the same time using a variety of strategies, such as direct address, modal verbs and imperatives to persuade the audience to buy products available on the website. When considering mode, many candidates commented that the possibility of planning and redrafting that the written/digital mode of the text offered, may have resulted in the use of low frequency, Latinate lexical items such as 'quintessential' and 'voracious' and in some complex sentence structures. They were able to contrast this to the more informal syntax and vocabulary in Text B. Candidates also commentated on the use of pathos in the depiction of the robin and related that to function. Candidates often commented on how the text used a statistic to emphasize its reliability. The more discriminating candidates were able to comment on the way the features identified in the description of the robins were often tailored to be of interest to the intended audience of gardeners

(e.g. 'voracious pest eaters') thereby helping the text fulfil one of its key functions.

When considering Text B candidates were able to show clear contrasting features to Text A and were able to account for these in terms of mode, field, audience and function. Most candidates identified the 'relaxed', informal style of the speakers and the presence of a range of familiar spontaneous spoken word features such as filled and unfilled pauses, repetitions, AK's use of 'kind of'. The more perceptive candidates were able to relate this to function and audience. They conjectured that the two 'experts' would be aware that a video on the website of the RSPB might attract people interested in birds of any age or level of expertise and they would therefore be likely to adopt an informal easily accessible form of language with very little specialist lexis. Perceptive candidates were also able to identify how the interview format was being used as a way of presenting information and that it had probably involved some level of pre-planning. When discussing phonology, many candidates commented on AK's playful imitation of the sound made by the swans and the use of a variety of ways of conveying it.

Text C was a more challenging text for some candidates. Some found it hard to identify the purpose and audience of the text. Candidates who recognised that there was an attempt here to use language to recreate the sense of a specific experience, and that it was related to story-telling, were in a better position to analyse the text. Most candidates were able to comment on the use of metaphors and similes such as 'the recoil of a .303 rifle', 'the hawk's tactical computer' and 'soaking up g- force like a sponge'. Discriminating candidates were able to comment on how some of the figurative language strongly implied a comparison of the bird with some sort of weapon. Candidates also commented on the use of subject specific lexis such as 'bars and pinions'. Stronger candidates analysed the use of the comic strip idea as a frame which allowed the author to present a sequence of truncated, sometimes minor sentences to present images of the speed and power of the hawk in flight. The most able candidates also recognised how the patterned sound of the words and the use of alliteration, also contributed to the sense of motion and force.

Candidate 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 the 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. Many candidates found Shan Wareing's analysis of different kinds of power in discourse helpful. Norman Fairclough was also mentioned frequently and there were quite a few references to Aristotle's theories about persuasive strategies. These theoretical ideas were helpful when accompanied by relevant quotations from the texts supporting or challenging the theory.

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 the poet Lemn Sissay's memoir about being brought up in care. The candidates responded well to the text. The strongest candidates were those who were able to comment on how the narrator's sense of his own identity changes over the course of the extract.

Most candidates commented on the use of short sentences, often in lists of three that Sissay uses at the start of the text to highlight the effect the new information about his mother had on him as a teenager. Candidates were able to comment on how the quotations from his mother's letters leads to the author posing rhetorical questions to indicate the young Sissay's thinking as he reacts to the new information about his identity.

Candidates commented on the author's extensive use of the first person and the way the repetition of key phrases towards the end of the extract demonstrate the growing certainty and confidence in his new-found sense of self. 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, for example by using minor sentences ('My Mother.', 'Ethiopia.'). The text deals with emotional effects arising from a lack of information about one's own identity and from a sense of social isolation. Candidates commented on the use of figurative language to present a troubled sense of self ('a shadow crawled into me'). Many also interpreted the tattoo incident as a way of dramatising the author's mental state at this time in his life.

While most of candidates were able to confidently analyse the way the author of this text uses language to express the confusion, distress and anger he went through while growing up, the most able candidates also recognised the sense of a change that occurs in the final paragraph with the use of adverbial phrases ('But now', 'there and then'). The most discriminating candidates were also able to comment on how the anaphoric repetitions in the penultimate paragraph create a celebratory rhythmic pattern which culminates in the final single sentence paragraph.

As in previous years, in this section, some weaker candidates found it hard to find things to say specifically about the language. The very weakest resorted to paraphrasing parts of the text. In these cases, it was hard to award marks above the lowest two levels of the assessment objectives.

Candidates used some of the same theoretical frameworks as they did for section A when addressing this text. They also occasionally referred to theories relating to Language and Ethnicity and Language and Class.

