

Examiners' Report

June 2025

GCE English Language 9EN0 02

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June 2025

Publications Code 9EN0_02_2506_ER

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Introduction

This year, the data again focused on spoken language with a parent/child interaction during imaginative play. Candidates were expected to focus their analysis on the language features shown by the child (both skills they had acquired and those that were shown to be still developing) and how the child used language to interact with his mother. Given the nature of the data, it was expected that some focus would also be on how the mother used language to interact with her child.

Typically, lower band answers often identified only a narrow range of issues, mainly focused on lexis and descriptions of phonology, coupled with a tendency to describe, but not explain. Also at this level, many candidates tended to have unbalanced discussions with much of the response being focussed on the mother. While present in the vast majority of responses, at lower levels, theories tended to be noted or a name of a theorist was referenced with no explanation.

Higher band answers were able to offer analysis based on a range of language features, reflecting morphology, lexis, syntax, phonology and discourse while introducing a range of theories associated with child language that moved beyond a straightforward reference. Responses at higher levels considered the specific question asked and often carefully considered the context of the conversation and how Robert's language enabled him to engage in imaginative play and interact with his mother. Once again it was clear that centres had worked hard preparing candidates for Paper 2 and there were very few candidates who did not identify at least some relevant issues in the data provided.

Question 1

This year's question and data required knowledge of the theories and issues that underpin development, how language development can facilitate (or not) the child's ability to engage in imaginative play and the importance of interaction – in this case with the mother. It was expected that this would be supported with clear reference to a range of language features from the different levels of lexis, morphology, phonology, syntax and discourse. As in previous years, it was important for candidates to shape their response to the demands of the question which linked language development to the specific context of imaginative play.

Responses which just identified a list of features and discussed theories without clear and explicit links to the question or source material were unlikely to achieve high levels. Similarly, it was important to explicitly address context (the language in use as well as development), as this is awarded under AO3. In this case, context included issues such as where the conversation took place and how/what language features reflected the purpose(s) of the conversation and the participants. Generally speaking, responses in the lower levels tended to be aware of common developmental and sometimes instrumental theories and while far fewer discussed these at length without clear links to the data when compared to previous spoken language papers, it was still common to see candidates in lower levels to just note them/bolt on without displaying understanding. Many at this level didn't always follow the basic approach of quoting an example, describing using appropriate terms, analysing it in terms of development/what it allowed Robert to achieve, the effect of his non standard forms and clear links 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 and explanation.

In previous years, phonology has been identified as an issue for many candidates. This year, although there was still some uncertainty regarding the analysis of phonology in responses placed in the lower levels, there was less use of phonetic spelling with some continued uplift in the number using the IPA but this tended to be limited to noting the substitution of / θ / and / ð / and /d/ and, although still present, there were far fewer instances of candidates confusing these sounds. However, only candidates at mid- and upper-levels moved beyond simple identification of substitution and explored other developmental features, explored patterns of use in the data and distinguished between developmental phonology and that which was caused by environmental factors and considered the effect on Robert's ability to communicate his ideas to his mother. Discussion of syntax and morphology is an essential skill for this paper but although many candidates were able to identify examples such as missing copula and auxiliary verbs (with or without relevant terminology), comments on syntax and morphology at lower levels were often limited to issues such as plurality (a commonly used example was 'aliens') and candidates often lost control of their responses and over-wrote. At lower levels, there was often much focus on lexical development by listing examples from various semantic fields such as 'space', use of word class terminology that was not used to analyse the development and references to Katherine Nelson's view on early lexical development even if it did not match the examples given.

Higher level answers showed more confidence with a range of language levels and 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, such the media, previous interactions, books etc), and the relationship the child and his mother. Candidates demonstrated secure and confident knowledge of a range of theories (both

developmental and functional and often moved away from the ageing big four) and were aware of grey areas where a number of theories could be applied or where whole or aspects of a theory could be dismissed based on evidence from the given data. At Levels 4 and 5, the approach to the data was often much more systematic and candidates worked through a wide range of language features – often covering a ‘full’ range of levels (lexis, morphology, syntax, phonology, discourse and pragmatics). These candidates were also aware of the importance of looking for patterns of use across the given transcript to ascertain how developed a particular feature was and whether a child was consistent in use or not. For areas such as syntax/morphology and phonology, there was awareness that variation from the standard form may not have been wholly developmental and could instead be explained by a wide range of other factors such as region, the influence of carers and other language users, or the informal/domestic nature of the language event.

This response was awarded mid Level 4 for AO1/2 with a mark of 21 and lower Level 4 for AO3 with a score of 10.

In terms of Syntax and Morphology, Robert is in the telegraphic stage of grammatical development which allows him to effectively communicate with his mother about the events occurring in his play. Robert's syntax is incomplete in places ~~now~~ however and not always reflective of Standard English. For example, he omits the auxiliary verb 'is' in 'he exploring space', this does show his understanding of the standard, subject - verb - object syntax but shows that at 2 years old his grammatical skills are not fully standard. Furthermore, he also omits the copula 'am' in 'I happy' showing he has not linked the

1st person pronoun subject 'I' with the abstract noun complement 'happy'. Despite Robert's incomplete syntax, his language development is still undergoing and his current grammatical abilities do allow him to sustain an interaction with his mother where she can understand him. Robert does show an impressive and consistent use of the ~~inflectional~~ inflectional, present participle 'ing' morpheme in the dynamic verbs 'going' and 'spinning'. This shows his understanding of changing the tenses of words to suit the context as his conversation and imaginative play is happening in the present tense. *

(Page 7)

* - Robert ~~shows~~ ~~he~~ has made a virtuous error as he says the stative ~~be~~ verb 'broke' non-standardly 'bawkt'. He has used the past participle ~~be~~ morpheme 'ed' to indicate the past tense of the non-standard, exception verb 'break'. This ~~provide~~ is a common error in child spoken language and provides evidence for Chomsky's Nativist theory. Chomsky believed all children have an innate ability for grammar, called a language acquisition device, this is evident in Robert's ~~* Robert demonstrates an impressive ability to create past tense on Robert~~ speech as he has applied a general rule non-standardly, which isn't something he would have heard others say. Despite this virtuous error, Robert's mother is able to understand ~~his~~ him still which shows his current language development enables him to engage in imaginative play with others.



The short introduction to the section effectively signposts the focus and there is evidence of the candidate bearing the question in mind. The feature is explored with tact / without evidence of a deficit approach through references to 'incomplete' and 'Standard'. Accurate terms are used with both auxiliary and copula accurately exemplified. At lower levels, these two terms were often confused and/or examples did not match. Here, it is a slight shame the candidate mislabels 'happy' as a noun, but as it is not the focus, it has little impact on the section. The candidate shows a clear ability to link these features to the language in use and a clear link to the lack of effect on the audience. In the following section, although the relevance of 'stative' is uncertain, the candidate does identify an example that illustrates a 'virtuous error' and the process/logic that the child has followed (although there are some minor issues with terminology) as well as considering the effect on communication.



When discussing developmental aspects of syntax and morphology, looking for patterns of use by the child can give your analysis more depth. Does the child use the feature sometimes, always, never?

This response showed mid Level 4 characteristics for AO1/2 with a score of 21. It was top of Level 3 for AO3 with a score of 9 as it lacked the discriminating links around construction of meaning and levels of detailed language features required to reach Level 4.

In terms of discourse development, we can see that Robert has begun to understand basic conversational maxims. For instance, the ~~verb~~ phrase 'what are you building, Robert?' from his mother, followed by Robert's noun phrase 'a rocket', acts as an adjacency pair in discourse, as Robert clearly has begun to understand the way in which conversation should be approached. His mother shows an example of Bruner's social interaction theory through the latter series of questions 'Aliens on Mars?' 'Are they friendly? are they grumpy?'. We can see that the mother has given Robert ^{the opportunity} to answer each question in a more complex way, by using child directed speech, we can see that the mother is promoting more complex answers for Robert to form, ^{which increases his involvement in the discourse} we can see further evidence of this paying off as Robert replies with the noun phrase 'friendly Aliens'.

And further with another noun phrase 'Alien in the Rocket'. Later in the text, we can see evidence of the mother using turn-taking in the interrogative sentences 'is he happy! or is he sad?', which could be seen as an effort to again maximise the variety in what Robert can give as an answer, to which Robert replies with a series of post-telegraphic utterances, like the verb phrase 'kraken live in home'. Therefore, we can see that Robert is going through the process of learning, and it is helping him form an imaginative discourse with his mother.



A focus on discourse is relevant to both the discussion of language development and how the child interacts in specific contexts. In this case, the focus is on the child's ability to respond in an expected way to his mother's questions and is framed as a crucial aspect of the interaction. The examples are useful, are supported by accurate terms such as 'adjacency pair' and 'noun phrase', and the candidate effectively illustrates Robert's ability to respond to his mother. This focus effectively transitions into the wider focus of the mother's questions showing some detailed knowledge of concepts and issues that underpin parent/child interactions. Although the reference to the mother seeking increasingly 'complex' responses hints at a discriminating approach, it is illustrated only with a reference to a noun phrase and isn't fully explored by referencing other examples from Robert's speech. The final comment is again highly relevant and intriguing but is left underdeveloped - the candidate could have explored the relevance of the type of question used (closed) and the possible focus of this question being to develop/support Robert's ability to describe the emotional states of the characters in the imaginative play.



Alongside the use of detailed but relevant terminology to describe examples, it is important to speculate as to why a feature may be present. It is perfectly acceptable (and sometimes preferable) to offer a number of explanations for the presence or absence of a feature in the data. Discussing a range of reasons why a particular feature is present is often a characteristic of Level 4 and above and can illustrate a discriminating approach.

This response scored secure Level 4 for AO1/2 and low Level 4 for AO3. The extract illustrates a largely effective phonology section that moves beyond single examples of substitution.

In terms of phonology, Robert performs phonological simplification through his use of 'th' reduction. He undergoes 'th*-fronting' (/fɪŋk/, /fri/) for the voiceless /θ/ 'three' and 'think' which we could expect as ~~the~~ ~~the~~ Pamela Grunwell argues 'th' phenomena are one of the hardest to articulate as airflow must be expelled at a constant rate. Not only this but 'th-stopping' or /dæ/ and /deɪ/ are used here as we can see the continuous shift in pronunciation ~~at~~ for ease of articulation.

As well as this, the consonant cluster reduction used

in adjective friendly /fend/ The deletion of the final consonant suggests that the skill of producing these words is still developing. As well as this with the mother modelling the ~~the~~ target pronunciation above Skinner's behaviourist approach, that language is acquired through imitation, a refuted and rather Chomsky nativist approach suggests that children use their built-in 'language acquisition device' to approach language. As well as this consonant cluster reduction by Robert perhaps comes from his inability to yet pronounce certain ~~phono~~ ^{substituted} phonemes. The deletion of ~~the~~ consonant cluster 'br' for pleasure 'b' supports ~~Chomsky~~ O'Grady's theory that children under 4 struggle particularly with phonemes 'r' and dental fricative 'th'. ~~But~~ however, we could perhaps argue that due to him playing he is more distracted and engaged with his play so his ~~pron~~ ^{pron} is on standard pronunciation.

We could argue that environmental influence has an impact on phonological development. As Robert has a tendency on deleting the final ^{relax} nasal /ŋ/ ('spinning', 'exploring') where this might be due to his skill of producing this phoneme developing it could also be as a result of potential accent.

or ~~social~~ sociolects. Therefore highlighting the poignant role of a child's environment and how much it can influence a child's development. As Bruner argues a child's exposure to their wider social community has intense ~~in~~ positive influences. ~~As~~ ~~Gene~~ However, we could attribute this pronunciation to the complexity of these polysyllabic lexis and their ambitious choice of lexis caused simplification. This supports the idea of Sarah Thorne and the fact we often underestimate the ways in which children's language develops and allows them to effectively communicate and perform a specific function. Not only this but accent could also be ~~as a result~~ seen through the use of short 'a' ~~in~~ /æ/ in concrete noun /dɛgæ/ (digger).



Most candidates discussed the /θ / ð / and /d/ /f/ substitution (with varying levels of detail). This candidate does the same but does attempt to offer a reason for the substitution with a controlled reference to a theorist they have studied. Although not explicit, there is a clear attempt to spot patterns of use across the data with the reference to 'continuous shift'. The section could have expanded slightly by considering whether the mother accepts these and the effect (if any) on the context of imaginative play. Candidates in lower Level 3 and below tended to limit themselves to just a single phonological feature but, those in higher Level 3 and above often showed a knowledge of other common developmental features, as this candidate does by discussing cluster reduction in 'friendly'. The exploration and links to the mother are plausible but do feel a little like an overview as they are not clearly explained. However, depth is added when the candidate uses 'broken' as a supportive example and speculates about the role of a specific phoneme in both examples. Having discussed two aspects of phonology related to developmental articulation, the candidate then considers other influences such as the environment, allowing a more discriminating approach than just discussing development. Although based on a single example, the section is effective in showing the candidate's ability to consider differing explanations for a feature, based on concepts and issues they have studied.



Moving a phonological analysis beyond common features of substitution associated with phonological development into discussions of regional and casual forms (and why these may be present) can result in a more discriminating analysis.

This response scored secure Level 4 for AO1/2 and low Level 4 for AO3. The extract illustrates a largely effective and highly controlled section on lexis which avoids the listing and feature spotting often seen in lower level responses.

In terms of lexis, Robert continuously uses the diminutive forms through vocatives 'mama' and 'mummy' and also sign off 'bye bye'. We would attribute this to the drive towards CVCV structures in young children for ease of articulation. However, ~~it~~ it could also be attributed to the fact that his immediate environments ~~is~~ is most likely using these forms and he ~~may~~ therefore is imitating them, if we support Skinner's behaviourist approach.

The semantic field of discovery and play ('digger', 'exploring' and 'astronaut') supports Halliday's imaginative function and shows how Robert is using his lexical understanding to explore playing and his imagination. Piaget argues that play is a means for children to ~~to~~ understand concepts and gain real life experiences. Thinking contextually, Garvey suggests

that play is ~~a~~ a way in which child build negotiation skills and understanding of ~~cont~~ pragmatic norms and societal expectations. What she calls 'sociodramatic play' can be seen through the mother's interrogative 'are you OK?' and Robert's response 'Kaken OK' demonstrating that even at a young age children are pragmatically aware and have what Hyman calls communicative competence.



The discussion of 'mama' allows the candidate to show their awareness of earlier forms that are present in the child's language and their explorations of concepts and issues that underpin the use of this term of address shows they are able to compare and contrast different potential explanations. The section could have been expanded slightly to include reference to its specific use in the context of this conversation.

Following this controlled section, the candidate moves to semantic field and avoids the approach of listing but instead focuses on concepts and issues. While the final part of the section does drift, the final mention of the interrogative/response is relevant if slightly under-explained.



Discussing lexis is an essential component of a full analysis of children's spoken language but it is easy to lapse into feature spotting and to lose control and allow it to dominate the response. Try to avoid long lists and ensure that any terminology you use to describe lexis (such as word class or categories such as count/mass) is relevant to any analysis and explanation that is given. Considering whether the child has the necessary semantic field, how they may cope with gaps and any environmental influences can all be relevant.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- Make sure you read the question carefully and follow its demands.
- Some brief planning before you start to write may allow you to decide which examples best enable you to cover a range of language features and issues/concepts and spot patterns of use. There is no preferred overall structure, but many successful candidates have sections for each of the key language levels.
- Avoid 'feature spotting' by always relating a language feature to a language development issue and/or a contextual factor (how the child is able to use language for a specific purpose).
- Although the role of adults in child language is important, ensure that analysis of the parent's language does not dominate the response and that you consider how the child responds to any adult input.
- If you are going to reference a theory associated with child development, you should briefly explain it to demonstrate your understanding (on first reference) and illustrate its relevance to the data by applying it to specific examples of the child and/or parent. If possible, use the data to refute any of the theories you have studied or introduce more than one to show discriminating understanding. Try to avoid just putting a theorist's name in brackets.
- Develop your knowledge of relevant phonological terminology and commonly confused phonemes to avoid errors in your analysis. Always use the IPA to discuss speech sound and avoid non-standard spelling. Try to draw distinction between any casual/developmental/regional phonology to add depth to your response
- To make the analysis more manageable, only certain words will be represented in the IPA. You should not comment on or assume phonology for words not in the IPA as you cannot be certain of the phonology.
- Take care with your written expression and avoid colloquialisms (such as 'mum') in your formal academic writing.
- Avoid just listing terminology, for instance, if discussing word class, unless categorisations like 'common/proper, count/mass, abstract/concrete, are relevant to your discussion and you are going to discuss their relevance, then it is likely they are not needed.
- If you have time, check your work for errors in terminology

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