Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2024

Pearson Edexcel International Subsidiary in English Language (WEN02)

UNIT 2: Language in Transition

Edexcel and BTEC Qualifications

Edexcel and BTEC qualifications are awarded by Pearson, the UK's largest awarding body. We provide a wide range of qualifications including academic, vocational, occupational and specific programmes for employers. For further information visit our qualifications websites at www.edexcel.com or www.btec.co.uk. Alternatively, you can get in touch with us using the details on our contact us page at www.edexcel.com/contactus.

Pearson: helping people progress, everywhere

Pearson aspires to be the world's leading learning company. Our aim is to help everyone progress in their lives through education. We believe in every kind of learning, for all kinds of people, wherever they are in the world. We've been involved in education for over 150 years, and by working across 70 countries, in 100 languages, we have built an international reputation for our commitment to high standards and raising achievement through innovation in education. Find out more about how we can help you and your students at: www.pearson.com/uk

Summer 2024
Publications Code WEN02_01_2406_ER

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide centres with an insight into the assessment process and give an overview of how candidates approached each question.

The paper is divided into two sections providing an opportunity for a comparative analysis in Section A and a discussion-based essay in Section B. Candidates are invited to analyse three texts representative of the spoken and written modes of language. Each section contains one question worth 25 marks each. Candidates must answer both questions.

It is recommended that candidates should read through both questions, as well as the extracts in the source booklet, before beginning their written response. This will allow them to gain an understanding of the discussion points within the paper and note connections across the texts before they begin.

As a starting point, centres are reminded that candidates should seek to avoid adopting, for both tasks, a deficit model with value-judgement based approach using terms such as 'incorrect', 'wrong' or 'lazy'. Options might include 'non-standard' or 'ungrammatical'.

For those typing answers, symbols from the IPA provided *should* be copiable into their answers using the hot keys on a standard keyboard, e.g. CTRL+C, CTRL+V.

Summary

Candidates generally performed well overall and there were a number of very impressive responses. In some cases, there was evidence that understanding was incomplete or there were issues with exam technique.

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

• Employ effective exam technique to ensure that appropriate time is spent on each question in relation to the assessment objectives.

• Read all three sets of data before attempting the question to gain an understanding of the discussion points across the paper.

• Use terminology throughout your response and in both questions. Make sure that it is accurate and relevant.

• Ensure you refer only to Text A for Question 1 and all three sources for Question 2. Support your points with evidence from the texts.

• In Q2 do not summarise and copy large sections of the data. Candidates are required to reference the sources and identify the transition of language with examples.

• Use the bullet points as a scaffold when writing your response to make sure all parts of the question are addressed and you have the opportunity to achieve full marks.

• Make sure that you are familiar with the exam format and the nature of what you will be asked. This element of the qualification requires specific subject knowledge and it is far more than a proficiency test.

Question 1

Candidates were mainly secure regarding both what a creole is and why the Antiguan and Barbudan (not Barbadian, it should be noted) version exemplified were interesting.

Nonetheless, there was confusion about the speakers' position in relation to the development and usage of creoles in the Caribbean and Standard English in general. There was a fairly common assertion that for the speakers in Text A 'English isn't their first language'. This is not impossible, of course, but it is unlikely.

The fact that the speakers in Text A are using a creole does not mean they are 'not first language speakers of English', just that they use a non-Standard variety on the post-creole continuum which is still, nonetheless, entirely recognisable as a variety of English. More correctly, perhaps, the speakers are not native speakers of, e.g. British English. That they are still intelligible to other English speakers should be taken as evidence of the evolution of the language into different forms rather than it being the case that, for example, Standard English is in the process of supplanting the creole, which had preceded it, and which now needs defending (or an idea similar to that).

It would perhaps be advisable for candidates to start by identifying the acrolect to which they wish to compare the variety under discussion and go from there. Indeed, there was some evidence of this, and a lot of good commentary ensued about the possibility of a shift in the acrolectal form from Standard British English (imported via colonialism, it was frequently asserted) and American English (increasingly dominant due to trade, geographical proximity and the influence of online and other media). The linguistic legacy of the slave trade was also a contextual factor with which some candidates chose to engage, with varying degrees of information and awareness.

There was a lot of effective discussion of phonology, but equally some fairly limited commentary of the 'here is an example, here is what it should be' kind, which is not conducive to higher attainment. From a contextual point of view it is worth observing that the accent on which the IPA is based is broadly Received Pronunciation (as is evidenced by, e.g. the medial vowel of 'str**u**t' being labelled as 'ʌ'). When commencing their analysis of speech sounds, candidates often use 'Standard English' as a covering term. Whilst this is understandable, from the point of view of clarity, Standard English can be viewed as a dialect of English which can be spoken with any accent, including Received Pronunciation, which is the prestige variety. Accordingly, for the purposes of phonologic comparison, R.P. is actually the form that the variety in Text A might most usefully be set against because this is the basis of the analytical approach with which candidates have been provided.

This extract from a candidate's typed answer deals very well with the phonological aspect of Text A. Not everything is perfect, but tit doesn't have to be to attain even very highly:

First of all in terms of phonology, the text exhibits several features that differ from standard english. First of all, both speaker show th-stopping in their speech. This can be seen in the pronunciation of "everything" as /evri:tɪŋ/, of "think" as /tɪŋk/ and of "there" as /deə/, where the interdental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ are pronounced as alveolar plosives /t/ and /d/. This lack of pronunciation of interdental fricatives is common in caribbean creoles, such as Jamaican Patois and Belizean Creole, and is due to the origins of the variety in the slave trade. When african slaves were imported to the caribbean, they did not share a common language with the british settlers, so had to develop a Creole with simple, easier to learn features to help communicate. While the Creole was most strongly influenced by English, the language of prestige used by the settlers that acted as a superstrate, many of the slaves' native african languages acted as substrates in the language's formation. Phonological features, such as interdental fricatives, that were present in english, but missing in many african languages, were omitted and replaced with easier to pronounce alveolar stops, to increase the ease of learning and communication. Another phonological feature present throughout the text is the change of vowel sounds from standard pronunciations. First of all, the schwa sound /ə/ is used much more commonly than in standard english, in the pronunciation of words such as "you" as /yə/ and "we" as /wə/. Due to being a mid central vowel, the convergence of many pronunciations towards the schwa makes the sounds easier and faster to pronounce, potentially also due to the need for ease of pronunciation in the creole's development. Another difference in the vowel sounds is in the simplification of diphthong sounds into easier to pronounce monophthongs. This can be seen in the pronunciations of "yourself" as /jɑ:self/, of "going" as /gɒn/ and of "my" as /mæ/. This once again increases the ease ad speed of pronunciation of these vowels, a priority when the creole was developed, due to its sole utilitarian purpose to provide easy communication beween groups without a common language. Finally, both speakers exhibit frequent ellision of words. This can be seen when "because" is shortened to /cɒz/ and when "offense" is shortened to just /fens/.Once again, these shorten and increase the speed of pronunciation of these words, without impacting the ease of understanding, explaining why they developed due to the creole's origins. Overall, both speakers use frequent non-standard phonological featurews in the text, and show no intention of attempting to use standard english to gain overt prestige and seem more educated. This is due to them both being from antigua and barbuda so they boh are comfortable using the same variety.

The term ‘rhoticity’ was commonly deployed, but not always correctly. On the evidence of, e.g. /deə/, the speaker would be non-rhotic (i.e. not ostensibly pronouncing the phoneme /r/ in post-vocalic positions). Many candidates claimed that the speakers were demonstrating rhoticity but used evidence which showed that the opposite was true. In cases such as this, it might be better to speculate, e.g. ‘it isn’t possible to be totally confident that the variety is rhotic on the basis of the evidence presented, but it might be (hopefully supported by an example)’.

Some candidates enhanced their comments on lexis by speculating on the influence of African America English (AAE) on Antiguan and Barbudan creole, exemplifying this through reference to, e.g. ‘y’all’ and ‘reppin’. In another interesting development, there was some comment on the reflexive impact of the varieties of the Caribbean region on the lexis of Multicultural London English (MLE). Postulations of this kind are welcome as they demonstrate a wider understanding of and engagement with the content at hand.

Morphology and syntax were often well dealt with. Candidates were able at least to identify some of the key examples, such as the dropping of the /s/ plural marker or the absence of the copula in some instances. Again, there is merit in identifying these things, but better answers tend to be technical, specific *and* evaluative. One or two candidates commented interestingly, for example, that the speakers’ morphological choices were in the main, standard, despite a number of ‘ungrammatical’ items. It is worth observing that, as stated in

some of the more astute analysis, many of the more established varieties of contemporary English are notable far more for their phonological differences than their grammatical ones.

From the point of view of discourse, many of the candidates made sound comments about the mixed mode, interview-like structure and the generic nature of YouTube clips. There was some discussion of the micropauses and repetition of, e.g. 'I love (.) I love (.)', which was often taken to be indicative of nervousness on behalf of one of the speakers. Although this is not ostensibly wrong, Sheba and Kaniyah could also be said to appear self-possessed and confident from the outset: 'y'all heard it hear first you all /jɔ:l/ heard it yourself'.

Finally for Section A, centres are reminded that whilst a bullet-pointed approach to answering this task might look appealing, it very rarely leads to marks beyond Level 2.

Question 2

Candidates should avoid repeating the rubric information without, at the very least, adding something about field, mode, function, register, mediation or a more nuanced comment on provenance. Thereafter, as many did in this case, it would be sensible to deal with the bullet points which follow the stem, in an orderly fashion (not necessarily sequentially however):

• the contexts in which this variety of English is used

• other influences on this variety of language

• how the role of English as an international language is reflected in the texts.

There is no stipulation about, e.g. equal coverage of each bullet and it is perfectly possible for an answer to deal impressively with the first and the third points but not as well with the second, but still score highly. That said, ignoring one of the three altogether is not usually conducive to success.

The further injunction: 'You must refer closely to the texts in the Source Booklet in your response.' is also worth noting, once again. There were not many 'prepared' answers along the lines of 'here is everything I know about language in transition (but with little reference to the sources)', but that approach persists and it is unlikely to succeed.

Many candidates drew effectively enough on Text A and commented on both the specifics of the transcript and the general issues related to identity and the ways in which language is tied up with that. There was a good deal of interesting commentary about the value which the speakers put on the particularity of their creole and their keenness to distinguish it from, e.g. Jamaican.

Text B drew some sound comments on the ways in which the content fed into bullets one and two in particular. There was a clear sense that many candidates were already armed

with some knowledge of the history of the region and a very small number who were especially well-informed. Such insight can be highly creditworthy, as long as it is made relevant.

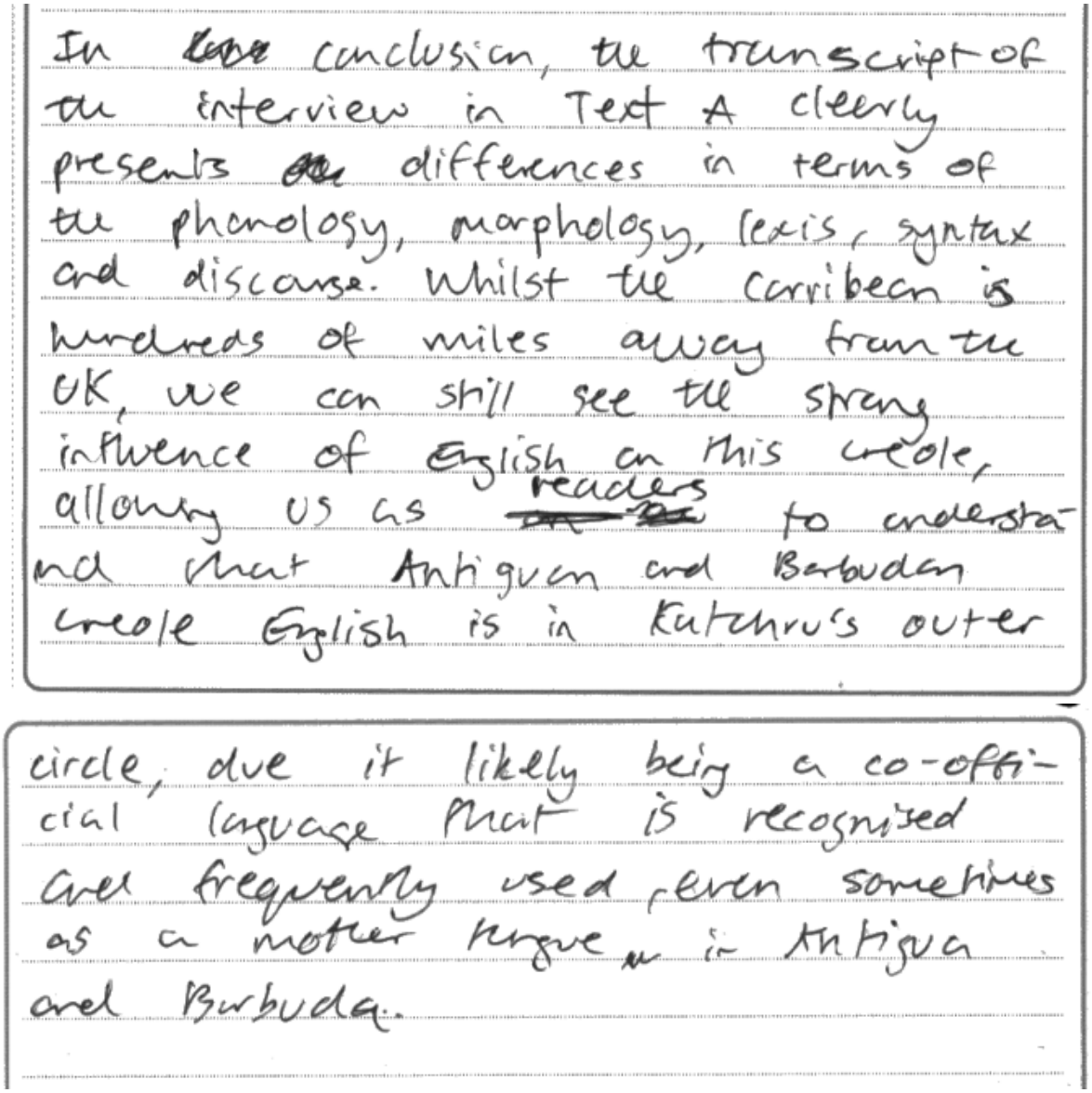
Writing about Text C, perhaps too few candidates distinguished between the high register formality of the early C20th editorial content, e.g. 'almost without exception, they will show reticence in telling their folk stories,' (which exemplified convergence to the Standard British English acrolect all but perfectly) and the folkloric lexis and grammar of the quoted tale. The strong contrast between the two and the idea of why the potential story-tellers might have felt a 'fear of ridicule' was only rarely explored in any depth.

Quite a lot of theories were deployed, from Aitchison's 'Progress or Decay?' model to Zip's Principle of Minimum Effort. Some of these were used more relevantly than others and some of them were only partially understood ('damp spoon' theory and Kachru were often amongst this group). Giles' Accommodation theory featured heavily, as did Labov's concept of overt and covert prestige. It was interesting (and rewarding) to see some ambitious embarkation into the challenging waters of, e.g. endonormative stabilisation and relexification theory. Centres are to be commended for giving their candidates access to these advanced ideas.

This candidate starts their answer efficiently and clearly:

The context in which text A is written, differs in some ways in comparison to texts B and C, in the sense that text A's mode is a spoken interview that is not preplanned or rehearsed addressing international audiences through the internet with the purpose of distinguishing and promoting the speaker's brand to the wider audience in persuit of reaching a wider demographic and expanding her clothing brand. On the other hand, text B is a written article that is no doubt edited because of the fact that it is published on a worldwide and international scale for all to see and read about the local dialects of Antiguan and Barbudan. The article is most likely written with the function of informing and providing information and is targeted toward those with an interest in learning about the Antiguan and Barbudan local dialect and creole. Text C is a multimodal form as it includes an introduction about the Antiguan folklore and storytelling as well as a short story, the purpose and function of the folk tales is to entertain and inform readers or listeners of the origins of the story told. We may assume that the story is targeted towards global audiences because of the standard form of english that the introduction is written and spoken in.

This candidate finishes well:



In conclusion, the transcript of the interview in Text A clearly presents differences in terms of the phonology, morphology, lexis, syntax and discourse. Whilst the Carribean is hundreds of miles away from the UK, we can still see the strong influence of English on this creole, allowing us as readers to understand that Antiguan and Barbudan Creole English is in Kutchru's outer circle, due it likely being a co-official language that is recognised and frequently used, even sometimes as a mother tongue in Antigua and Barbuda.

Once again, centres are reminded that candidates should definitely quote from the sources but that they should not simply copy out large sections of the material.