Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2024

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level
In Enlish Language (WEN04)
Unit 4: Investigating Language

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide centres with an overview of the performance of the June 2024 paper. This paper offers a choice of four topic areas focusing on global language, child language, language and power and language and technology. The pre-release material was available to centres via the Pearson website in December 2023, enabling candidates time to research their chosen subtopic in preparation for the exam on 14th June.

The sub-topics for the June series were:
1. Gullah
2. The Role of the Caregiver
3. Debates
4. The Language of Computers

Candidates are recommended to read through both questions, as well as the source material for Section A, before beginning their written response. This will allow them to gain an understanding of the focus of the task and with regards to Section B, the perspective for discussion. This cohort had 336 entries and there was a wide range of responses with candidates scoring across all levels. There were some strong level 4 and level 5 responses demonstrating most candidates were well prepared for the exam. Overall, candidates performed well, engaged positively with the data and demonstrated their subject knowledge in their responses.

Section A (questions 1 – 4) is marked out of 20 and Section B (questions 5 – 8) is marked out of 30. The time spent for Section B should be longer than Section A as reflected in the higher number of marks available and the requirement to include research completed by the candidate, within their response.

The most popular choice was Question 2 (Child Language) and its corresponding question in Section B, Question 6.

The remaining questions were as follows:

Second popular – Q1/5 Global English
Third popular– Q3/7 Language and Power
Least popular – Q4/8 Language and Technology

Question 1
For Question 1, candidates were asked to analyse a speaker from a group of storytellers called the Geechee Gullah Ring Shouters. The speaker is addressing an audience, explaining the origins of Gullah English. Candidates were required to focus on the language frameworks, the context behind the transcript and to introduce relevant theories and concepts to explore how the data is representative of Gullah.

Candidates continue to show confidence with the topic and demonstrate strong linguistic analysis of Global English building on their skill set from studying varieties of English at AS level for the Unit WEN02. Candidates were awarded across the levels with top level responses covering a range of features including grammatical, phonological and lexical features using sophisticated terminology as well as explanations of non-standard features linking to the contextual factors. Candidates discussed certain features with reference to American history and the origins of Gullah exploring the influences of other languages and showing understanding of how global varieties of English develop over time.

Many candidates referenced theories including language change, accommodation theory, prescriptivism and were able to identify specific features in the data which were representative of Gullah making links to findings in their research. Some candidates demonstrated strong knowledge of the specific phonetic features and articulation demonstrating confidence in their analysis and allowed for relevant and discriminating selection of source material. Mid-range responses either lacked a range of features for analysis, did not cover all of the frameworks or engaged in some discussion of concepts and issues relating to the data but did not demonstrate the depth of knowledge and understanding exhibited in responses awarded top of level 4 and in level 5.

At the lower end of the mark range for Question 1, candidates generally resorted to a descriptive approach when exploring what the data provided and any examples selected were unassimilated and at times paraphrased. Weaker candidates tended to feature spot and describe what was there particularly with phonology and lexis, quoting non-standard features and then writing their standard equivalents with no discussion. Some candidates digressed writing about the history or findings from their research with a lack of focus on the data provided and no linguistic analysis.

Question 2
For Question 2, candidates were asked to analyse two transcripts from a child, at different ages, engaged in conversation with their caregivers. The transcripts provided data which covered a range of features associated with different stages of language development. Candidates were required to discuss to what extent the texts were representative of language used by caregivers to support successful language acquisition.

This was the most popular research topic this year and candidates demonstrated strong knowledge of child language and how care givers

support language acquisition. Higher level candidates produced a clear, controlled response and demonstrated their knowledge of language development with close relation to the different stages. The child was a year older in the second transcript and candidates were able to explain how the child's language skills had progressed over time identifying grammatical, phonetic and pragmatic features linked to the stages of language development.

One key strength of the candidates was their ability to identify specific language features that are commonly used by caregivers to support and enhance child language development such as child directed speech, recasting, and expansion. They effectively analysed how these features facilitate language acquisition and provide scaffolding for young children as they navigate the process of learning to communicate. The majority of candidates referenced theories to explain development including Skinner's Behaviourism to discuss positive reinforcement, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, Piaget Preoperational stage of cognitive development and Chomsky's Lanaguage Acquisition theory. Candidates applied theories to explain caregivers' interaction with the child as well as discuss how the child's language has developed. Higher level candidates covered a range of features across the framework as well as theories engaging in detailed analysis.

Mid- range candidates applied theoretical understanding with Skinner's positive reinforcement being the most common and made good links to the praise used by care givers and attempts at supporting the pronunciation of 'Whitby'. Progression of grammatical acquisition was discussed as well as use of diminutives and simplified syntax to aid communication with the child. A good range of features may have been discussed with limited reference to theory or contextual factors or vice versa, with the emphasis on context and theory but points not supported with language features.

Those scoring withing the lower levels were able to describe the data and what was happening during the interactions mentioning a few features but did not fully engage with data or go into detail, demonstrating a general understanding of child language development.

Question 3.
For Question 3, candidates were asked to analyse the language used in two debates, one debate between environmental activists and sceptics and a debate between university students considering whether environmental concerns outweigh economic growth. Candidates were asked to what extent the texts were representative of how the language of power is used in debates.

Candidates engaged well with the two debates recognising the more formal structure in the university debate and picking out key moments from where power was used effectively to challenge arguments. The best responses covered a range of power structures exhibited in both debates and supported their points with examples from the text, used terminology and linked to theories. It was clear candidates had conducted good research on the strategies used in debates to persuade others to their viewpoint and

challenge opponent's arguments. Candidates demonstrated understanding of a range of concepts and issues within the data with reference to Grice's Maxims, Accommodation theory, Aristotle's three rhetorical appeals, Brown and Levinson's positive and negative face and French and Raven's five bases of power. Higher level of candidates covered a range of these providing strong examples from the text making links to expert power, converging with the audience, using emotive appeal and showing weaknesses in the opponent's evidence or viewpoint. A common example most candidates highlighted was the use of statistics and reference to 'scientists' to provide legitimacy and expert opinion to their argument.

Some mid-range candidates were able to demonstrate clear or discriminate understanding but lacked the depth of knowledge and insight shown in higher level responses. Some candidates provided a good theoretical analysis of the texts but did not support clearly with language features or terminology which limited them to the top of level 3 or lower level 4. Other candidates only focused on language features but did not apply any theories to engage in a comprehensive discussion of how language conveys power. Candidates at the lower levels commented on some features linking to contextual factors but made no reference to power or theoretical analysis. Candidates in level 1 described the debate and arguments in general terms.

Question 4.

For Question 4, candidates were asked to analyse three texts which were a computer operational manual for the first Apple computer released in 1976, instructions on how to set up an iPad from the Apple website and a review of new PlayStation 5 DualSense controller from a YouTube video. Candidates were asked to discuss to what extent the texts were representative of the language used in computer discourse.

Language of Technology tends to have the lowest number of entries each series and there were approximately 20 candidates who selected this subtopic this year. There were a range of responses and some good discussion provided by candidates which demonstrated they had engaged in relevant research. The majority of the candidates were confident when analysing the data and able to highlight a range of features which represented computer discourse. Some theories or authors who were referenced when discussing contextual factors were Brown and Levinsons face theory, accommodation theory, Lakoff's politeness theory, David Crystal and reference to Gretchen McCullocks book, Because Internet: Understanding how language is changing. Candidates awarded in the upper levels commented on a range of features and were able to comment on how language can be for a specialised technical audience or more accessible for an everyday user. The differences in mode and audience for each set of data was discussed with reference to theories. Mid-range candidates were able to discuss many features and including development of new words and semantic changes. The majority of candidates scored within level 2-4 showing good engagement with the data. There was one candidate who focused on the development of computers in general and was not linking to language which restricted what could be awarded. Responses scoring in level 1 or low level 2 wrote very brief undeveloped responses.

Section B
Questions 5, 6, 7 and 8 required the candidates to use their wider research to discuss the statements given in the question. Each question enabled the candidates to build an argument for or against the statement and to support their ideas with evidence and concepts from their wider research.

Question 5
The question posed the statement: 'It is believed that Gullah has survived for 400 years due to the geographic isolation of its speakers, but more effort is required to preserve the language in the face of globalisation'. Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

Responses ranged between level 2 and level 5 with some candidates providing well researched and detailed answers. The best responses were those candidates who were able to tailor their knowledge and research to form an argumentative response to the question. Most candidates demonstrated they had done a wide range of research on Gullah and were able to construct a focused response discussing how language can develop in isolation with reference to historical factors. Some candidates discussed a wide range of issues such as attitudes towards non-standard varieties of English and the stigma of certain features using examples from the data provided or their research. Candidates discussed recent preservation efforts of Gullah showing knowledge of initiatives educational programs, linguistic documentation projects, and cultural festivals. Lower levels demonstrated knowledge of the history of Gullah and its development but were unable to develop their answer beyond that and refer to the debate posed within the question.

Question 6.
The question posed the statement: 'The quality of interactions with caregivers is not important. As long as children are exposed to some form of language, they will successfully acquire it.' Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

The majority of candidates engaged in a debate regarding the statement posed with some firmly agreeing or disagreeing and providing balanced points to support their argument. Candidates demonstrated strong theoretical application and made references to prominent cases of children who had limited exposure to language or care giver interaction such as Genie, Victor of Aveyron and Bard and Sachs' (1977) study of Jim, a hearing child whose parents were deaf. They also discussed how caregivers can interact with children to ensure they acquire language efficiently referencing strategies such as child directed speech and dialogic reading. There was also reference to various theories of Language Acquisition to explain the role of care givers such as Skinner's Behaviourism as well as Chomsky's theory of universal grammar to demonstrate the children's innate ability to acquire language. This was further supported with reference to Berko's Wug Test. The weakest responses focused on describing the

stages of language development and the need for interaction with care givers but made general points that did not agree or disagree with the question posed nor go into much depth. Strong candidates presented knowledge and understanding of language acquisition, the different factors which can impact language development and theories and research were well integrated within responses and used to establish an argument.

Question 7.
The question posed the statement: 'The most successful debaters are those who have the strongest knowledge and understanding – their use of language isn't nearly as important'. Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

The majority of candidates produced well-structured arguments demonstrating an engagement with the research and topic. Candidates were awarded across the levels focusing largely on evidence they had found in their research. Higher level responses engaged in theoretical discussion showing strong understanding of the power dynamics within debates provided real world examples of a variety successful/unsuccessful debates. Some examples of debates which candidates chose to illustrate their points were Trump vs Clinton (2016), Oxford Union debates, Obama vs Romney (2012) and various debates with Piers Morgan covering different issues. Candidates utilised a wide range of debates, both contemporary and historical, looking at issues to do with politics, religion and the environment as well as others. This allowed candidates to use a lot of examples from their research to illustrate the language strategies which are most successful debates to persuade or challenge audiences/opponent's viewpoints. The best responses used examples from their research and linked to theories to structure a clear argument for or against the statement.

Question 8.
The question posed the statement: 'The rapid development of computer technology has provoked profound linguistic and cultural change, which is ongoing'. Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

As with question 4 the candidates demonstrated that they had engaged in wide range of relevant research and produced some good responses. Candidates discussed the evolution of language and how computers have created online communities and different methods of communication on digital platforms which impact language used. There was reference to the informal nature of language in some contexts and also terms used within subgroups, such as gamers, which cannot be understood by other users. There was one student who focused on the history of computer development (in particularly Apple) with no reference to language, which was not relevant to the question or topic which meant they scored in level 1.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, I would like to offer the following advice to candidates:

- ensure you employ effective time management in the examination to ensure that appropriate time is spent on Section A and B in relation to the number of marks awarded

- read all the source data carefully before attempting the questions in Section A

- support each point you make with evidence from the source material in Section A and your wider research in Section B

- make sure you cover the language framework when analysing the data in both Section A and B

- support your discussion with reference to appropriate theories, concepts and contextual factors

- create a discussion/debate for Section B, tailoring your research to the question and form an argument responding to the statement

Grade Boundaries

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