



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2025

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced
Level in English 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 January 2025 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 August 2024, enabling candidates time to research their chosen subtopic in preparation for the exam on 22nd January.

The sub-topics for the June series were:

1. Nigerian English
2. Managing Behaviour
3. Organisational Leadership
4. E-health Communication

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 77 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 1 (Global English) and its corresponding question in Section B, Question 5.

The remaining questions were as follows:

Second popular – Q2/6 Child Language
Third popular– Q3/7 Language and Power
Least popular – Q4/8 Language and Technology

Section A

Question 1

For Question 1, candidates were asked to analyse members of the public who speak Nigerian English being interviewed for a YouTube news channel. The speakers were responding to the question, 'What should be the top priority in the national budget?' 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 Nigerian English.

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 historical factors and the origins of Nigerian English 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 Nigerian English 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.

Question 2

For Question 2, candidates were asked to analyse two transcripts, from parenting videos, showing children at different ages being disciplined by a parent. 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 and children when behaviour is being managed?

Higher level candidates produced a clear, controlled response and demonstrated their knowledge of strategies and language to support behaviour management with

close relation to the different stages of language acquisition. The child was older in the second transcript and some candidates were able to explain how the child's language skills and comprehension of her behaviour allowed her to reason and discuss what she did wrong.

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 Language Acquisition theory. Candidates applied theories to explain caregivers' interaction with the child as well as discuss the child's language development and their response to strategies to manage their behaviour such as inclusive language and taking responsibility for actions. Higher level candidates covered a range of features across the framework as well as theories engaging in detailed analysis.

Those scoring within 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 and managing behaviour.

Question 3.

For Question 3, candidates were asked to analyse the language used in two communications sent by leaders at a UK university: an email from the Vice Chancellor to all staff after a successful enrolment period and a post from a senior manager on an online group forum on Microsoft Teams. Candidates were asked to what extent the texts were representative of how the language of power is used by leaders in an organisation?

Candidates performed well on language and power and demonstrated strong understanding of the topic with some effective responses awarded within the upper levels. Candidates engaged well with the two communications recognising the more formal structure in the university email from the Chancellor highlighting use of formal vocabulary and greetings/sign off compared to the Teams group forum. The best responses covered a range of power structures exhibited in both texts 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 leadership styles and language used to foster a transparent and collaborative approach to empower staff and make them feel valued. Candidates demonstrated understanding of a range of concepts and issues within the data with reference to Fairclough, Accommodation theory, Brown and Levinson's positive and negative face and French and Raven's five bases of power. Books read by the candidates were also referenced with one candidate highlighting examples to explain the modern language of leadership citing David Marquet 'Leadership is Language'. Higher level of candidates covered a range of these providing strong examples from the text making links to expert power, converging with the audience and using politeness features to show appreciation of staff's efforts.

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.

Question 4.

For Question 4, candidates were asked to analyse three texts which were text messages from dental practices sent to their patients, information from the Check Your Symptoms page on the mobile app for the National Health Service (NHS) and an NHS website promoting the Better Health Campaign with details on how to stop smoking. Candidates were asked to discuss to what extent the texts were representative of the language used in electronic health communication?

There were 3 candidates who selected this subtopic this year, therefore there is limited commentary on performance. Candidates in the lower levels described the data or were able to select features to discuss such as acronyms, use of bullet points and hyperlinks to access information and politeness features. Marks awarded in level 4 discussed features across the language levels including imperatives to guide support and made reference to examples in the data conveying inclusivity, personalisation, politeness and discussion highlighting the digital divide.

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: 'Speakers of Nigerian English should embrace its unique linguistic features and cultural expressions, rather than striving for conformity to Standard English'. 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 Nigerian English and were able to construct a focused response discussing how language can develop globally 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. Lower levels demonstrated

knowledge of the history of Nigerian English 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 use of positive language is more effective than negative language when managing children's behaviour.' Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

Candidates demonstrated strong theoretical application and made references to prominent examples of effective strategies to manage behaviours using positive language. Higher level responses were able to expand on this demonstrating the benefits to children's development and some of the negative impact which negative language can have. Some candidates scoring within low level 3 or upper level 2 were vague in their response and were able to describe the different results between using positive or negative language but did not support with examples or specify the features/techniques classed as positive or negative which limited their explanation. The weakest responses focused on describing the stages of language development and the need for behaviour management 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 and behaviour management, 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 language of leadership is more effective when it is authoritative and commanding than when it is collaborative and informal.' Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

There was a strong response to Language and Power with the majority of candidates producing 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 leadership using effective examples from the data and their own research. Candidates discussed the language with reference to power theories and leadership styles showing good understanding of how leaders can get results. Some candidates highlighted the changing nature of leadership explaining how more autocratic styles were used in the 20th century which has moved towards a more democratic collaborative style within 21st century. This was linked to changes within culture and society. Other candidates discussed certain professions whereby autocratic leadership and language were necessary such as the military and other organisations which benefitted with more collaborative styles and language to get

results. 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: 'While efforts have been made to make the language of e-health communication accessible to all patients, challenges remain before it can be considered fully inclusive'. Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

As there were only three candidates there is a limited commentary on performance. However, there was a level 4 response which embedded theory well linking to the technological aspects of e-health communication. Features such as active voice, direct imperative language and avoiding complex medical jargon were linked to effective communication. Discussion linking accessibility to the social model of disability demonstrated wider research and understanding of inclusivity in e-health communication. Furthermore, the candidate applied Vygotsky's theory of scaffolding to the support tools featured in apps to help manage healthy behaviours e.g., quitting smoking. Another candidate veered from the topic and wrote an essay about the history BMI which could not be awarded. Candidates are reminded to tailor their research to communication and stay focused on the question when writing their response.

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

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