



Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback
June 2025

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced
Subsidiary 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 June 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 December 2024, enabling candidates time to research their chosen subtopic in preparation for the exam on 13th June.

The sub-topics for the June series were:

1. Appalachian English
2. Children's Books
3. Legal Language
4. E-learning

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 449 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 and its corresponding question in Section B, Question 6. Half the entries chose Child Language as their topic demonstrating a wide interest in the area of children's books for investigation.

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

Section A

Question 1

For Question 1, candidates were asked to analyse speakers of Appalachian English (AE) discussing their childhoods. 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 AE.

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 Scots-Irish settlers and the origins of AE exploring the influences of older forms of English and the impact of geographic isolation on the development of this variety.

Many candidates referenced theories including language change, accommodation theory, and prescriptivism and were able to identify specific features in the data which were representative AE making links to findings in their research. Common features discussed were rhoticity, a-prefixing and older lexical forms. 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, such as linguistic insecurity or covert prestige, but did not demonstrate the depth of knowledge and understanding exhibited in responses awarded top of level 4 and in level 5. There could also be occasional lapses in the use of terminology which can be a discriminator between a level 3 and level 4 response.

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. Some candidates may digress from the question and describe historical factors relating to AE which would be more relevant in section B. Weaker candidates tended to feature spot and describe what was there particularly with phonology and lexis. This could involve quoting non-standard features and then writing their standard equivalents with no discussion or repeating the glossary translations with no analysis.

Question 2

For Question 2, candidates were asked to analyse 4 extracts from books for children of different age ranges. The extracts provided data which covered a range of features associated with different stages of language development. Candidates were required to discuss to what extent are Texts B1 to B4 representative of language used in books for children at different stages of language development?

This was an extremely popular research topic this year and candidates demonstrated strong knowledge of child language and how language in books engages children and supports language development. There were some very good responses this series with the best candidates identifying features from all of the texts and linking them with the stages of language development at the targeted reading age. 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. Some made links to how children will be reading books with a caregiver and how the language developed throughout the books expanding in complexity at each reading age including sensory patches/semantic development, complex sentences, metaphorical language, phonological devices. Books for older children also introducing concepts that the reading age would relate too e.g. feeling scared. Higher level candidates produced a clear, controlled response and demonstrated their knowledge of language development with close relation to the different stages.

Those scoring within the lower levels were able to describe lexical and phonological features within the books but may have limited discussion with theories or how the complexity of the lexical and grammatical features correlated to the stages of the language development of the targeted age range. Some candidates scoring within level 1 simply described the content of the books.

Question 3.

For Question 3, candidates were asked to analyse the language used in two legal documents, an extract from a tenancy agreement and an extract from a letter sent by a solicitor to their client regarding the purchase of a property. Candidates were asked to what extent are Texts C1 and C2 representative of language used in legal communication?

Candidates engaged well with the two extracts recognising the more formal structure in the tenancy agreement and picking out key features where power was used effectively to convey the responsibilities of the tenant and consequences of noncompliance with the agreement. Candidates were able to compare the formality and difference in tone between the extracts with C1 being more authoritative and C2's more personal, yet professional, approach. The majority of candidates were able to identify a range of features specific to legal language such as embedded clauses and nominalisation and discuss them with accurate terminology. 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. Candidates demonstrated understanding of a range of concepts and issues within the data with reference to Grice's Maxims, Accommodation theory, 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, the need for clarity and why legal language is highly jargonistic at times and difficult to understand.

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 legal documents in general terms.

Question 4.

For Question 4, candidates were asked to analyse two texts which were an excerpt from a live training session on Zoom and extracts from the chat box of a live webinar. Candidates were asked to discuss to what extent are Texts D1 and D2 representative of language used in online learning platforms?

Language of Technology tends to have the lowest number of entries each series and there were approximately 40 candidates who selected this subtopic this year. However, this was an increase from last year which was pleasing to see. 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 features which represented e-learning communication such as technical lexical fields, tag features, emoticons, greetings and technical problems causing disruptions. Some theories or authors who were referenced when discussing contextual factors were Grice's Maxims, Brown and Levinson's face theory, accommodation theory and Lakoff's politeness theory to discuss establishing rapport in the absence of visual cues and face to face interaction. Furthermore, David Crystal and some sources provided within the pre-release material were referenced highlighting how technological advances can lead to new lexis and terminologies. The majority of candidates scored within level 2-4 showing good engagement with the data.

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: 'While there is value in preserving and celebrating the unique dialect of Appalachian English, speakers may also benefit from being able to communicate effectively in Standard American 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 AE 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 which can lead AE speakers to code switch and adopt standard American English forms in certain contexts. Lower levels demonstrated knowledge of the history of AE 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: 'Children's language acquisition could potentially develop more slowly if they are not regularly exposed to books'. 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. As a high number of candidates did this question, there was a variety of approaches exhibited with some candidates carrying out observations of children reading with caregivers at home or in class and referring to noted improvements in pronunciation of words or error correction. Some candidates discussed examples of features they had found in a variety of books they had researched and made links to these as well as examples from the source book data.

There was clear evidence of a wide range of research and reference to books in the pre-release material to explain cognitive development. Many candidates argued for a holistic approach to children's development citing the benefit of children's books to enhance language, caregiver interaction and develop literacy but also arguing that consistent language exposure and caregiver interaction were also needed. This led to references of prominent cases of children who had limited exposure to language or caregiver interaction such as Genie and Bard and Sachs' (1977) study of Jim, a hearing child whose parents were deaf. There was also reference to various theories of Language Acquisition to explain the role of children's books to develop cognition and expand/reinforce vocabulary and grammatical development 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 exposure to books but made general points that did not agree or disagree with the question posed nor go into much depth.

Question 7.

The question posed the statement: 'The complexity of legal language hinders, rather than helps, clarity on legal communication'. 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 legal language provided real world examples of when legal language has hindered communication or has been necessary for clarity. There were some really interesting discussions regarding the historical development of legal language and its function to exclude with reference to social class as well as the origins of Latin within legalese. Candidates utilised a wide range of legal documents, both contemporary and historical, looking at issues to do with the need for clarity, specialised terminology and plain English campaign. This allowed candidates to use a lot of examples from their research to illustrate the power structures within legal language and how they have developed over time. 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: 'Online learning environments challenge learners to adapt to various communication styles and technologies for effective learning, but the lack of face-to-face interaction may lead to misunderstandings'. 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 research and produced some good responses. Candidates discussed how technology such as tele-conferencing have created digital platforms which impact language used when used for online learning. There was reference to the informal nature of language in some contexts and how the lack of face to face interactions may cause learners to limit their interactions or misinterpret some communications due to lack of visual cues or perceived tones within short direct chat messages. Some also mentioned the need for praise and positive reinforcement within online learning to engage learners and encourage interactions. Some candidates discussed the technical barriers such as learners not having or being familiar with certain technology leading to errors in communication. There was one student who focused on the technology used for online learning and alluded to the impact on communication without going into the detail of what those were. Candidates should remember that they need to focus on how the communication taking place on the technology is impacted to remain focused on the language element of the question.

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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