

Moderators' Report/  
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2012

GCE English Language (6EN04)  
Investigation and Presentation

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## General Overview

This year, candidates carried out research across a wide range of language topics. The most popular included child language acquisition, children's writing, advertising slogans, TV and film language. There were some interesting and unusual topics, for example:

- The language of cold reading
- The language of travellers.

There was some excellent research, with candidates showing real engagement with their topics, and centres clearly providing a good level of support, guidance and preparation.

Administration was generally well carried out with consistent moderating within centres and useful evaluative comments provided either on the cover sheets or on the coursework itself, showing how the marks had been decided and distributed across the AOs. This gave the moderators valuable insight into the marking process and was very helpful.

Centres are reminded of word count limits, and the requirement to provide a running word count at the bottom of each page.

## Task 1

Candidates submitted articles, presentations and talks. It is important that the format and intended audience is given on the cover sheet or as a heading so moderators know what they are assessing.

## Articles

Candidates entering this unit have already explored journalism in Unit 2. They should have the skills to produce articles for this format. However, too many candidates wrote in ways that would have been suitable for a talk, but not for an article. The following extract demonstrates the problem.

### ***Ye Olde Recipes – cooking for the past.***

*On TV, in magazines, in newspapers – sometimes it seems impossible to escape the celebrity chef. Want to make a stir fry? Want to bake a cup cake? Want to flambé a lark's tongue? No problem – someone in the media will tell you how to do it. But do you know where modern recipes come from?*

*For my investigation I plan to collect recipes from the past 500 years and analyse the way they are put together.*

## Moderator's comment

This candidate starts off well with an informal, entertaining opening to an article about language change in recipes that would be appropriate for a popular food magazine, or a feature article in a newspaper. However, once she starts the

second paragraph, the style moves away completely from the appropriate tenor and she starts talking to her fellow A-Level students about 'my investigation.'

## **Talks and presentations**

Talks and presentations were more successful, especially where they were delivered to fellow A-Level candidates. Centres where candidates actually delivered their presentations produced more successful work on the whole than centres that did not. Candidates should supply all PowerPoint slides, handouts and other support material with their folders. These will not be included in the final word count.

## **Task 1 Response**

*You have a box of old, unsorted photographs in your house. You have problems with a friend or relative. You have a need for other people to like and admire you. As do almost 90% of other people, incidentally. Such 'Barnum' statements have probably been used by so-called 'psychics' since the dawn of their existence, and with their being almost ubiquitously applicable, this would not come as a surprise. You might pose the question: 'Wouldn't it require a multitude of intricate linguistic abilities and body-reading skills to surreptitiously claim to be psychic?' Possibly not.*

*It is not my place to label all clairvoyants as charlatans or to declare the following ideas as facts (after all, it would be rather ignominious of me to claim knowledge of things unknown). However, it would be highly convenient for a fraudulent psychic to deliver a stock spiel (prepared script), based on information collected from various sources, such as the latest polls, so as to ensure that their readings are as accurate as possible. For instance, almost all of African-Americans over the age of twenty in the South of America have been subjected to racism at some point in their lives. It would seem foolish for a clairvoyant not to consider such figures in their readings. However, only the most basic of inference skills often seem necessary. Would it really have taken the supernatural ability to transcend the boundaries of time and space for 'psychic' that I recently watched to sense that an old lady had recently visited a doctor and a middle aged, overweight man was experiencing back problems? The only thing that seemed to be supernatural here was the semantic field used to sugar-coat this employment of basic deduction skills and the fact that the audience was still somehow left in awe.*

*If a more astute psychic sought to exploit the vulnerable through fallaciously making psychic claims, they could employ a number of linguistic tricks, to augment the credibility of their lexis. For instance, a psychic could use negative phrasing, as in the interrogative 'You haven't been drinking a lot of water recently, have you?' If this was affirmed by the subject, the psychic could*

*state that their dead aunty wanted them to drink more water and vice versa. Politeness conventions could be adhered to. Karla McLaren, an out-of-the-closet psychic, confesses that she used to state her observations as questions, rather than facts, so as to invite the reader to 'lean in to the reading'. This can be explained through observing Brown and Levinson's maxim of Negative Politeness, whereby the speaker mitigates their lexis, so as to reduce the level of imposition on the recipient. Such a principle would be of great use to a psychic who wished to maintain the credulity of their customer.*

*Having an audience that wants to believe seems to be everything in the psychic business. Imagine the psychic says to an audience: 'I'm getting a G....Gordon, or Glen, perhaps.' A member of the audience who wants to contact their dead grandfather 'George' might deduce: 'It must be Grandpa George!' Would such ambiguous lexis penetrate a more sceptical audience? Derren Brown has acknowledged, in a 2010 interview with Rachael Dawkins, that if an audience member seemed doubtful, or if a reading, in some extraordinary circumstances, turned out to be hideously inaccurate, the psychic would have to be sure to avoid any non-fluency features, such as the filler pause. Discourse markers would also be useful, to reduce the thinking time of the audience . . . to maintain control.*

*Fraudulently claiming to possess psychic powers does not seem so difficult after all. With a plethora of linguistic techniques that can be manipulated with ease and a credulous audience that seeks to flush out any possibility of error on the psychic's behalf, what are the chances of a number of depraved individuals filling this section of the market, when there are millions to be made? You're having doubts about the veracity of psychic now, aren't you?*

### **Moderator's comments**

This article is consistently appropriate for the audience and format. The writer adopts an engaging tone, introduces (but glosses) some linguistic terminology and uses direct address to engage the audience. The language is confident and the voice of the writer comes through. This is an original piece. There are one or two minor flaws. The word 'ignominious' is used incorrectly and the opening paragraph could be a bit clearer. However, the overall quality is sufficient to keep it in the top bands for both AOs.

### **Task 2**

The standard of work for this unit is high. Candidates are identifying areas of language they want to research, deciding on research questions and devising methodologies to carry out their research. Even at the lower end of the achievement range, there was clear evidence of enquiry and discovery.

Most problems that arose arose in the preparatory stages of the investigation, or from an incomplete understanding of the significance of findings. There was also sometimes a lack of theoretical background to the topic under investigation and over-reliance on outdated theory.

### **Data collection**

It was encouraging to see candidates showing awareness of the importance of collecting valid data, and trying to accommodate, in their analysis, any perceived weaknesses. Some candidates allowed themselves to be defeated by early problems with data collection and abandoned potentially interesting topics for safer areas of study. If data collection proves impossible for a specific research question, then clearly the question needs refining. However, too often a topic was abandoned or over-simplified too early, or data was collected without sufficient thought. Too often, when candidates found their data unsuitable, they worked with it anyway. An investigation based on inappropriate data cannot be successful. Candidates need to be aware of populations and samples and collect representative data.

### **Extract from a Task 2 Response**

*Due to the scarceness of cold reading transcripts online, I attended a psychic show performed by Derek Acorah, in which I noted down various quotes, as recording devices were prohibited. I also transcribed a number of interactions from a recorded performance by Sally Morgan. Having now read Ray Hyman's 'The Elusive Quarry', I have an awareness of many linguistic techniques employed by cold readers, which will augment the analysis of my data. A potential encumbrance in this collection of data was that, whilst at the show, it was difficult to jot down many quotes at the speed at which the clairvoyant was speaking, which meant that I had to select a broad set of quotes somewhat incisively, despite not yet having an awareness of the various techniques employed. This meant that it was possible my data could be thinly spread. However, it was imperative for this method of data collection that I did not have prior awareness of the linguistic methods to be expected, as this could have tainted the equity of my study, since I would be more likely to omit lexis that did not support my hypothesis. Furthermore, in ensuring that I focused on key constituents of language relatively equally, I was able to collect a variety of data, likely to show a multitude of lexical techniques. Through observing a show directly, it was also easier to gauge the atmosphere and explicit cold reading techniques were observable that may have been cut during editing prior to the release of the video.*

*I expect that a number of various linguistic techniques used to manipulate the audience into higher state of credulity will be identified in both transcripts.*

### **Moderator's comments**

This is an example of a candidate working intelligently with the problems data collection presents. He is looking at the language of cold reading. The first problem he encounters is the banning of recording devices. He uses a note book instead, and makes the very valid point that because he will not have time to be selective, his own expectations will not distort the data collection. Nor will his data be distorted by editing techniques used if the event were broadcast.

### **Child Language**

Where good data was collected with an appropriate research question in mind, investigations into all aspects of child language were successful. Topics that produced successful investigations included:

- Spoken language development in twins
- Spoken and written language development in children with learning difficulties
- Language interaction between siblings.

In all of these, candidates approached the problem of data collection thoughtfully and took time to collect useful and representative data.

Too many candidates tried to interview young children, or record them while they or other adults encouraged the child to talk. Children should be recorded in familiar surroundings and familiar contexts. They can be recorded interacting with each other, or interacting naturally with adults. A recording of a parent trying to encourage his or her child to speak, or an artificial interview situation will not provide representative examples of the child's language, or sometimes any examples at all.

### **TV and Film**

Candidates investigated reality TV, sit-coms and soaps. Reality TV often presented a problem as candidates, though they were clearly interested in programmes such as Big Brother and TOWIE, were not able to formulate useful research questions and carried out unfocused analysis of the spoken language. One candidate looked, with some success, at the way TOWIE manipulates the viewers' responses to specific characters, another attempted to explore the concept of scripted or structured reality that this show represents. An analysis of the different presentation styles of Davina McCall and Brian Dowling was interesting, but rather limited by the formulaic nature of these.

Too many candidates assumed that 'film script' or 'TV sit-com' formed a population, and carried out comparative analysis with no further refining of the data. A comparison of US and UK sit-coms will not be valid if the sit-coms are two decades apart and are different types of comedy.

Comparisons between films and books appeared across the achievement range. Candidates need to be aware that a straight comparison is unlikely to be rewarding. They may find stretches of dialogue that are identical, and stretches

of text that are completely different. A more rewarding approach was taken by a candidate who explored the use of dialogue as a narrative vehicle in film and graphic novel, using Buffy texts as a source that existed in both modes.

Other investigations explored a range of topics that included language and gender, political speeches and various aspects of language change.

### **Language and gender**

This topic was less popular this year, though gender was often an aspect of analysis. When candidates are investigating gender issues, they need to be aware of other variables that may be influencing the data: age, location, context, culture and ethnicity may all have more influence on language than gender roles. Data collection should try to account for these variables as much as possible.

Candidates should not use Robin Lakoff to support their methodology. Lakoff's work is not based on research. *Language and a Woman's Place* was written 37 years ago, and was based on impressionistic observations of language within Lakoff's own academic community. Candidates using her work were often misled and identified aspects of women's language as representing low status, when in the context they were being used, they represented something else. Candidates should consider the contexts in which an utterance with a tag question such as 'You won't do that again, will you?' represents lack of confidence as Lakoff claims, where it represents politeness or where it represents power. Similarly, candidates should query the meaning of the term 'empty adjectives.' How useful is this term, and in what contexts can adjectives such as 'divine' or 'nice' be described as 'empty'? Is it only, or usually, women who use these? Where is the research support for this?

### **Political speeches**

Several candidates analysed political speeches. This topic was represented across the achievement range. Candidates need to be aware that politicians make speeches in a range of different contexts and the field, function, tenor and mode of the speech must be taken into account if the data is to be comparable. A speech by a politician to a group of directors will be very different from a party conference speech or a parliamentary speech. A televised speech will be different from one that is delivered from the stage for the current audience.

### **Language change**

Several candidates explored an aspect of language from a language change perspective. Many of these investigations were well-planned and successful. Where they were less so, this was often because candidates did not research sufficiently into the nature of the language they were looking at. Candidates often assumed that earlier forms of English were intrinsically more formal than later forms, that words they were unfamiliar with were archaic (a common



mistake under exam conditions, but perfectly avoidable in coursework where the word can be researched).

A successful language change investigation looked into the changing depiction of vampires and sexuality, using Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Coleridge's *Christabel*, Charlaine Harris's *Living Dead in Dallas* (a True Blood novel) and the first of the *Twilight* novels.

### **Making assumptions about language**

Some candidates made broad assumptions about data which led them into making comparisons that were not valid, or which led them to conclusions that were incorrect. For example, many candidates assume that older people speak more formally than younger people. They need to be aware that all speakers will have a range of styles from the most to the least formal. Candidates who did newspaper investigations sometimes made the assumption that the language of tabloid newspapers was 'less complex' than the language of broadsheets. It is helpful if candidates learn to challenge things that are often seen as self-evident truths, and also to define their terms: what, for example, defines a 'tabloid newspaper' or a 'broadsheet'? What do they mean by 'complex language'?

### **Numeracy**

The majority of candidates took a qualitative approach to their data. This was often the best way given their topic and their research question. Where quantitative approaches were used, many candidates showed skill in handling bar charts, pie charts, graphs and tables to present their findings. Some of the best investigations used both, giving a qualitative analysis of much of their data, supported where appropriate by quantitative charts and tables.

Candidates need to be aware of the limits of analysis. Pie charts, graphs and bar charts are meaningless where small items of data are being analysed, and small differences between limited amounts of data are not significant. For example, finding that there are 4 mild profanities across 2 US sit-coms and 1 across two UK sitcoms means very little.

Some candidates dealt with the problem of items of data that were of different lengths by shortening the longer piece. Comparing an incomplete text with a complete one will not yield comparable findings. Candidates need, at the very least, to understand why and how to use percentages and averages

### **Example of a Task 2 Response**

#### ***Introduction***

*Cold reading involves the revelation of information about an individual or group by a psychic, despite it being seemingly impossible for the psychic to have attained such details without a supernatural aid. Due to the recurring debate regarding the veracity of psychics such as Sally Morgan in the media recently, I*

*decided to research the linguistic techniques that aid clairvoyants in cold reading.*

### **Methodology**

*Due to the scarceness of cold reading transcripts online, I attended a psychic show performed by Derek Acorah, in which I noted down various quotes, as recording devices were prohibited. I also transcribed a number of interactions from a recorded performance by Sally Morgan. Having now read Ray Hyman's 'The Elusive Quarry', I have an awareness of many linguistic techniques employed by cold readers, which will augment the analysis of my data. A potential encumbrance in this collection of data was that, whilst at the show, it was difficult to jot down many quotes at the speed at which the clairvoyant was speaking, which meant that I had to select a broad set of quotes somewhat incisively, despite not yet having an awareness of the various techniques employed. This meant that it was possible my data could be thinly spread. However, it was imperative for this method of data collection that I did not have prior awareness of the linguistic methods to be expected, as this could have tainted the equity of my study, since I would be more likely to omit lexis that did not support my hypothesis. Furthermore, in ensuring that I focused on key constituents of language relatively equally, I was able to collect a variety of data, likely to show a multitude of lexical techniques. Through observing a show directly, it was also easier to gauge the atmosphere and explicit cold reading techniques were observable that may have been cut during editing prior to the release of the video.*

*I expect that a number of various linguistic techniques used to manipulate the audience into higher state of credulity will be identified in both transcripts.*

### **Lexis and Semantics**

*Both psychics manipulate lexis in order to create an aura of the supernatural. For instance, Derek uses the declarative 'you'll smell the flowers of the spirit garden'. In using the second person collective pronoun 'you'll', he is immediately able to create a strong link between the whole audience and the supernatural, as olfactory imagery is common in reports of supernatural experiences. The combination of 'spirit' and 'garden' also raises both connotations of the biblical and the afterlife. Sally Morgan successfully creates a similar aura through using semantic field of science:*

*'Where are these messages from? The ether, they say. Some say they are derived from the astrophysical dimension. They often say they come from celestial navigation'*

*As science is based on evidence, this makes it seem as though Sally possesses knowledge of the supernatural. Recent studies by the James Randi Educational Foundation show that up to 75% of*

*psychic audience members lack a GCSE or an equivalent qualification in physics, which may suggest that they would not appreciate the definitions of the scientific terms used; for instance, the 'astrophysical dimension' merely refers to the universe. The vague pronoun use of 'some say' and 'they' also creates a sense of mystery that entices the audience.*

*Numerous techniques are used to maintain a high level of intimacy with the audience. Upon observing the emotional distress on an audience member, Sally states 'you're going to make me cry', so as to demonstrate empathy. Positive lexis such as 'lovely' is used repetitiously, which seems to express interest in the lives of the audience members. Derek initiates his show with an anecdote regarding the last time he was in the area, which reveals local knowledge likely to please the audience. He also uses jokes such as 'they've given me vodka, not water', to maintain a jovial tone. Hyman argues that high levels of intimacy are required for clairvoyants to make the recipient(s) less likely to question the veracity of their readings. Giles' theory of convergence involves the speaker altering aspects of their language to mimic the ways in which the recipient speaks, so as to augment the level of intimacy between them. Such alterations are evident within both transcripts. Sally uses colloquial language, as in the idiom 'you're a spitting image of him', which display a friendly persona. Derek uses the non-standard first-person pronoun 'our' in 'she was looking for 'our' Jim' to add authenticity to his readings. This is effective as it emulates a northern English accent (the show is in the North East of England). Likewise, Sally uses the lexis such as 'I love you I love you' so as to mimic an authentic spoken voice. Non-fluency features are used throughout each show so it seems as though they are being interrupted by supernatural forces. For instance, Sally states; 'why is he saying - I feel as if-'. Similarly, Derek states 'he was hospitalised and survived- oh! I'm getting a John!'*

### **Grammar and formality**

*In order to maintain a high level of certainty, Derek frequently uses the modal auxiliary verb 'must'. However, hedges are used when a reading has been somewhat inaccurate. For example, when an audience member displays uncertainty as to a reading, Derek states 'perhaps you could check it out', rather than simply admitting his reading is inaccurate. He states after another nebulous reading 'maybe this will happen'. Sally asks an audience member if they had a migraine 'the other day'. This vagueness increases the chances of her receiving an affirmative response. Derek uses 'Barnum statements', such as the interrogative 'you've told your daughter.....she can't have a dog, haven't you'. This adheres to Brown and Levinson's maxim of negative politeness, as it reduces the level of imposition on the recipient. When imitating the voice of a child, Sally uses smaller sentence structures, such as 'I (subject) love (verb) you (object) Nanny' so as to increase the credibility of her readings. Questions*

are often phrased in the negative, so as to allow a response from the psychic that makes it seem as though they already knew the answer to their question prior to its asking, regardless of how the recipient responds. For instance, Sally uses the interrogative 'you haven't been drinking lots of water recently, have you?' This makes it possible for her to make it seem as though she already knew the answer, regardless of the response.

A juxtaposition of formality may be observed from both clairvoyants. Although Derek uses informal lexis, as in the clipped pronoun 'you'll', the grammatical structures he uses are more complex and display fewer non-fluency features. This supports Bordieu's theory on language and power, which suggests that people generally perceive a higher register of speech as an indicator of superior intellect. It is therefore possible that Derek employs such structures to assert his intellectual authority over the audience, which may make them more likely to view his claims as veracious. Sally, on the other hand, enshrouds her lexis with more of a conversational aura, as in the non-standard declarative 'I don't know if the person that he wants, they had been pulling their hair out literally'. In this case, it seems that Sally is employing the principle of Convergence, so as to maintain a level of intimacy between herself and the audience. Also, when impersonating spirit, Sally states 'You need to start drinking lots of - more water', arguably to emulate spontaneous speech. This may simply be due to the differing idiolects of each individual. Furthermore, it is difficult to ascertain whether either of these methods is more effective than the other, as both psychics receive feedback.

### **Paralinguistic Features**

Paralinguistic features play a key role in enticing the audience. Sally often uses high-rising terminals to mimic the voices of the spirits she is apparently talking to, as in 'Nanny Nanny!' which emulates the voice of a child. These methods appeal to emotions, rather than rationality; thus reducing the likelihood of scepticism. Derek asks an old lady 'have you got a problem around here?' whilst waving his arm to denote the upper half of her body. Such ambiguity allows audience members to 'fill in the gaps'. Exclamatory lexis such as 'Yes! It's you' is used by both psychics. This prosodic feature creates a false level of certainty likely to be welcomed by the recipient, as they probably desire to hear from a friend or loved one. However, the paralinguistic features of the psychics are not the only ones of significance. Ian Rowland suggests that the body language of the recipient is as important as that of the psychic, if not more so. This is because, if read correctly, it can provide a strong indication as to which recipients might respond to a particular reading and how they might do so. For instance, a shocked expression in response to a Barnum statement may indicate that the statement pertains to their circumstances. There evidence of Derek in particular reading the paralinguistic features of audience members before

deciding who to address. For example, after addressing the audience as a whole with a Barnum statement involving 'caring' man 'with a heart of gold', it is probable that Derek observes an exchange of glances between two audience members sat next to each other which suggests that they had known a man whose characteristics were like those in the aforementioned description, as he subsequently inquires as to their knowledge of such a man. Similar occasions are evident throughout the show. An awareness of stereotypes is also evident. The audience at Derek's show seems predominantly working-class; therefore it is probable that Derek assumes a recipient will have known someone who once worked in a factory and this is affirmed by the recipient, as expected. Even more basic deduction is evident, as in Derek's inquiring as to whether an overweight, middle-aged man has experienced back problems. It does not take knowledge of statistics to deduce that this is probable, however, when the man states that he suffers from a lower-back problem, the audience responds with shock as to the accuracy of Derek's statement.

### **Pragmatics**

Grice's maxim of Modest Politeness is adhered to by both Sally and Derek. When seeking a round of applause, the psychics ask the audience to show their appreciation for the recipient, as in Sally's imperative 'let's thank these people'. After a series of inaccurate readings, the audience begin to express some indignation towards Derek. In order to maximise the positivity of the audience's response, Derek uses a mitigated imperative in the form of an interrogative; 'can we have a round of applause for this lady please?' As the audience at this point have no acrimony towards the subject, a greater applause than that which Derek would receive. The principles of Martinovski's Mitigation theory are also displayed by each psychic when soliciting members of the audience to respond to a description of someone who has passed away, the psychics use pacifying statements, such as 'don't be scared'.

### **Conclusion**

As expected, a number of linguistic techniques have been employed by each psychic, in order to make the audience more credulous. Most of the apparent lexical devices are used by both psychics, which corroborates the suggestion that their lexis is contrived. When considering the commonality of such features and their impact despite this, the great importance of the key constituents of language within the psychic industry may be appreciated. It is rather interesting that many lexical features of the audience can significantly influence the lexis of the psychic. For instance, Derek frequently uses mitigation techniques when he seems to suspect a level of doubt as to the veracity of his readings on behalf of the recipient. For instance, when an audience member declares 'that's not right' in a somewhat confrontational tone, Derek replies with hedges such as 'perhaps'

and modal auxiliary verbs such as 'could', which are uncommon throughout most other dissimilar areas of the transcript.

### **Evaluation**

Through dividing my analysis into a number of differing sections, I was able to ensure that the research question was answered in as broad a way as possible, whilst maintaining an adequate degree of depth. Research into relevant linguistic theories also aided my analysis and although not all of their suggestions were apparent in the transcripts, this made for more of an in-depth discussion.

If this study was to be further developed a greater number of transcripts would be useful, in order to provide clarity to the assumptions that the identified linguistic commonalities are the product of a mutual desire to deceive the audience. A second full transcript, rather than the list of notes collected at Derek Acorah's show, would also have revealed a broader set of linguistic techniques.

Word count: 2272

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### **Moderator's comments**

This is an ambitious investigation that presents challenges of data collection and analysis. There is no easily accessible analysis of the language of cold reading so the candidate has to find his own way. He analyses his data via the key constituents of phonology, focusing on the prosodic features of pitch and intonation, lexis, looking at the connotations of the language under investigation, and the grammar. This analysis allows him to explore aspects such as intimacy, the use and function of colloquial language and levels of formality. He also explores aspects of the pragmatics of the text. All of these are chosen with the focus of the investigation in mind.

The writing is fluent and confident, and appropriate for a piece of academic research, apart from the candidate's insistence on using the given names of his informants: 'Derek' and 'Sally'. This is a common error across the unit, and centres are asked to remind candidates that academic writing is formal, and naming should also be formal.

The pragmatic analysis contains some inaccuracies. Grice's Maxims do not include 'modest politeness.' Leech proposed a Politeness Principle with the maxims Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement and Sympathy. However, the candidate's analysis of the data is perceptive.

The investigation is supported throughout by reference to relevant theory.

## **Grade Boundaries**

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<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>