Examiners' Report

Summer 2016

Pearson Edexcel GCE in English Language 6EN04 Paper 01

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General Comments

71 centres submitted coursework for this final full year for 6EN04, English Language Investigation and Presentation. Candidates carried out research across a wide range of topics. The language of news reporting, psycholinguistics and international Englishes were popular this year. The topics of child language, language and gender and lyrics from popular music genres also remain popular. There were fewer investigations into TV and radio scripts.

 The standard of work was high, with candidates showing real engagement with their research, and centres clearly providing a good level of support, guidance and preparation.

The main weaknesses seen in investigations, as in previous years, were a lack of focus or too-large a topic, and a sociological approach that led to an insufficient focus on language. There are also clear examples of misapplied theory which suggest centres may like to look more closely at these.

Most centres provided evaluative comments 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.
The marking was broadly accurate, but there was some generosity, especially in the marking of Task 1 which meant some marks had to be adjusted to bring them in line with the standard.

Task 1

Candidates submitted articles, presentations (talks with PowerPoint or similar support, PowerPoint only, posters) and talks. In some cases, the intended format and audience were not specified on the cover sheet. Candidates should make these clear in their title, for example 'Presentation to a group of A-Level English Language students,' or 'Article for the food section of the Observer Sunday magazine.'

Too many candidates wrote introductions to their investigations and then presented them as Task 1 pieces (often replicating them with little change as part of their actual Task 2 introductions). There is no problem if candidates wish to introduce their research topic to their peers, but this must be written in such a way that it is suitably adapted for audience and format.

Talks and presentations were most successful where they were delivered to peers, allowing the candidate to make references to a GCE investigation, to share knowledge with the group and test his or her ideas. Presentations and talks were written for a wide range of audiences, including parents of autistic children, trainee telemarketers on persuasive techniques in conversational language. The following in the opening of a candidate's presentation to her fellow GCE students about her investigation into the effects of phonics teaching of early learners:

> … the second piece of writing I want to show you {text of screen} shows some the ways in which phonics influences the way a child spells. Here, Maya has written about a summer picnic. You can see some of the spelling

errors we've already looked at. Maya doesn't yet understand where to use double of single consonants, but the spelling of 'butter' as <but> shows that sounding out can lead to spelling errors. When she sounded out the word, she said /tə/ for <t> which lead to the spelling error you can see in the example.

The next thing I'd like you to look at…

Moderator's comments:

This extract, from the middle part of the talk, shows both audience awareness and awareness of the ways in which a presentation should be structured. The candidate uses PowerPoint slides for her examples and draws the audiences' attention to this at the appropriate time. She also signposts the talk clearly, linking forwards and backwards so her listeners know what is coming, and are reminded of what has already been said: 'the second piece of writing…' 'we've already looked at…' 'here' 'The next thing…'

Though the talk is relatively technical, it is written for an informed audience, that is, a group who have studied A-Level English language, but non-expert: one that has not studied children's written language at this stage.

Articles

Articles must have a focus or a direction, and be written with a publication or type of publication in mind. Very successful pieces were written for Babel Magazine where candidates were able to write for an audience with an interest in language issues, but at the level of the candidates themselves, or at undergraduate level.

An article about using corpus linguistics to analyse literary text aimed at this publication played around in an interesting way with some of the bells and whistles electronic analysis of language allows. It opened with a brief explanation of what corpus linguistics is, made an entertaining foray into a David Lodge book where an author is pushed into writer's block when an analysis of his work shows his favourite word is 'grease'. It them produced word clouds for some popular books.

What can you find out by analysing a literary text be? Analysing concordances in Dracula, for example, shows how Bram Stoker uses a lot of words from the semantic fields of wild and dangerous animals to describe the vampires. A word cloud gives a quick check of what a writer's most often used words are. The word cloud for Dracula (fig 3) shows that the names of the main characters are used a lot, but also 'must', 'know' and 'one.'

Fig 1 Word cloud for Dracula by Bram Stoker

Moderator's comment

This article is clearly written for its intended publication. It assumes some awareness of corpus linguistics, but also presents its material in a way that will interest a less well informed audience. The use of arresting images in the analysis by giving word clouds rather than concordances as examples shows good audience awareness.

Task 2

The topics covered in this task included general analysis of child language, language disorders in children, children's writing, the language of newspapers, analysis of literary text, the characteristics of specific regional dialects. Sports commentary remains interesting to students, with the better investigations moving beyond simple comparisons of TV and radio commentary. Topics that ranged more widely into the subject included gender stereotyping in tennis commentary, the language of success and defeat in post-match interviews and the motivational language of sports coaches.

Topics that presented some problems included investigations into language and gender where too many students are still analysing data into simple male and female characteristics of language, apparently unaware of more recent research into this area. Too often, the data was diligently hammered to fit the candidate's expectations, and the resulting investigation was not rewarding. An interesting and successful investigation that had gender as a focus looked at the maiden speech of SNP MP Mhairi Black as part of an investigation into how women use power in language.

However, though gender remains a popular topic, too many candidates over-simplify the issues around language and gender, as so much of the research in this area is simplistic, or simply wrong. Candidates tend to ignore other factors that may influence their data, and focus all their attention on gender issues.

Child language, both spoken and written was a popular topic, and candidates were generally well prepared for this. Students again need again to be wary of which theorists they use and how they use them. Kroll's stages have little to say about emergent writing, which is far more than simply a preparatory stage when

the child learns the physical skills required to write and the basic principles of the spelling system. A glance at children's writing between the ages of 6 – 8 shows much more than a simple reproduction of spoken language, and candidates who tried to use Kroll as support for their investigation into children's writing often had problems getting their data to link to the theory. When this happens, it is often the theory that is at fault. More recent work, like that of Cathy Nutbrown, is far more useful in relation to this topic.

Some candidates tend to make assumptions about the language they are analysing. For example, forms that are typical of spoken language are often dismissed as 'ungrammatical' or 'wrong.' Candidates should not treat spoken language as a degraded for of written language. They need to be aware that spoken language is the first and primary means of communication and it has, of necessity, different structures from written language. Older forms of language are not more formal and more complex. Language at all observed stages of its development varies according to context. We have less awareness of colloquial forms of earlier English's because they were not so widely recorded. This does not mean they did not exists.

Presentation

Candidates should present their final submissions with ease of reading in mind. Data should be available close to the relevant analysis, and submissions should not need to be wrestled out of folders or wallets in order to be read.

Charts and tables that rely on colour should be reproduced in colour or the moderator will not be able to read it.

Texts should be carefully proof read and errors corrected. If they are not, they should be penalised under AO1. Errors of spelling and punctuation in coursework are not acceptable at this level. Candidates should take responsibility for proof-reading and correcting their own work. They should also be aware of the weaknesses of spell checkers and the pitfall of 'false friends'.

Structuring an investigation

Introduction

This section should introduce the topic under investigation with a clear explanation of the investigation. In this extract from an introduction, the student briefly outlines the area of her investigation, the reasons why this interests her, and puts forward a hypothesis around which she plans to devise her investigation.

> I am a bilingual student studying in an international school where the medium of instruction is English. Hence English plays a vital role in my life. The fascinating point is that through social interactions with fluent English speakers, the Koreans' English will improve. Therefore, I want to analyse whether the mispronunciation of some phonemes by the Koreans and the non-standard grammatical structures they use, which are influenced by the Korean language, would in any way hinder the progress of Korean English language learners. So I created a hypothesis, 'If

Koreans want to overcome English Language barriers, they will have to understand the differences between the two languages and increase exposure to English through social interactions.'

Moderator's comments: this is a helpful introduction. It is immediately clear what the student plans to do (AO4) and the context of the investigation and the data is explained (AO3). The hypothesis is too large but focuses on two aspects that the student may go on to investigate with success: language interference and the role of interaction in language learning.

Methodology

This section should explain the methods of data collection and analysis the candidate has used, with a rationale for these, and observations on any unavoidable weaknesses.

Analysis

There was a lot of excellent, well-focused analysis of the language under investigation. Where candidates went wrong was either in poor selection of which levels of language to investigate, or in misunderstanding the analytical tool they were using. For example, an analysis of a literary text that comments 'The writers uses simple, compound and complex sentences' is not really making a useful comment at all. Most texts use most sentence forms. Candidates need to be selective in the language they analyse.

Pragmatic analysis can also present problems, especially if candidates are using the Cooperative Principle. This, as expounded by Paul Grice, offers a way of understanding conversational implicature, for example, the meaning contained in such exchanges as A: 'I've run out of milk,' B: 'There's a supermarket round the corner.' B does not need to say that the supermarket is open, because the cooperative principle means that both speakers know that via the maxim of quantity, B does not need to add unnecessary information, therefore A can assume that as far as B is concerned the supermarket is open and sells milk. Too many students are analysing these maxims as some form of 'rule.' Students need to understand the difference between flouting the maxims and violating the maxims if they want to be rewarded for their analyses.

This extract from an investigation into the use of phonics in teaching literacy to children shows how close analysis of small units of language, can, when appropriate, lead to illuminating findings.

The previous examples show that phonics works for most children in my sample. Ellie and Katy were both successful in the tasks I set with the errors appearing where sounding out didn't work, like letter doubling and silent <e>.

There were some errors that were harder to explain until I listened to the children sounding out. The words are 'butter' and 'carpet.' Ellie spelt these 'but' and 'kapt'. When she sounded out the plosive sounds /t/ and /p/, she actually said /tə/ and /pə/. This meant she though the graphemes <t> and <p> made the sounds that should have been spelt <er> and <e>.

This student has made a close study of the way children sound out letters and has explained a common spelling form found at this age that arises directly from the sounding out method. This can be rewarded at AO1, AO2 and AO3.

Conclusion

This should be drawn directly from the analysis. The candidate should explain how the findings relate to the research question or the hypothesis and discuss any unexpected or anomalous finding.

Evaluation

This section allows the candidate to reflect on the work, comment on any weaknesses that only become apparent once the investigation is complete, and comment on further research that may be carried out in this area.

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