Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2019

Pearson Edexcel IAL
In English Language (WEN04) Paper 1
Unit 4: Investigating Language

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<u>Introduction</u>

The purpose of this report is to provide centres with an overview of the performance of the January 2019 paper.

The paper offers a choice of four topic areas focusing on Global Language, Child Language Development, Language and Power and Language and Technology. The pre-release material was available to centres via the Pearson website in September 2018, enabling candidates time to research their chosen sub topic in preparation for the exam in January 2019.

The sub-topics for the January series were:

1. Ivory Coast English
2. Phonics
3. Language and Bullying
4. Technology and Written Communication.

The paper addresses four of the Assessment Objectives:

AO1   Apply appropriate methods of language analysis, using associated terminology and coherent written expression.
AO2   Demonstrate critical understanding of concepts and issues relevant to language use.
AO3   Analyse and evaluate how contextual factors and language features are associated with the construction of meaning.
AO4   Explore connections across texts, informed by linguistic concepts and methods.

All candidates appeared to be able to manage their time effectively across the paper ensuring that they answered both questions fully.
Section A (questions 1 – 4) is marked out of 20 and Section B (questions 5 – 8) is marked out of 30.
The time spent and length of response for Section B should be longer than Section A as reflected in a higher number of marks and the requirement to include research completed by the candidate within their response.

Despite a small entry this series, the number of candidates for January 2019 had increased slightly from that of January 2018. In contrast to the previous January series, all four questions were answered, with Language and Technology (Technology and Written Communication) and Global English (Ivory Coast English) the most popular choices. It was good to see that centres had encouraged their candidates to use the pre-release material when undertaking their preliminary investigation and evidence was seen of some candidates using both primary and secondary research to explore specific language issues, concepts and contextual factors.

Most candidates were able to analyse the source material in Section A and transfer this information over to their Section B answer. Responses for Section B that did not refer to the data in Section A or candidate's own research had trouble meeting the Level 3 criteria, as the majority of the AO descriptors for this task refer directly to candidates being able to analyse connections across the data. With regards the integration of 'theorises and concepts', a few candidates used theory almost as if it were a title or add on feature. While this is not inherently wrong, it often seemed to signal a broader lack of insight into what academic linguists actually do, and indeed what counts as a theory or concept. Occasionally there were sweeping statements made to the historical development of language, particularly with regards the technology question where a full history of technological evolution from the printing press to modern computers and mobile phones was included. Integration of historical research that illuminates the data and research is far better than the candidate re-telling everything they know about language and technology development or child language acquisition theory.

Candidates should also be encouraged to avoid a reductive approach to language features and concepts, writing as if a particular feature or concept always, and alone, creates a particular effect. For example, how 'synthetic personalisation' always makes the reader feel involved. Or that rhetorical questions invariably

'make the reader think' about the issue, despite the fact that rhetorical questions are often quite clichéd and might be said to bypass real thought, instead implying shared and unquestioned assumptions.

Overall, it was felt that candidates showed confidence in answering the questions this series and there were no concerns raised by the centres.

Question 1. Global English – Ivory Coast English

In Q1, the candidates were asked to analyse a transcript of an interview between Yaya Touré, an Ivorian football player, and Dan Walker. Candidates were required to focus on language frameworks, the context behind the interview and to introduce relevant theories and concepts to explore the language of Ivory Coast speakers of English.

Responses on this sub topic showed an enthusiastic engagement with the language of Ivorian English and in general, there was a good knowledge of key linguistic features that were described and discussed in both Text A and in a variety of data sources.

A number of candidates made sound observations of key features of Ivorian English in the transcript and the subject talking about his football career. Most candidates attempted to deal with phonological issues, making use of some of the phonemic transcriptions given. Despite the issue being raised in last year's report, there was still widespread feature spotting in the lower level responses such as referring to how the speaker omits 'the alveolar plosives /d/ and /t/' in 'the' and 'then', without discussing why this is reflective of an Ivorian speaker of English. Some simpler grammatical features tended to be handled better, with accurate reference to the transcript and an exploration of how speaking French and playing football in the UK may have influenced the speaker's grammatical structuring.

Candidates at a Level 1 or 2 generally summarised what the speaker in the transcript was saying and generally resorted to feature spotting phonological features without analysing their significance. One candidate's response focused on the lack of punctuation and sentence formatting in the transcript, which suggested that they were not familiar with the rubric of transcript presentation.

In contrast the quality of responses at the top end, when compared with the previous January series, showed a noticeable improvement, with a couple of candidates achieving marks comfortably within a level 4. Engagement with the data was reasonably sustained, with the use of appropriate register, style and accurate terminology.

Question 2. Child Language Development - Phonics

In Q2, candidates were required to analyse two pages from a phonics teaching book and an edited guide for parents on the teaching of phonics. Candidates answering Q2 were expected to use the language framework to consider how the sources presented approaches to phonics teaching and candidates were expected to underpin their responses with contextual, theoretical and conceptual discussion.

Weaker responses for question 2 tended to retell what phonics was and how B1 and B2 were examples of books used by schools. There was very little exploration of the data or discussion of the way that phonics was used to teach word recognition. The responses were also unbalanced with very little mention made to B3, the article aimed at parents. Some mention was made to theoretical perspectives; however, this was not generally applied to the data.

In general, responses for question 2 were slightly weaker than in previous series but despite this there were one or two responses which scored marks within a level 3 range and were coherently written with appropriate examples integrated throughout. Candidates at this level were able to analyse data from all three sources. There were detailed explanations of the ways in which phonics can be taught by parents and schools and the guidance given to parents.

Question 3. Language and Power – Language and Bullying

For Q3, candidates were required to analyse an edited online article on the topic of bullying and a list of common words and phrases used by bullies. The question prompted candidates to consider how the data represented the language of bullying. As with Q1 and 2, the task required candidates to show a clear understanding and application of relevant concepts and issues to the data; to explain the construction of meaning in the data and to make relevant links to contextual factors and language features, supporting their explanation with exemplification from the data.

Candidates who achieved marks in the lower levels, generally resorted to a descriptive approach when exploring the article and associated word list. Analysis was unassimilated and at times paraphrased. Terminology was infrequently or incorrectly applied. Responses lacked reference to the language framework and the majority of the discussion was fairly general concerning what bullying was and how to deal with the problems of bullying.

Due to the small entry, there were no examples at an A grade level. Responses at an A/B boundary needed to include a balanced discussion of the language of bullies and the impact the choice of language has on their victims. Within the examples seen this series, a number of candidates had used the theories of Grice and Levison and Brown to explore the data, however for an A grade these need to be used to illuminate and challenge the data. There was a tendency to produce a sociology style essay on how bullying can be prevented, rather than an analysis into the language of bullies linked to the language framework.

Question 4. Language and Technology – Technology and Written Communication

For Question 4, candidates were asked to analyse the different ways written language has been influenced by developments in technology. The extract was taken from an online article. Question 4 was the most popular choice this series, possibly due to the topic. This question also produced the highest score of all the scripts marked.

Weaker responses for Question 4 tended to retell what the article was about, with large sections of it lifted and integrated within the candidate's discussion, without any depth of analysis. Use of terminology was simple and there was a lack of analysis across the language framework. Contextual discussion was general and in a couple of cases, candidates described the history of technology from the printing press onwards, without relating it to the source material.

At a higher level, candidates were able to discuss the article in depth and to consider the various opinions expressed as to whether the advancement in technology had had a detrimental impact on language or not. The main focus of discussion tended towards mobile phones and how they had impacted communication and the changes that had taken place over the last 20/30 years. Many responses explored the use of emoticons and abbreviations to reflect emotions and expressions and to simplify the message being communicated.

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. Global English

The question posed the statement: 'Even though a lot of people understand English in the Ivory Coast; it's not the language they choose to speak.' Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

In section B, weaker candidates generally retold the history of the Ivory Coast and when they did discuss the framework, there was a lack of supporting data, research or theoretical analysis. There was also a lack of argument presented in relation to the statement.

Question 5 also saw a couple of level 4 responses. In the previous series candidates had tended to retell everything they knew about the history of the country, whereas this series there was more of an attempt to explore and integrate historical and social context, particularly as English is a minority language in the country, with the majority of Ivorians speaking French. Candidates had analysed the morphological nature of the language, the lexical choices made and phonological features that identified speakers of English in the Ivory Coast. There was also evidence of candidates establishing a discussion centred around the statement posed.

Question 6. Child Language Development

The question posed the statement: 'Some research has shown that learning to read by the 'look and say' approach is more effective than the phonics approach'. Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

In Section B, candidates generally made sweeping statements that were not supported by evidence of research or data from Section A. Candidates struggled to apply theoretical perspectives to the data. There usually was no evidence of own research or the use of the sources from Section A. There is very little attempt at forming a debate. In the majority of cases responses tended to focus on phonics rather than the look and say method as mentioned in the question.

Stronger responses for Section B included some findings from candidates' own research but again this was less obvious than the previous series. Candidates were able to show a secure understanding of the topic to support and challenge the data provided for Section A and to create a discussion on how 'Look and Say' methods compared to phonics. There was more of an attempt to apply theoretical discussion in Section B but this was not always used effectively. There was a far better attempt by candidates to develop and maintain an argument/discussion.

Question 7. Language and Power

The question posed the statement: 'Understanding the language and techniques of bullying will not help the victim.' Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

Candidates writing at level 1 and 2 for question 7 generally described what society could do to help support bullies and the victims of bullying and there was very little discussion of the language framework. Reference was superficially made to sources C1 and C2 but there was no specific evidence of wider research.

To achieve an A for question 7, responses need to reflect on the candidate's wider research and to use this to explore how bullies use language to control and intimidate their victims. There also needs to be a critical examination of the contextual factors in relation to the language features, with the use of appropriate terminology and theoretical discussion.

Question 8. Language and Technology

The question posed the statement: 'Recent developments in technology have improved written 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 weaker responses for Question 8, lacked the application of concepts or theories and tended to be more of an essay on the history of how we use technology to communicate. There was limited links made to the language framework or exploration into the unique characteristics of communicating via mobile phones – emoticons, abbreviations etc. Very little discussion stemmed from the statement given.

There were one or two high-level responses for Question 8, which showed a secure understanding of different attitudes to language development. Consideration was made to prescriptivist and descriptivist attitudes to language and mention was also made to the Crumbling Castle, Infectious Disease and Damp Spoon theories. There were also examples from wider research included within responses. A number of level 3 responses tended to become historical essays on the development of technology, with a particular focus on mobile phones and social media, however these did move beyond the data from Section A and integrated evidence of their own research. There was also a sense of debate or argument being established by the candidates on some responses.

Paper Summary

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

- make sure you manage your time carefully
- create a brief plan of your responses to ensure the language framework is covered
- use a range of examples from all the texts given in the source material for Section A
- adopt an appropriate formal register and style
- support your discussion with appropriate theories, concepts and contextual features and avoid writing an historical essay on everything you know about the topic
- ensure evidence from research is included within your section B response
- relate answers back to the language features being analysed
- create a discussion/debate for Section B, giving your own opinion in response to the statement