



# Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2020

Pearson Edexcel IAL  
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 2020 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 2019, enabling candidates time to research their chosen sub topic in preparation for the exam on 22nd January.

The sub-topics for the June series were:

1. South African English
2. Stages of Speech Development
3. Language of Recruitment
4. Language of Space Exploration

It is recommended that centres provide candidates with opportunities to familiarise themselves with the content and format of the examination paper, ensuring that they have a clear understanding of the requirements of each question before the exam. Exemplar materials and accompanying commentaries of the previous series are available on the Edexcel website and give valuable insight into the marks awarded at each level and the standard required.

Candidates should 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 Section B, the perspective for discussion.

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. All candidates answered the corresponding questions for Sections A and B this series.

The most popular choice was Question 1 and its corresponding question in Section B, Question 5 – Global English (South African English).

The remaining questions were as follows:

Second popular – Q2/6. Child language development (stages of speech development)

Third popular – Q3/7. Language of Power (Language of Recruitment)

Least popular – Q4/8. Language and technology (Language of Space Exploration)

## **Section A**

### **Question 1**

For Question 1, candidates were asked to analyse a transcript of a 45-year-old black male from Tsonga, who was born in Hammanskraal South Africa. Candidates were required to focus on the language frameworks, the context behind the transcripts and to introduce relevant theories and concepts to explore the language of South African speakers of English.

Candidates awarded in the higher levels of the mark scheme used the language framework to analyse the transcripts and the way the speaker demonstrated features of South African English. Top level responses had covered a range of features including grammatical, phonological and lexical features using sophisticated terminology such as copular and clause structure as well as explanations of non-standard features linking to the contextual factors and their research.

Many candidates referenced theories of language change, accommodation theory, prescriptivism and were able to identify specific features associated with South African English and discuss their development. There was an awareness of different dialects and sub-varieties of English in South Africa such as White South African English and Black South African English and knowledge of the specific phonetic features and articulation demonstrating confidence in their analysis and allowing for relevant and discriminating selection of source material.

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. Candidates would mention some terminology such as word class or phonology and be able to link one or two features to language development. However, the majority of candidates showed confidence with the topic and demonstrated strong linguistic analysis of Global English building on their skill set from studying varieties of English at AS level for the Unit WEN02-Language in Transition.

### **Question 2**

For Question 2, candidates were asked to analyse three transcripts of child and her mother at home during different stages of her language development. The three transcripts were recorded at 18 months old, 2 and a half years old and 4 years old and provided data which covered a range of features associated with each stage of development. Candidates were required to discuss to what extent the transcripts demonstrated the stages of speech development up to the age of four.

Higher level candidates produced a clear, controlled response and demonstrated their knowledge of language development with close relation to the different stages. Candidates were systematic in their approach,

commenting on a range of features across the levels and were able link features to the different stages of development such as two- and three-word utterances reflecting the telegraphic stage. Specific word classes were also identified to demonstrate her vocabulary progression acquiring lexis to form more complex utterances such as interrogatives. Some made reference to theories of language acquisition linking the acquisition of grammar to Berko's Wugs experiment and Chomsky's language acquisition device.

Responses at the lower end of the mark range tended to describe phonetic features and make statements regarding what the child could do without linking it to the stages of development or described theories with limited reference to the data. There was a lack of links made to the language framework and minimal use of terminology to explore the data.

### **Question 3**

For Question 3, candidates were asked to analyse the language used in two forms of recruitment documents. One was an advertisement for a job vacancy and the other a curriculum vitae of an applicant. Candidates were asked to discuss to what extent do the texts demonstrate the language of recruitment.

There were limited entries for this question with candidates scoring across level 2-4. Successful responses identified a range of features used to promote the applicant's key skills creating the impression that they would be a good employee. Candidates identified lexis such as positive modifiers and intensifiers to emphasise qualities and attributes. Acronyms and jargon were discussed in relation to language specific to recruitment as well as lexis which created a successful impression of the company making it a desirable place to work, e.g. 'market-leading'.

There were missed opportunities to apply theories of power and discuss pragmatics with candidates mentioning briefly the function to persuade. Less successful responses gave a general overview of the data and focused on the layout of the texts, discussing the semantic fields of business and technical jargon related to accounting demonstrating a very general understanding.

### **Question 4**

For Question 4, candidates were asked to analyse the language an interview with astronaut Buzz Aldrin about being a member of the space crew who first landed on the moon. A second text was a transcript of the radio communication between the command centre in Houston, Texas and the astronauts in their space craft. Candidates were asked to discuss to what extent the data represented the language of space exploration. This was the least popular choice this year with only three entries.

Candidates were awarded in the low to mid- levels and commented on the formality of the radio communication adhering to protocols by using specific

technical jargon such as 'Roger' and ensuring clarity when communicating. Candidates focused on the description in the interview with semantic fields of space and modifiers and similes used to create an image of the moon and experience that people will be able to relate to.

Responses for Question 4 within the lower level of the mark scheme tended to describe the contents of the data and had little awareness of function and audience focusing solely on formality with limited terminology.

## **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: 'English is the main language of government, but the fact that South Africa is a multilingual society can cause problems'. Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

Higher level responses explored the historical and cultural changes that have occurred within South Africa and the evolution of sub-varieties of English in South Africa linking to its influence of Dutch and English. Candidates were able to demonstrate understanding of the education system within South Africa and its use within the government. This was supported with historical knowledge of the development of English in South Africa making reference to apartheid and linking the attitudes towards English and sub varieties with discrimination and a reflection of the segregation within the country. Weaker candidates tended to describe one or two factors such as colonisation and the Dutch influence or the different dialects demonstrating their research but not using it to form an argument linked to the question. This is a feature throughout the weaker responses in section B whereby candidates failed to specifically tailor their research to the question.

### **Question 6**

The question posed the statement: 'If a child has not acquired the basics of spoken language by the age of four, it will impact on the child's development'. Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

Strong candidates presented knowledge and understanding of language development and the different factors which can prevent successful

acquisition. Some made links to relevant case studies of children who had not been exposed to language during a critical time period impacting on their development. Others considered the psychological impact of late acquisition such as low self-esteem by comparing themselves to peers or frustrations at their limited communication. Some outlined the requirements for successful language acquisition citing early exposure, repetition and interaction, care giver speech and play as important for language development using theories to support their points.

Evidence that was collected was well integrated within responses and used to establish an argument. Candidate responses at the lower end of the mark range generally did not establish an argument relating to the question and wrote an essay on child language acquisition citing general theories of language acquisition.

### **Question 7**

The question posed the statement: 'The language used by employment agencies to advertise a position, and by job applicants in their CVs or resumes, is promotional as well as factual'. Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

There were only a few entries for this topic but the most successful responses provided examples of both promotional and factual language used within recruitment. Some candidates discussed the evolution of recruitment due to technology mentioning how in the past, jobs were advertised in employment centres whereby now it is done online via company websites and recruitment sites. One candidate researched different advertisements and CVs identifying common language used across them creating a positive image with the function to promote skills such as 'motivated', 'team player'. Examples of terms reflecting the factual nature of the role and applicant were linked to qualifications and salaries with some candidates referencing the use of gender neutral nouns for positions to ensure equality. There was a distinct lack of terminology across the responses and limited reference to theories or rhetoric which would have strengthened their analysis.

### **Question 8**

The question posed the statement: 'The technical language of space exploration tends to exclude most people, but its precision is important for its primary audience'.

Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

The responses to this question were fairly limited with a lack of terminology, limited reference to the data and missed opportunities to expand on their points. Candidates demonstrated their research with discussions regarding the learning of Russian and English by astronauts to ensure precise communication between space stations reducing the need for translations. Some candidates mentioned the development of Runglish a mixture of both Russian and English as a result of the communications. There was a lack of reference to specific features which would have strengthened their response for example describing a use of short sentences and technical jargon but providing no examples. One candidate did make links to the use of gender specific terms 'manned' and 'unmanned' when describing the space craft but did not expand on this to discuss the changes in equality. Overall, the responses were underdeveloped and would have benefited from more evidence to support their points and use of terminology.

### **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 appropriate theories, concepts and contextual features
- create a discussion/debate for Section B, tailoring your research to the question and form an argument responding to the statement
- use theoretical discussion to explore and challenge/support your findings rather than including everything you can remember about a particular theory/theorist or the main body of your research.



## **Grade Boundaries**

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

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