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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2022

Pearson Edexcel International Advanced Level
In English Language (WEN02)
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 2022 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 2021, enabling candidates time to research their chosen subtopic in preparation for the exam on 17th January.

The sub-topics for the June series were:

1. African American Vernacular English
2. Interactive Toys
3. Mental Health Awareness
4. Language of Social Media

The cohort was small with 78 entries however, this was an increase on last year's entries. It is likely that candidates had experienced disruption to their learning due to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic enforcing school closures and a move to distance learning in 2020 and 2021.

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. Considering the circumstances, 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 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 3 and its corresponding question in Section B, Question 7 –Language of Power (Mental Health Awareness).

The remaining questions were as follows:

Second popular – Q1/5 Global English (African American Vernacular English)
Third popular – Q2/6 Child Language (Interactive Toys)
Least popular – Q4/8 Language and Technology (Language of Social Media)

Section A

Question 1

For Question 1, candidates were asked to analyse a transcript of an interview between Ice Cube and radio broadcasters. Candidates were required to focus on the language frameworks, the context behind the transcript and to introduce relevant theories and concepts to explore the language of African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

Candidates awarded in the higher levels of the mark scheme used the language framework to analyse the transcripts and the way the speakers' demonstrated features of AAVE. Top level responses covered 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 and their research.

Many candidates referenced theories of language change, accommodation theory, prescriptivism and were able to identify specific features associated with AAVE and discuss their development. There was an awareness of American history and development of AAVE and knowledge of the specific phonetic features and articulation. This demonstrated confidence in their analysis and allowed 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 four transcripts from interactive toys aimed at children from six months to eight years of age. The transcripts provided data which covered a range of features associated with different stages of language development. Candidates were required to discuss to what extent the texts reflected the expected level of language acquisition for each target age range.

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 theories of language development. The progression of phonological, lexical and grammatical development was discussed using examples from data such as the emphasis on phonics development and

following instructions when playing with the phonics bus. Candidates recognised the increased complexity of lexis and grammar used in the toys to correlate with the specific age ranges as well as strategies to encourage interaction.

Responses at the lower end of the mark range tended to describe the features and make statements regarding strategies used by the toys without linking it to the stages of development or described theories with limited reference to the data.

Question 3

For Question 3, candidates were asked to analyse the language used in a document offering advice for managing a mental health condition in the workplace. Candidates were asked to what extent the text was representative of how the language of power is used to raise awareness of mental health conditions.

Candidates scored across level 3-5 demonstrating clear and discriminate understanding of the data and confidence with discussing the topic. Level 4 and 5 responses identified a range of features used to inform and advise the reader on how to manage or support others who are managing mental health issues. They linked their point to theories of power and pragmatics consistently throughout the response and made reference to how language can discriminate. This was the discriminator between the level 4 and level 3 candidates as those in level 3 lacked theoretical application linking mainly to synthetic personalisation and rhetorical techniques to persuade.

Question 4

For Question 4, candidates were asked to analyse a selection of data taken from three social media platforms: Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Candidates were asked to discuss to what extent the texts were representative of the language used on social media platforms.

This question had the lowest entries which were awarded within levels 2 and 3. The candidates engaged well with the data however there was a lack of range with regards to the features and in theoretical application which prevented marks within the higher levels. Candidate's level 2 demonstrated general understanding and were able to identify the use of simple language, hashtags, use of emoticons, phonetic spelling with links to mode and general purpose to interact with other followers. Their analysis was brief and underdeveloped and overall lacked the range of features and discussion required to more marks. Level 3 candidate explored the interaction with technology in more depth identifying some contextual factors such as audience and linking to global connections and trending topics. There was a lack of awareness to the different purposes of each platform such as how Instagram has a promotional function. Some missed opportunities to discuss how influencers use language to generate new followers and interest in lifestyle or products.

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: 'Despite acceptance as a recognised language linked to ethnic identity, creativity and pride, some features of African American Vernacular English are still viewed negatively'. 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. Mid-level responses tended to focus on the historical development of AAVE making links to the slave trade and the stigma of certain features within its use in education or professional formats. Lower levels demonstrated knowledge of the history of AAVE and its development but were unable to develop their answer beyond that and make reference to the debate posed within the question. Higher level responses covered a range of features present within AAVE, made links to theorists, code switching, historical development and attitudes towards the variety referencing its importance to cultural identity.

Question 6

The question posed the statement: 'Interactive toys are interfering with children's language development rather than supporting it'. Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

Candidates scored across level 2 to level 4 producing some interesting responses. Those within level 2 and low level 3 made some good points regarding the language features used by toys to engage children but were largely under-developed responses. The weakest responses focused on the stages of language development and the need for interaction with care givers but made general points that did not agree or disagree with the question posed. Mid-level responses went beyond this and made reference to observations and case studies they had researched with varying degrees of relevance. Strong candidates presented knowledge and understanding of language acquisition, the different factors which can impact ability and knowledge of the function of interactive toys and their effectiveness. Some made links to the benefits of stimulating environments, the behaviourist theory and positive reinforcement as well as the impact to social and interactive skills. Evidence that was collected was well integrated within responses and used to establish an argument.

Question 7

The question posed the statement 'Language used when discussing mental health can lead to discrimination against people experiencing mental health conditions'. Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

This was the most popular question and candidates produced well-structured arguments demonstrating an engagement with the research and topic. Candidates were awarded across level 2 to 5 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 mental health discussion and how, historically, language had led to discrimination, stigma and misrepresentation of people with mental health. They also considered positive changes in language to promote inclusion and reduce negative stereotypes. Some mid-level responses were able to use the data and some of their research to argue how language can discriminate and provide examples of lexical, semantic or grammatical features to demonstrate the difference between negative and positive techniques. Low level responses were unable to form a structured argument and produced undeveloped response which focused on mental health conditions and how certain terminology can impact individuals with little reference to specific language features.

Question 8

The question posed the statement: 'The evolution of social media has led to users developing language features specific to an online community which may exclude others.' 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 responses to this question which predominantly scored level 2 and level 3 due to their answer being brief and underdeveloped. There was evidence of some research, but there was a lack of discussion regarding specific online communities and how language can develop within various forums and platforms amongst users. There was an understanding of the language features specific to social media such as emoticons, abbreviations, phonetic spelling and hashtags linking to the contextual factors of online communication but there was limited argument produced relating to 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 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.

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