General Certificate of Education

English Language 1706
Specification B

ENGB1   Categorising Texts

Report on the Examination

2009 examination - June series

General

Almost 21000 candidates sat this second examination for the new specification. Senior examiners commented that the paper proved to be highly successful and that it provided candidates with clear opportunities within which they were able to demonstrate their knowledge. Candidates of all levels of ability were able to respond, most of them successfully. It was clear that centres had worked hard to provide candidates with the skills necessary to apply both learned knowledge and appropriate methods for working with unseen data.

Section A – Text Varieties

Question 01

As outlined in the report on January's paper, it is worth remembering that the task is marked out of 48, with marks divided equally between AO1, AO2 and AO3.

- AO1 - use of linguistic methods
- AO2 - grouping choices
- AO3 - contextual awareness

Candidates who arrived at a balance between an insightful and judicious range of grouping choices, supported by systematic, perceptive and accurate linguistic support and insightful exploration of contextual factors scored very well.

The specification (p6) suggests a range of possibilities for grouping, including audience, purpose and genre. Examiners saw a very broad range of approaches but very few candidates appeared to misunderstand the nature of the task.

Successful responses tended to:

- include most texts
- choose a range of data-led groupings
- adopt an open-minded approach to grouping texts – not approaching the texts in a pre-planned way
- attempt to link groups together to show cross-boundary texts
- place the same texts in different groups showing the complex nature of the task
- discuss differences between texts within each group
- exemplify with salient language detail
- move beyond feature spotting and describing
- link AO1 to AO3 consistently.

Less successful responses tended to:

- use a pre-planned approach which often led to unconvincing groupings as the texts on the paper did not fit the plan
- analyse texts individually, often in turn, making some occasional implicit links
- ignore influential linguistic and contextual factors leading to a descriptive and sometimes vague discussion.

Finally, there were still a relatively small number of candidates who infringed the rubric by using texts H, I or J from Section B for Question 01 answers. The instructions on the paper about this are very clear, including a blank page between data sets as a clear reminder to candidates that the data for each task is distinctive.

Section B Language and Social Contexts

It is worth highlighting that although this task is also worth 48 marks, the way the Assessment Objectives are weighted is different. AO2 is worth a maximum of 16 marks, and AO3 32 marks. Centres should therefore be aware of the significance of contextual awareness in terms of teaching and learning for this section.

There was a reasonably even spread of answers across the three topics. However, it was reported that there appeared to be evidence of some centres only preparing candidates for one or two of the topics. On occasion this seemed to have a rather detrimental effect when it limited candidates' choice.

Question 02 Language and Gender

This was the most popular choice of question. There were a wide variety of responses at all levels, with marks awarded across the full range. Less able candidates were able to gain marks for topic knowledge and very often treated the data as a form of 'real' speech, analysing its representation using spoken discourse analysis. The most able candidates recognised issues in the data that challenged traditional ideas from language study and were able to combine these ideas with clear, and often perceptive contextual awareness.

Successful responses tended to:

* integrate relevant AO2 knowledge to support the response rather than allow ideas from language study to dominate
* discuss how the representation in the text both subverted and supported female and male stereotypes - more specifically how the generalised stereotype of the submissive female is challenged by a representation of a new culture where women can socialise in the manner that it is acceptable for men
* use the data as evidence to challenge received theoretical knowledge, making effective observations about role reversal and ladette culture and how use of non-standard English challenges the theories of Lakoff and Trudgill
* explore the role of the silent male in the data and how his physical presence empowers the women to make a decision
* recognise the use of parody/exaggeration for humorous and persuasive purposes
* explore the perceived target audience effectively with clear recognition of The Gate's appeal to a diverse audience with diverse interests – the presence of the widescreen television coverage of a match and the attractive males and females in the background prompted comment on how this would be a venue with appeal to both genders
* systematically explore a range of language features, linking them to their role in the representation of gender and speech – for example the focus on female topics, use of co-operative, supportive features to support stereotypes but also subversion of stereotypes through the use of colloquial dialectal forms and the confrontational interchange more associated with male speech
* discuss the lexical choice of 'Phwoar' as a non-gender specific term that carries the same semantic meaning – that the subject of attention is attractive
* analyse the use of punctuation to represent prosodic features – for example the use of 'Who cares?!!' to infer that it has more exclamatory value than that of an interrogative
* focus on the advertisement form and analyse audience and purpose (to entertain as well as persuade) in some depth – the slogan and representation of the venue as well as the amusing narrative led to interesting analysis

* examine the unconventional phonological representation of accent/dialect in terms of making the characters accessible, familiar and relaxed to the local audience rather than an

examination of how the accent/dialect showed that women were not bright or they were of a lower social class.

 Less successful responses tended to:

* import and describe irrelevant or unhelpful learned gender theory
* make sweeping generalisations about female talk or about the type of woman represented in the text with no supporting evidence from the data
* ignore or misunderstand the data type and the question, '…discuss how language is used to represent gender'
* demonstrate limited awareness that this was not a *real* but a *represented* conversation
* appear to be unprepared to deal with data of different types
* have limited focus on language
* offer limited discussion of context – purpose, genre, audience.

Question 03 Language and Power

Candidates appeared to have enjoyed responding to this question. A wide variety of responses were seen and marks were awarded across the full range. Most candidates were able to recognise basic issues of influential and persuasive power within the text, while the most able recognised different forms of power and combined this with a close analysis of the language features and discourse. The data allowed more able candidates to respond fully with some very perceptive comments about empowerment of audience and the use of corporate discourse features.

Successful responses tended to:

* integrate salient AO2 knowledge relevantly into their response – Fairclough was often usefully employed
* exemplify to illuminate their analysis
* show clear awareness of the employee audience and how much of the message relied heavily on employee assumptions, being careful to avoid imperatives which would sound authoritarian
* relate the text to their own work experiences, recognising corporate language in all its subtleties
* reflect on power types to consider the balance of influential and positional power exerted by the company/Nick Williams.
* examine language features in some detail to explore subtle persuasion including the pun in the title 'A New Chapter in Service' and the pragmatic suggestions that it might even have Biblical connotations as well as a new era for Waterstone's
* evaluate the effectiveness of the persuasive strategies including the politeness features that soften imperatives like the invitation to 'Please participate fully with your suggestions'
* examine the graphology including the use of the picture of a smiling, casually dressed Nick Williams and his signature to personalise the text so that the impression is of a human author not a faceless company
* explore how lexical choices that are professional and from a semantic field of business imply a professional approach
* show awareness that the use of the second person pronoun was avoided until the final paragraph to conclude with a persuasive personal appeal to the reader that might motivate them to try harder
* refer appropriately to synthetic personalisation to consider the relationship established between the company/Nick Williams and the reader.

Less successful responses tended to:

- use a linear approach that tended towards paraphrase
- misunderstand the purpose of the data
- use a narrow range of language methods
- respond to the text as though it were intended for customers rather than employees, assuming it was to encourage customers to buy more books
- comment only on the first two paragraphs due to time constraints and therefore failing to engage with the wider discourse structure.

Question 04 Language an Technology

This task was a popular choice and candidates appeared to enjoy discussion of the data, as there was real familiarity with MSN. Generally, candidates were able to reflect appropriately on a range of key features; the more able candidates recognised the phatic nature of the discourse and the social functions of MSN, as well as demonstrating good pragmatic understanding of the nature of the relationship as represented in the discourse and the level of shared understanding of the participants. Stronger responses used the language features evident in the text as a starting point to consider the context for the piece and explore broader technology issues.

Successful responses tended to:

- engage well with a range of key features to make effective links between AO2 and AO3, considering the roles of the two participants in the interaction and commenting in detail about the language choices of both users
- make perceptive observations about inconsistency of use, especially punctuation, orthography, lexical choices and tone, perhaps reflecting the participants individual particular idiolects
- explore formality: the use of both Standard English and more colloquial forms to create particular effects
- make insightful observations about the relationship between the two users, reflecting appropriately on close friendships linked to shared understanding of previous conversations, sometimes considering the flirtatious tone of the data
- refer to theory to consider compressed language (use of variant spelling, vowel omission, abbreviations, ellipsis and acronyms)
- explore links to theories of accommodation, positive face and co-operation
- examine a range of contextual features other than technology, including gender and age
- employ a tentative approach, exploring more than one possible explanation for features identified
- show awareness that the data was not 'typical' and did not feature many stereotypical language and technology features they had observed in their own research/observations
- explore the cross-boundary nature of the data – the inventive ways the participants conveyed laughter, volume and sarcasm using a range of features such as onomatopoeia, capitalisation and punctuation
- identify the expected discourse structures of informal conversation employed by the participants to create an almost synchronous feel to the 'conversation' while acknowledging that the nature of MSN means it can not be entirely synchronous
- comment on the affordances of the medium to send information and files cheaply and quickly when the MP3 file is transferred towards the end of the data.

Less successful responses tended to:

- make only brief reference to the data itself, using it to initiate a wider discussion based on other forms of technology, usually text language
- adopt a deficit approach, making detailed reference to the declining standards of language
- adopt a linear approach resulting in some repetition
- move away from the data to write irrelevantly about features they would use in MSN
- show limited awareness of other influential contextual factors apart from technology.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the **Results Statistics** page of the AQA Website.