



General Certificate of Education

English Language 1706
Specification B

ENGB1 Categorising Texts

Report on the Examination
2010 examination - January series

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General

Over 5000 candidates sat this third examination for the new specification. Senior examiners commented that this was a highly successful paper that provided candidates with varied and rich data, allowing them to demonstrate their linguistic knowledge and analytical skills. Candidates of all levels of ability were able to respond and centres had clearly taken on board much of the advice given in the two 2009 exam reports. Generally speaking candidates had achieved a balance between the two questions but some concern was expressed that on occasion candidates had taken more time completing one question at the expense of the other. This led to brief or less analytical responses to the latter and a potential imbalance in marks awarded.

In an effort to avoid repeating previous comments it would be very advisable for all teachers to read the exam reports on the two previous sittings regarding advice about Assessment Objectives and approaches to the different tasks. There is still a sense that some candidates are not fully aware of what is being tested, particularly in question 2 where awareness of a range of contextual factors is crucial for success.

Section A – Text Varieties

Question 1

As outlined in the reports on the 2009 papers, it is worth reminding centres that the question 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

The specification 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.

In this sitting a range of different approaches to grouping the data was taken, the majority of which were helpful in allowing the candidates to show their knowledge and understanding. Within question 1, texts A, D and G were often grouped as spoken texts and examiners were impressed by how many candidates gave succinct explanations of the various differences between them. Texts E and F tended to be grouped as entertaining texts and there were many successful attempts to explain the nature of the humour.

Without doubt, B and C were the most challenging texts, allowing stronger candidates to offer good analyses of the unusual fictional voice of B and intertextuality in C.

Successful responses tended to:

- have good coverage of the data
- explore a range of groups – including grouping choices led by audience, purpose, mode, formality, genre and language features rather than limited to one or two areas
- use an open-minded approach to grouping – not approaching the texts in a pre-planned way
- weave groups together to show their cross-boundary nature for example ‘*Text C can also be grouped with A and D as...*’
- place the same text in different groups showing the complex nature of the task
- demonstrate subtle exploration of differences between texts within one group (eg *different audience, purpose, language features, register*)
- systematically exemplify all points using integrated detail from the data
- move beyond feature spotting and describing content
- link AO1 (language features) to AO3 (contextual awareness) consistently and insightfully.

Less successful responses tended to:

- take a pre-planned approach which often led to unconvincing groupings as the texts did not fit their plan
- ignore influential contextual factors
- list too many groups leading to a superficial response
- adopt a descriptive approach where groups were not clearly identified or signposted
- misread or misunderstand some of the texts (especially B and C) possibly due to not reading the contextual information at the head of each text carefully
- lack a linguistic focus
- complete a sequential survey and then try to group at the end leaving little time for discussion of similarities and differences
- take a prescriptive approach to the use of non-standard grammar in text B rather than commenting on the deliberate stylistic deviation from SE to represent the cultural and linguistic differences of the narrator
- make very broad groupings for example based on mode to cover spoken and written texts, ‘grammar’ and texts from ‘books’ leading to some broad generalised comment.

Section B – Language and Social Contexts

General

There were some really exceptional answers to all three questions suggesting that centres had prepared their candidates well for this section. The title ‘Language and Social Contexts’ points to the importance of contextual factors and one senior examiner commented that ‘I saw lots of good detail that went beyond the scope of the topic but still remained relevant and consequently addressed AO3 criteria. For example, close comments on the discourse community (sixth form, region, belief systems) inhabited by girls and how this as well as aspects of gender affected their linguistic behaviour in Text H. Also, how the RNLI text producer held varying degrees of influential power over potential readers in Text J. Where this was explored well it was done very well indeed.’

Gender was the most popular choice of question followed closely by Power. Technology was selected by a lower number of candidates. There are a range of potential reasons for this such as centres having a limited amount of time to prepare candidates for all three topics in just one term of study or candidates feeling more secure with a more substantial body of learned knowledge to measure the data against. Where this learned knowledge was exploited open-mindedly it was a strength; the problem lay more when candidates assumed a more narrow-minded approach allowing theory to cloud their analysis when analysing the data.

Again, teachers and students would be well advised to read the advice given in previous exam reports in order to avoid the potential pitfall of spending too little time thinking about the specific contextual factors for their chosen question. Candidates occasionally seem less aware that AO3 (contextual awareness) is worth twice as many marks as AO2 (theoretical ideas and concepts). This tends to be less problematic for those who choose Power or Technology rather than Gender.

Question 2 – Language and Gender

There were a wide variety of approaches to the analysis of the data, with marks across the full range. Although the data was taken from a context familiar to students this did not appear to hamper their ability to identify and link language features to contextual factors. In fact for some it allowed some insightful awareness of how the all female conversation was influenced by a range of factors they recognised.

Successful responses tended to:

- integrate relevant AO2 knowledge into the response – dominance and difference approaches were well handled, referring to the data to examine key features
- consider dominance in terms of the roles adopted by the three girls; Gina’s role in particular as initiator of topics was considered, as was Amy’s attempts to change topics
- adopt a critical approach in order to reflect on the extent to which deficit and dominance models applied to the data
- explore notions of uncertainty or support and collaboration tentatively
- analyse how topics were developed
- link ideas to context insightfully, reflecting appropriately on a number of key points: single sex, age, location, relationships, youth sociolect, nature of ‘chat’ as gossip or phatic talk etc
- discuss how the talk of the females in the text challenged established theoretical ideas
- cluster ideas in a systematic way together rather than producing a linear response
- include tentative development of points made, realising that there could be more than one explanation for a given feature.

Less successful responses tended to:

- offer a very theory-led response – for example, commenting only on features they could link to theoretical ideas (for example, intensifiers and vague language) whilst ignoring other significant features
- rely too much on Lakoff, without adopting a critical approach particularly when examining key features such as fillers which were deemed evidence of ‘insecurity’ rather than examining the context fully
- make rather sweeping observations about the use of taboo language, commenting on its severity and linking this to attitudes about declining standards
- mislabel features such as tag questions
- use less relevant learned knowledge
- link theory to the data tenuously
- make sweeping generalisations about female talk
- describe the content of the conversation
- complete a linear analysis rather than using a systematic approach
- ignore the data and write about gender conversation theories.

Question 3 – Language and Power

Some senior examiners commented that some of the best responses they saw were in response to this question. One commented, 'All the answers I read were sensible and saw the encounter as a trained professional using her authority to the ultimate benefit of the children. They didn't misread the data and produce responses denouncing the primary school teacher in question as power-hungry gorgon, bent on frightening small children!'

There was plenty of scope for exploration of this specific context – the age of the children, the experience of the teacher and the planned nature of the activity and what it was designed to teach were all explored sensitively.

Successful responses tended to:

- integrate sound and often specific theoretical knowledge of classroom discourse into their response – such as Sinclair and Coulthard's Initiation-Response-Feedback structure
- include a range of key features – considering discourse structure, questioning and framing strategies and re-casting and expansion techniques
- comment about whole class dynamics with the teacher working in collaboration with the pupils to create a positive learning environment
- consider accommodation and face theories appropriately
- include awareness of instrumental and influential power features
- integrate exemplification helpfully throughout to illuminate discussion
- evaluate the roles and status of the teacher and children
- explore a range of language features
- show awareness of influential contextual factors such as the particularly young age of the children and the specific infant classroom environment
- give tentative development of the assertions made.

Less successful response tended to:

- consider the exchange as an 'enforcement of institutional power' and a power struggle – over-stating the situation without considering the fact that the participants were only five years old
- ignore support strategies and tended to over-simplify power roles
- complete a linear analysis rather than take a systematic approach
- identify a narrow range of language methods
- describe the data
- give unsupported assertions about the teacher being patronising
- have limited contextual development.

Question 4 – Language and Technology

There were fewer responses to this question but again the complete range of achievement was seen from those led exclusively by describing the graphology to those candidates who used their theoretical awareness selectively to explore the complexities of a text that looked simpler than it was.

Successful responses tended to:

- engage well with a range of key features and were able to make effective links between AO2 and AO3
- consider the nature of the text as a professional website, a charity and the language choices made to reflect this
- identify a range of features moving beyond surface description to consider conventional features such as navigation tools, the use of Standard English and graphology to organise and shape the content
- refer in some detail to interactive elements, both in terms of navigation around the page but also in terms of RSS Feeds and the 'live' segments.
- link key language features such as compressed language to contextual factors
- respond well to audience and were able to consider broad audience as well as audience appeal, especially in a charity context
- demonstrate clear understanding of its multiple purposes
- take a tentative approach to contextual factors using the data to support development
- discuss the interactive nature of the text
- give only brief reference to established theory which seemed to enhance responses rather than constrain them, allowing candidates to remain focused on the data.

Less successful responses tended to:

- move away from the data to write about other technology texts
- limit comment to graphological elements without discussing how these were used to shape and organise the content
- reference surface constraints such as the lack of internet access for everyone or loss of internet connection
- make only brief reference to the data, addressing wider aspects of technology instead such as text messaging
- discuss general points about the usefulness of the internet
- make very limited reference to context with only very broad comments about audience and purpose
- take a descriptive approach
- adopt a deficit approach, making detailed reference to the declining standards of language.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.