General Certificate of Education

English Language 2706
Specification B

ENGB4   Investigating Language

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - January series

General

The entry numbers for the first series were, as expected, quite small. However, for those centres that did choose to submit their A2 coursework this January there is much to congratulate. The majority of centres had clearly worked very hard to prepare their students for both elements of this unit, and had applied the new style assessment criteria very accurately. Moderators saw some excellent work at all levels of the mark ranges. In particular, centres should be congratulated on the range of topics covered for the language investigations and on the imaginative links between the investigation and the media text.

The Language Investigation

Successful investigations tended to:

- *Reflect the interests of the candidates*
  There was clear evidence that candidates who pursued areas of their own interest produced investigations which were engaging, well-focused and therefore maximised their access to the criteria.
  Examples were seen in language areas, eg The Language of Texting; in terms of a personal interest, eg A study of a child's reading (usually a young relative) and in terms of subject, eg A study of Specialist Language in Dance Classes.

- *Use an appropriate methodology*
  Selecting an appropriate method for data collection is at the heart of a successful investigation. Moderators were encouraged to see that centres had worked hard to help candidates shape methodologies to suit the revised word count, allowing them to work with manageable data sets. In all cases this led to increased analytical rigour, which clearly benefitted candidates across the mark range. In addition, moderators were impressed by the range of methodologies chosen for data collection. For example, many more candidates were using questionnaires either as the method for data collection, or as a complement to their primary data.

- *Select appropriate methods for data analysis*
  Candidates tended to produce much higher quality investigations when they were able to extract the most significant linguistic details from their chosen data set and chose them as a starting point for analysis. This was often reflected in the use of relevant subheadings to scaffold the analysis section. In addition, the best quality investigations tended to use subheadings which were more precise than a simple method, eg reader – writer relationships/semantic field of... etc, rather than simply listing the broad language methods, eg lexis, grammar etc.

- *Consider contextual details in the light of language features*
  A key distinction of successful investigations was an understanding of the link between the use of language and context. Candidates who were able to extract language detail to support a contextual point or vice versa tended to produce investigations which were evaluative, rather than simple identifications of language detail.

- *Use language concepts to illuminate their data analysis*
  Part of the AO2 credit for the investigation is awarded for the use of appropriate methodologies, and part for the use of concepts to support the data analysis. Successful investigations demonstrated a strong awareness that published theories could be challenged when appropriate, as well as being used to support data analysis. Crucially these candidates also were able to understand and use the concepts learned from published theories, therefore avoiding too much 'content' and description of AO2.

Less successful investigations tended to:

- *Have an inappropriate methodology for data selection*
  Often this was in terms of the quantity of data that a candidate was attempting to analyse. Imprecise or overly ambitious methodologies, eg attempting to analyse whole novels, or too many children reading, or historical data sampled from too many dates – led to candidates becoming overwhelmed by the quantity of data to analyse.
  Sometimes the use of a comparative methodology was a problem. Moderators felt that some candidates chose to compare data where the range of contextual variables were too problematic, eg attempting to compare men and women's text messages when the data set for the males was taken from a sample of men over the age of 35, and the women's was 16-25, and 'age' variable was then entirely overlooked.

- *Use inappropriate language methods to analyse the data*
  Candidates who used a simple list of language methods, eg grammar, pragmatics, graphology etc, often tended to overlook the most significant features of the data. Occasionally this approach also led to candidates discussing what was not contained in the data, or writing simplistic or inaccurate comments such as, 'there is not much grammar in my data'.

- *Be either too short or too lengthy*
  Candidates' investigations that failed to meet the minimum word count were self-penalising in terms of access to the full mark range. However, more frequently, candidates who exceeded the word count were less successful because of the descriptive nature of their approach. Usually overly long investigations were also problematic because of the nature of the methodology.

- *Lack evaluative comment*
  In less convincing investigations many candidates were overly reliant on tables, charts and lists as an approach to data analysis. Frequently the lack of discussion about what their tables revealed about the data, or their investigation title, meant that candidates were not able to demonstrate 'the beginnings of an evaluative approach' which kept them in the lower bands for the AO1 mark.

The Media Text

Successful media texts tended to:

- *Have a clear language focus*
  To fulfil the requirements of the specification the media text needs to be focused on the 'broad subject focus' of the investigation and highlight the surrounding ' language ideas and issues'. Moderators saw many interesting and imaginative media texts at all levels of the mark range. However, the most successful texts tended to have a well-judged balance between the amount of language information contained in the text and the needs of the intended audience and genre.

- *Demonstrate a sophisticated awareness of genre and audience*
  Candidates are allowed to select their own genre and audience for the media text offering them greater scope and personal engagement with the writing task. Texts which fulfilled the criteria for the higher bands were able to establish a credible relationship with their intended audience, and were also able to craft their writing to meet the needs of their chosen genre (in the higher bands this always went beyond a simplified awareness of the visual aspects of the genre).

- *Demonstrate 'effective and sustained' adaptation of the language details*
  Candidates who were able to sustain their adaptation of language concepts and ideas usually produced the most effective texts. In these texts there was a clear understanding of how writers shape and structure an argument, guiding their audience at every stage; complex ideas were carefully explained or exemplified, and language detail was woven throughout the text rather than placed in 'chunks'.

Less successful media texts tended to:

- *Overlook the needs of their intended audience*
  Moderators felt that this was a key discriminator in terms of the quality of these texts. Often candidates underestimated the intelligence of their intended audience, which led to a patronising tone, or they overestimated the determination an audience would need to engage with the quantity of information offered.

- *Demonstrate an oversimplified awareness of genre*
  In these texts genre awareness was often reduced to some simple observations about layout, images and colour. Clearly these elements are significant in some genres, however, to meet the language needs of a genre, candidates needed to engage with the more sophisticated aspects of the discourse conventions of their chosen genre.

- *Take an uneven approach to the adaptation of language detail*
  A further aspect of texts in the lower bands was the inability to integrate language detail. For these texts language detail was often dealt with in discrete paragraphs, or placed entirely at the beginning or the end of the text. This often led to an uncomfortable relationship between the need to 'inform' and the needs of the audience and genre.

- *Overlook the need to 'inform' about language*
  The media text needs to inform a new, non-specialist audience about the 'broad' language issues surrounding their investigation topic. Unfortunately, some candidates failed to do this. As stated at all standardising meetings, candidates who fail to offer language detail in their media texts cannot be placed above the 13-15 band. It cannot be argued that 'source materials have been shaped' (band 16-18) if the text does not contain any language detail. Please refer to the 2010 ENGB4 Standardising Materials, the GCE English Language B Specification and your Coursework Advisor for further guidance.

Advice for future submissions:

- The Language Investigations should always be organised as highlighted in the specification, section 3.4
- Bibliographies are a mandatory element of the ENGB4 folder
- The media texts work well in a variety of genres – centres do not need to limit candidates to newspaper or magazine articles
- Please use a cover sheet (either produced in centre or the AQA coversheet) to identify the genre and audience for the media text and the link to the investigation
- All candidates are required to 'choose their own area for study in consultation with their teacher(s)', however, the supervising teacher(s) must ensure that the chosen topic yields 'interesting questions about language in use'. If teachers have any concerns about the acceptability of a topic for any reason, they must consult with their Coursework Advisor.

Advice for centre assessment:

- The marking grid for the investigation awards individual marks for the three Assessment Objectives – moderators need to see a comment relating to each Assessment Objective to see how the individual marks were awarded. A generic comment about the overall quality is rarely helpful on its own
- Senior moderators have found that it is very helpful to start the assessment of the investigation with the AO2 mark – considering the quality of the methodology, then working into the quality of the analysis linked to context. The folder comments for the Teacher Standardising Materials 2010 model this approach
- The marking criteria for the media text work with the three aspects of a completed media text: transformation; register; genre and audience – it is very helpful for moderators to work with comments relating to these elements.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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