



General Certificate of Education

English Language 1706

Specification B

ENGB1 Categorising Texts

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – June series

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General

More than 22,000 candidates sat this paper in May. Senior examiners commented that the paper was highly accessible for candidates of all abilities; the data for both sections proved to be both enabling and challenging. Centres have clearly prepared candidates well for the differing approaches necessary for each question and candidates were generally approaching unseen data in an open-minded way. To avoid repetition of previous advice, centres new to this specification should access the reports written for the two sittings in 2009 and this January's report. All are available on www.aqa.org.uk. These have detailed clarification of the assessment objectives, their different weightings and how these are interpreted across the two sections.

Section A – Text Varieties

Question 01

The vast majority of students understood the rationale of the question. Only a few candidates analysed the texts sequentially with limited awareness of the need to group. It was clear that most centres had prepared students to produce a range of groups as is implied in the question. Even weaker candidates were able to fit texts into groups and no text was neglected. There was a range of different approaches taken, the majority of which were helpful in allowing the candidates to show their knowledge and understanding.

Many candidates responded with real insight and regard for some of the subtleties of the groupings, especially around the humour of B, C and D. Audience as a grouping also yielded some very perceptive discussion as did representation, multi-modality, levels of formality. An interesting group included texts B & F, moving beyond speech to consider power and status between speakers. Spoken groups tended to include B, D and F, with E sometimes included, but less successfully.

Examiners are instructed to be open-minded in terms of the number of groupings; it is the quality of discussion and exploration of complexities that spring from their initial links and subsequent sub-groupings that is evaluated.

Successful responses tended to:

- have good coverage of the texts
- employ terminology accurately
- use a good range of language methods
- choose a range of interesting groups
- have an open-minded approach to grouping texts – avoiding approaching the texts in a pre-planned way
- link groups together to show cross-boundary texts for example, 'Text C can also be grouped with A and D as...'
- place the same texts in different groups showing the complex nature of the task
- explore differences between texts within one group using comparative vocabulary to aid cohesion
- move beyond feature spotting and describing
- link language methods to contextual factors consistently
- use graphology as a focus in often subtle ways; the significance of colour was frequently explored.

Less successful responses tended to:

- offer groups on the sole basis of grammatical reasons - less able candidates were sometimes confused in their terminology while more able candidates were restricted in their approach
- move into theoretical ideas in detail (an approach more appropriate for questions 2-4)
- employ a pre-planned approach which often led to unconvincing groupings as the texts did not fit their plan
- use one text as a group – this is a misinterpretation of the task and limits achievement as discussion of differences and complexities is not possible
- feature spot with no discussion of influential contextual factors
- employ limited terminology
- use a narrow range of language methods
- list many groups, often with very limited discussion and development
- produce groups which were used only to discuss differences rather than exploring the connections between the texts.

Section B – Language and Social Contexts

General

'Language and Gender' proved to be the most popular choice of task, followed by 'Language and Power'. 'Language and Technology' was least popular but often led to strong responses. Reasons for this trend could possibly be connected to candidates' desire to display awareness of learned knowledge and the fact there is less theoretical knowledge afforded to Technology. This may not always be a helpful strategy as the weighting of the assessment objectives is different for this section. Contextual awareness (AO3) is awarded a potential 32 marks whereas ideas and concepts associated with the topics (AO2) are worth a potential 16. Candidates who spend more time expounding ideas from language study than exploring the language features in relation to context may risk losing marks. It is the synthesis of ideas learned about the topics, the language features identified in the chosen data and the influence of contextual factors that leads to higher achievement.

Question 02 – Language and Gender

There were some very strong answers but there were also some weaker responses as candidates failed to move beyond showing their knowledge of learned named research. Most students noted that it was all male conversation. However, some still proceeded to launch into an exhaustive survey of theory relating to female talk. It is encouraging to note that theoretical discussion is increasingly related to the actual data rather than simply being cited in isolation. Weaker candidates continue to assert theory, especially when they have identified a tag question or a stray adjective. Stronger candidates, however, are open-minded and tentative; consequently they recognised both co-operative and competitive features.

Successful responses tended to:

- integrate relevant AO2 knowledge into the response to support points raised from the text; Robin Lakoff, Tannen and Zimmerman & West were referenced in some detail, but candidates did begin to extend beyond just gender based theory to also consider politeness and accommodation theory
- handle deficit, dominance and difference approaches well, making close reference to the data to examine key examples
- clearly focus on dominance, with clear comments linked to Jay's dominance (linked to floor space) or Tim's role (linked to his role as initiator/topic manager)
- comment on the use of insults to forge friendship groups and consider different ways in which the males, Jay in particular, were able to communicate 'emotions and feelings' through the use of exaggeration, sociolect and taboo
- recognise stereotypes linked to conversational styles – in particular insults and the formation of friendship bonds were explored in some detail
- discuss how the boys in the text subverted as well as conformed to stereotypes
- analyse how the speech of the boys went against established gender concepts
- explore how gender was not necessarily the only influential factor; other factors included: age, relationship, in employment as opposed to school, established friendship and shared knowledge, single sex, youth sociolect, status linked to school/employment, nature of talk to 'catch up' hence accounting for Jay's dominance/floor space
- take account of the specific and differing known circumstances of the boys
- take an open-minded approach
- challenge received wisdom
- select the most pertinent studies and weigh up the evidence from the data with some sophistication
- observe the shift in formality between the start and end of the data and considered the reasons why
- include relevant discussion about overt and covert prestige.

Less successful responses tended to:

- identify only one factor influencing language behaviour rather than a range of factors
- approach the data with very fixed ideas of what would be found
- ignore any contextual influences on the data
- reveal knowledge of AO2 but with limited relevance to the actual data
- identify features followed by, for example 'this shows Lakoff's study was right'/'this proves Fishman's theory' without thinking open-mindedly about this particular piece of data
- find it difficult to apply dominance theory when considering an all-male interaction. These candidates made broad comments to topics being initiated by males without considering the absence of female participants
- make sweeping generalisations about male and female talk with limited supporting evidence from the data
- be preoccupied with incorporating much named research at the expense of actual data analysis; showing knowledge of learned knowledge does not always lead to a successful response.

Question 03 – Language and Power

General

Senior examiners commented that candidates of all abilities found this data very accessible and there were very few weak responses. One commented, 'The more able candidates were able to use sophisticated analysis of modality. I remain impressed by students who can not only distinguish between types of modality, but also comment on the effect of these language choices. The stronger candidates engaged intelligently with the many contextual features waiting to be explored: whereas the less strong did not recognise these factors except in broad terms.'

Almost all candidates were able to make at least some reference to relevant AO2 concepts with suitable examples from the data to support. The representation of JCQ and the examination boards as authority figures was generally an indicator of a higher level response as was the identification and exploration of the dual audience for AO3. But the majority of candidates recognised the legal links, the use of direct address and modality and could make sensible points about both text structure and design.

The strongest candidates produced subtle comments on the variety of different forms of power that were evident in the text and linked these securely to a wide variety of language features. Many also recognised that the text had a wider audience than simply students sitting exams and referred to the way power was also being exercised over teaching staff and invigilators.

Successful responses tended to:

- reflect on the warning, threatening aspects and the consequences likely to arise from failure to comply. Rules were addressed in some detail, focusing on the use of modal auxiliaries, graphology – linked to lack of choices and restricted options
- develop points effectively: for example the use of address terms and direct address to create an impersonal tone whilst ensuring individual responsibility
- explore the use of instrumental power, recognising that this was exerted for the benefit of the candidates rather than to intimidate and frighten them
- include critical reference to Fairclough
- give appropriate consideration of accommodation and face and politeness theories
- relate their own experiences effectively to the text – as recent exam candidates they were able to link the data to familiarity of reception
- move beyond feature spotting and consider issues such as status, different form of hierarchy, purpose, audience, environment and the impact on the students
- take a systematic approach to the data often using language methods to structure the response
- recognise the legal obligations of the text, where all eventualities had to be catered for
- realise that very few students were actually going to read the whole of the text and that iconic images were central to its effectiveness.

Less successful responses tended to:

- have difficulty engaging with different types of power, not clearly distinguishing between instrumental and influential power sometimes suggesting that it communicated personal power, attempting to influence the audience
- adopt quite a narrow exploration of the data, addressing the title, the use of graphology (images and bold typography) and the use of modal auxiliaries, but without full exploration of why key features were utilised in the data
- misinterpret the purpose – suggesting that the main purpose was to intimidate and frighten candidates or suggest that the tone was patronising
- struggle when distinguishing between declaratives and imperatives
- describe and feature spot.

Question 04 – Language and Technology

General

Although this was the least popular question many senior examiners found that it was the most enjoyable to mark. The data seemed to produce a wide variety of interesting, thoughtful and engaged responses that were almost entirely data-led. The transcript encouraged candidates to explore this genre and how it was modified for a particular, rural audience, often driving a car. The audience's expectations of a meeting of the spontaneous and the formulaic were analysed in the more able responses, whilst others candidates were keen to introduce concepts and issues more relevant to a phone-in. One senior examiner commented, 'Stronger responses engaged well with a range of key features and were able to make effective links between AO2 and AO3, considering the nature of the text as a local radio station, with multiple purposes to entertain, inform and persuade.'

There were very few responses that focused on wider areas of technology such as internet pages and text messaging at the expense of the text given. Although there is a narrower source language study available on this topic, the best answers still managed to produce one or two sensible concepts from theorists, which were well secured to the data. Even the weaker responses produced sensible comments on the use of conventions such as pre-recorded voices and jingles. There was an implicit understanding of technological affordances and constraints underpinning the data in most answers.

This text certainly challenged and stretched the more able candidates who were able to analyse various features of the specific discourse. It gave the opportunity for such candidates to demonstrate the tentative and open minded response that this specification encourages.

Successful responses tended to:

- identify a range of radio conventions; sfx, pre-recorded elements, change of pace to compensate for absence of visuals. There was some effective development of points, considering change of register to appeal to audience or to shape discourse structure, and to maintain audience engagement with the radio show
- address the name of the radio show and focused on the data precisely enough to note the anniversary of the show, thus impacting on the content
- explore the role of the presenter and the relationship established with the listeners
- comment on recent changes in radio broadcasting to involve the audience directly through internet/phone media, commenting on the concept of loyal audiences who are encouraged to interact and participate in the show
- handle the break in the show to cover the breaking travel news with effective comment about the live nature of the broadcast, the need for current, up-to-date information and localised appeal/references

- discuss the register and lexis used by the presenter in relation to the local youthful audience
- explore the need for more fluency in radio than other media
- compare the discourse with television in terms of lack of visuals
- analyse the flexible role of the presenter when entertaining and informing the listening audience
- compare how the presenter's speech differs from 'normal' conversation
- explore the impact of the show as 'live' and local.

Less successful responses tended to:

- seem unsure how to handle the data as if they had not covered radio or TV broadcasting as part of their programme of study
- paraphrase what was said by the presenter with limited consideration of context
- over-simplify points, suggesting that the use of non-fluency features was due to nervousness on the part of the presenter without considering the presenter's actual role in the radio broadcast
- address wider technology points rather than addressing radio broadcasts offering a limited response to the data
- offer a general discussion of technology advances
- make inappropriate links between the data and irrelevant technology features such as text talk
- feature spot.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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