General Certificate of Education

English Language 2706
Specification B

ENGB3   Developing Language

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – June series

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General

June 2010 provided the second opportunity for Examiners to assess students' performances and just over 13,500 candidates sat this final examined A Level unit. It is pleasing to report that candidates have been well-prepared for the demands of tackling unseen data for Language Acquisition and Language Change. Most found plenty to engage with in both topic areas and showed awareness of the different weightings of the Assessment Objectives in structuring their responses; this was evident either in their planning or the ordered paragraphing of their written responses. However, some candidates used their time less effectively by outlining what they expected to find in the data or rewriting the contextual information given in the question rather than focusing on their analysis.

The main weighting for both Section A and Section B lies with the selection and application of linguistic methods (AO1) and candidates who were led by these in the ordering of their answers were always going to be advantaged. The identification, application and exploration of linguistic methods is worth 50% of the marks for the paper. As always with a data-led paper, rather than essay-based questions, candidates performed best in applying their AO2 understanding of theories and concepts when they selected relevantly. Off-loading learned knowledge unhelpfully given the actual evidence in the texts before them is never going to gain much credit. Candidates who angled their Language Acquisition and Language Change responses from a theoretical basis were often limiting their potential marks, given the AO1 weighting. Contextual awareness (AO3) was generally good. The best marks were awarded to candidates who had considered a range of situational contexts, as well as the contexts relevant to text production and reception, and linked these to evidence from the data.

Section A - Language Acquisition

The data for the Language Acquisition question proved accessible and well-received by students, with the majority, as would now seem customary, opting to answer the spoken data question. However, the response to children's literacy development produced many engaged and thoughtful responses; the lack of over-familiarity with this type of data set required them to analyse and apply their knowledge in a more creative way, often resulting in genuine analysis rather than a paraphrase of the data.

Question 1

This gave candidates every opportunity to use their knowledge in elucidating data. Nearly all answers addressed the two aspects of the question, looking at the language of the children and their caregiver. Stronger candidates were able to structure their answers conceptually instead of relying on a linear commentary. Those who spent time first reading through and considering the content were better able to interpret, eg some possible reasons for Franki's brief replies in A; those diving straight in had her in the 'holophrastic stage' within their first paragraph. Indeed, stronger answers were able to see patterns in the data and cluster examples together, avoiding discussing each transcript separately. Seeing differences and inconsistencies in both the children's and the childminder's use of language also offered fruitful development and evaluation. Overall, stronger responses blended the AOs together building on specific language features and methods (AO1) by linking these successfully to concepts (AO2) and contexts (AO3).

In terms of AO1 features, there were some impressively accurate and rigorous descriptions of the children's grammatical development, showing confident linguistic analysis. But sensible, exemplified observations using clear and accurate linguistic methods also made for very

competent answers. For AO2, better responses used named theorists, but linked them to specific examples from the transcripts and evaluated what these showed about language development. Candidates also used AS theories and concepts well, integrating power and gender into their analysis of the language use they observed in the data.
With AO3, some were skilful interpreters of the relationships emerging in those short passages and of the language that told their story. Most were able to recognise the influence of the variation in situational contexts on the children's language uses, as well as taking the opportunity to assess the impact of the carer's language input. The best answers looked at the changing contexts of the three transcripts and the effect on the children's use of language, especially Text B where many discussed effectively Josh's adoption of the childminder's role and language.

Overall, weaker answers were often AO2 led responses that didn't apply or link the theories to examples in the data but rather described the theories, described events in the data, speculated about context with limited evidence and analysed Texts A, B & C separately which didn't allow them to see links or resulted in repeated points.

Question 2

This was done best by those bringing to it their study of texts written for children and the strategies by which young readers process them. There were some neatly integrated approaches to this question, where candidates were able to look at the reading books and the children's input together in order to help them comment on the reading process. Most candidates focused on linguistic features (AO1) of prosody/punctuation, with stronger candidates illuminating their discussion by reference to semantic/grammatical interpretation of the books. Strong interpretations considered the demands of reading, whilst celebrating the lively interpretation of these two texts by the two young readers. Some looked for patterns, but many saw differences between the children and how their confidence and competence were aided by the different kinds of reading scheme books.

The best answers used a range of developmental concepts (AO2), including the methods used to teach children to read with detailed discussion of evidence sourced from both the transcripts and books. The synoptic element of the course permitted some students to draw on language and gender knowledge, multi-modality and representation to make well-supported comments on the different appeal of the two reading texts. Contextual comments (AO3) tended to focus on the role of the classroom assistant, the age; the best were able to explore the situational context of school and literacy experiences helpfully.

Less successful responses described the data and predictably, perhaps, those who looked for 'theorists' to prove or disprove their points, or selected spoken acquisition theories with little relevance. Other less profitable approaches resulted from spending time criticising the classroom assistant for her lack of support of the children, not really engaging with the routine and role of this activity within the primary context.

Section B - Language Change

The comparative option, Question 4, proved the most popular. However, many who responded to the occupational data in Question 3 clearly found this stimulating and interesting data and produced engaged and interesting responses with close data focus. As one senior examiner reported 'such perceptive fluency is impressive anywhere but produced under exam conditions, a pleasure to reward'. Much like the learned theories for acquisition, there is a tendency for students to reiterate the history of English with little relevance to the data to be seen, given both

the focus on Late Modern English (1700 onwards) and the weighting of linguistic analysis. Applying a broader understanding of the ways language changes through different linguistic processes would have been more profitable as this, for both questions, offered links between specific language features (AO1), key concepts (AO2) and contextual reasons (AO3) for such changes.

Question 3

The strongest answers responded to the 'significant language features' element of Question 3. This provided a springboard to some businesslike linguistic discussion (AO1). Lexis/semantics, grammar and graphology were often favoured, but discourse structure and pragmatic awareness appeared too, allowing candidates to offer a range of linguistic methods. Discussion of graphology could score well, but too many candidates merely described layout features or made simple general comments, eg 'subheadings drew the reader in'. Better scoring remarks analysed text-graphic cohesion or the wording of the subheadings and captions. In the strongest answers, representations of gender, issues of power and the promotion of authority (AO2) were explored with a full focus on language and linguistic evidence (AO1) to inform their responses. Clearly many students had revised gender issues and could talk about gendered lexis, political correctness and stereotypes convincingly alongside issues of language change. Good responses combined an awareness of the processes of lexical, semantic and syntactical change and exemplification of these with a realisation that the 'voice' of the text promoted an occupation which, even at the time of print, was rapidly changing. It was interesting to see how informed responses were able to judge the blend of formality and pompous humour within the text, relating this to contextual issues and changing perceptions of gender roles (AO3).

There was the temptation in a number of instances though, to forget language analysis and to enter the realm of society and sexual politics alone. While this might have gone some way to earning the 8 marks available for AO3, this approach did not earn many of the 24 AO1 marks. Weaker aspects of responses did not develop their comments about prescriptive attitudes towards English as might have been expected (though when they did, it was often done really well). Some candidates struggled to identify and explore genre/purpose and missed out on marks for contextual awareness. Weaker candidates found it difficult to move beyond broad generalisations about equality issues. Archaic lexis was perhaps overstated and was often used to identify any words not known to candidates.

Question 4

The comparative element of Question 4 was well managed by many candidates resulting in some valid comments exploring genre conventions linked to a focused linguistic analysis of the different types of language employed, exploring the traditional and commemorative, alongside technological and interactive. The very best answers realised the importance of applying rigorous analysis of lexical and grammatical features (AO1) within the texts. Many were able to make very useful comments on titles, nomination, the presentation of emotion and discourse structure through specific language features. Although it is not a requirement to compare, those that did could explore similarities and differences between the texts more systematically and evaluatively, so accessing the upper marks bands. Some of the best answers used the features which the two texts had in common- the lexical set of football and its fan base- to make interesting comments on the nature of status and celebrity, formality and informalisation. This enabled candidates to integrate their linguistic understanding with issues and concepts (AO2) and the contexts of production and reception of the texts (AO3). Technology provided the way

into context for many candidates, but there were also interesting discussions of class and gender issues.

Some candidates found it difficult to integrate their observations of semantic change features into a wider discussion of stylistic or linguistic change, often identifying features using vague terminology. Although many students used both texts effectively to comment on language change over time, some candidates did choose to speculate on what modern texts might have said, ignoring the modern text in front of them. Weaker answers tended to describe the layout, or take a deficit approach to the old text by dismissing its graphological features as boring and dull. Other responses restricted themselves to demonstrating 'rudimentary linguistic knowledge' by simply paraphrasing the content of each and using quotations from the data to support their discussion of content rather than language.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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