



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2011**

English Language B

ENGB4

(Specification 2705)

Unit 4: Investigating Language

Report on the Examination

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General

It was clear that the majority of centres had worked very hard to prepare their candidates for both elements of this unit.

The advice and information given in the body of this report is intended to help centres feel secure in the delivery and assessment of further series of this unit.

Investigation

Once again moderators were impressed by the quality of work they saw for this part of the ENGB4 coursework folder. There was a range of topics, reflecting personal interest and this was most encouraging to see. Candidates were clearly well supported by their coursework tutors, and there was evidence of careful guidance and scaffolding so that candidates achieved at their highest potential across the mark bands.

Introduction

The most convincing introductions had a clear indication of personal interest and a sensible rationale for focus of the language investigation. Most candidates included very clear aims and/or hypothesis. Occasionally, problems occurred where candidates did not use their aims and/or hypothesis to shape the body of the investigation. In these cases, investigations became a simple analysis of the data chosen, rather than a consideration of 'interesting questions of language in use' (English Language B Specification, pg 12). Centres are reminded that the basis of a successful language investigation is 'candidate-led enquiry supported by open learning'. In line with the summer series, candidates seemed to respond well to the word limit and therefore, for the majority of candidates, this section was suitably precise and controlled.

Methodology

Moderators noted that there was further improvement in the quality of writing in this section of the investigations this series. Some candidates referenced their methodological approach clearly, taking into account ethics and variables as appropriate. However, for some candidates, the methodology was very brief, with a brief explanation of form of data collected (eg magazine articles) but without specific focus for analysis offered. In these cases the methodologies were sometimes vague, offering only limited insight into reasons for data collection. One positive aspect, however, was that there was very little evidence of the lengthy descriptive approaches evident in previous series. Centres are obviously acting on advice in the support meetings and candidates are avoiding including inappropriate detail in this section of the investigation.

Approaches taken varied according to topic choice, with a nice balance of case study, qualitative and quantitative approaches; this series had fewer purely quantitative approaches and therefore, most candidates discussed and explored patterns of language use in the data collected.

Data

As indicated in all centre standardising meetings, when moderators are assessing the potential quality of an investigation, the methodology and the data are the primary indicators of a viable language investigation. Therefore, it is worth considering moderators' comments on the quality of the data seen this series.

Moderators felt that there was some very interesting data collected from a wide range of topics this series. Interesting choices included the representation of murder victims in the Suffolk murders of 2006 and comparisons of Cameron & Clegg's linguistic style pre & post formation of the coalition government. However, there were more 'safe' topics such as the comparison of women's lifestyle magazines or gender patterns in social networking. As ever, the language of education was a popular choice this series, with a number of interesting approaches from EFL to teaching children with learning difficulties.

Most candidates were careful to collect usable amounts of data and had been clearly advised by their coursework tutors. Quantity of data was mostly well managed; most candidates were able to work effectively with their data and there was often careful and judicious selection of examples extracted from their data to support assertions/observations.

Analysis

In this section the majority of candidates adopted a fairly systematic approach considering a range of linguistic methods. Most centres encouraged candidates to use subheadings to shape their analysis; often this was organised according to linguistic methods (eg graphology, lexis etc.) - but some centres took a more sophisticated approach encouraging their candidates to shape subheadings into clear questions that could then be explored in a systematic manner. Indeed, this encouraged candidates to take an open-minded approach, leading to a tentative exploration of ideas and concepts. Where candidates did not use subheadings to shape their analysis, this section became similar to an extended essay, with little system demonstrated. Moderators commented that this approach significantly limited candidates' access to the higher bands of the assessment criteria.

Conclusion and Evaluation

Moderators felt that there was improvement in the quality of this section across the mark ranges. Candidates were often able to make sensible summative points about their investigation without resorting to 'I was surprised to find what I hoped to find' approach in too many cases. It is clear that centres are working with candidates to help them remain open-minded, tentative and analytical in all sections of the investigation.

Assessment of the investigation

It is clear that the majority of centres are now entirely conversant with the assessment criteria for this part of the ENGB4 coursework folder. However, it is still worth repeating some of the comments from the June 2010 Principal Moderator report here as an indication of the best practice.

In terms of assessment, often centres started with the AO2 mark (as modelled in the centre standardising materials) allowing the assessment of the methodology to guide the initial thoughts about the quality of the investigation, moving into a consideration of the linguistic (AO1) and contextual (AO3) analysis.

Centres are again reminded that candidates must demonstrate clear awareness between context and language features to access the top two bands of the AO3 Assessment Criteria.

Moderators felt the most common examples of inaccurate assessment occurred when considering the quality of the methodology (AO2), or the exploration of context (AO3). In particular the assessment of AO3 was very problematic for a minority of centres. Investigations must reveal both

- *clear and sometimes perceptive consideration of contextual issues/pressures*
- *sound, occasionally sensitive analysis and engagement with context in the light of language features*

to be placed above the 5-6 band. Too often candidates were only beginning to show awareness of the links between context and language, and yet were placed in the 7-8 band for context. This remains an ongoing area of concern for moderators.

Media Text

Moderators were very pleased to report that there was a significant improvement in the quality of work offered for this element of the coursework folder. Most centres were careful to ensure their candidates' work linked the media text to the investigation, although unfortunately, some candidates still linked the content or topic details, rather than focusing on broader language issues (eg an analysis of power techniques in *A Few Good Men* was linked to an article about Tom Cruise; a comparison of local and national news coverage of John Lennon's death was linked to an article about Lennon's significance in the media/music). Centres still need to encourage the 'broad link' approach as some candidates clearly felt constrained by having very close links to the investigation.

In line with previous series, the most common genre for the media text was some version of a magazine or newspaper article. However, this series there was far more evidence that candidates were carefully shaping their articles to meet the demands of specific audiences. Often the most successful pieces were those linked to a specific genre, eg *mumsnet* articles arising from investigations into Child Language Acquisition. However, even where genres and audiences were not as focused as this, moderators were encouraged to see that pieces did meet the rubric requirements and did inform about language.

Adaptation of original materials is a challenging task for candidates – some candidates interpreted 'original materials' as the data or the findings of the investigation and this often resulted in a simple re-writing of the investigation, sometimes with very little language focus. Others, more successfully, referenced research conducted in preparation for the investigation. Shaping research was not always sophisticated and seamless, but candidates were aware of the need to transform materials with the aim to produce a new text, for a new audience.

Encouragingly, there were fewer 'whole centre approaches' than in the summer series, but in some centres tasks did remain fairly similar and sometimes routine.

Assessment of the Media Text

Marking of this part was far more secure than in the summer series, but there was still some over-marking where the link between the investigation and the media text was not fully explored re: language ideas.

In some cases there was little marginal annotation for this task, and often only a brief summative comment was provided, without addressing the three distinct strands of the AO4 assessment objective. Also in some instances, there was less evidence of internal moderation for the media text in comparison with the investigation. Moderators remarked that where centres adopted a similar approach in terms of assessing the media text and the language investigation, there was an increased level of accuracy in the application of the assessment criteria.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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