**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2012**

English Language B   **ENGB1**

(Specification 2705)

Unit 1: Categorising Texts

Report on the Examination

General

More than 6,000 students sat this paper in January and senior examiners commented that the paper was accessible for students of all abilities; the data for both sections proved to be stimulating. Schools and colleges continue to prepare students well for the differing approaches necessary for each question and students approached unseen data in an open-minded way. To avoid repetition of previous advice, schools and colleges new to this specification should access the reports written for previous examinations. All are available on e-AQA and have detailed clarification of the assessment objectives, their different weightings and how these are interpreted across the two sections.

Section A – Question 01

This January there appeared to be less variety in range and approach with the majority of students opting for three main groups that often then included smaller sub-groups. The texts also enabled students to discuss differences between texts within the same group. This was a strength of many students' responses and showed that schools and colleges are aware of the need that responses need to explore such complexities. There was clear evidence that students were aware of the need to offer 'a range' and avoided, for example, more than one purpose group. Students appear to have been well prepared for this aspect of AO2.

Most texts tended to be used across a response although many students avoided text F. However, in more successful responses grouping and analysing the language features of the mini saga did prove to be a key discriminator.

Senior examiners reported that a variety of groups were offered. However, there were some more 'popular' choices:

- instruct
- spoken mode
- graphology
- use of imperatives
- young producer/receiver
- humour.

In more detail:

- spoken language groups were often based on texts B & C, but some students explored represented speech presented in texts E and G
- spoken language groups usually focused on non-fluency features, with different levels of success, with some students merely describing non-fluency features evident in texts B & C, whilst stronger responses explored the functions of the interactions linked to relationship between speakers and the very different contextual situations
- power was sometimes usefully explored when examining texts B & C whilst examining the relationships involved, with some relevant exemplification of imperatives (B) and humour/banter (C)
- imperatives were also often usefully explored, examining texts A, B and D, drawing close connections between the two instructive texts and some useful parallels with the spoken imperatives in text B
- there were also some interesting data-led choices, notably power, narrative voice and shared understanding
- many students were beginning to consider more than three texts within a group. Where pairings were offered, there was often some development via sub-grouping
- texts A, D, E and G proved very popular texts, grouped according to purpose and graphology

- text F proved the least responded to text – some students were able to comment on sophisticated lexis, but there was often little beyond this, and little understanding of the 'mini-saga'. Whilst students did tend to engage with the Egyptian content, they didn't always place this in context of other time references within the text and thus did not really engage with the content
- students were often able to engage with humour quite successfully, considering images to create humour (E), and exploring the juxtaposition of text and image (A and G).

Successful responses tended to:

- cover the majority of the data
- use terminology accurately
- employ a range of language methods
- offer a range of groups
- take an open-minded approach to grouping texts
- link groups together to show cross-boundary texts ('*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
- discuss differences between texts within one group using comparative vocabulary to aid cohesion
- identify groups clearly.

Less successful responses tended to:

- follow a pre-planned approach which often led to unconvincing groupings as the texts did not fit their ideas
- feature spot and describe the data
- identify language features which were inappropriate to the group
- offer limited discussion of contextual factors
- use a limited range of terminology
- cover a narrow range of language features
- ignore the task requirement to give 'linguistic reasons'
- make quite generalised statements about the links between language features and context without considering the specific context
- lack tentativeness when discussing reasons for language features.

Section B

Gender proved to be the most popular question choice with Power following closely behind. Technology was the least popular. Possible reasons for this are explored in earlier reports but the data for Technology was very rich and challenging, allowing strong students to analyse in detail. In general, for all the tasks in this section, starting with a reference to audience, purpose and genre helped focus responses.

It should be noted that many successful responses did not reference published research, and this did not necessarily impact negatively on the success of their responses.

Question 02 – Gender

It was pleasing to see that a significant number of students were able to cope very well with representation, and it was evident that schools and colleges had prepared students for this aspect of gender. Both male and female stereotypes were considered with some students commenting perceptively on the portrayal of the characters including the direct speech as well as the description and actions. Many students considered the era of publication linked to the readers' aspirations, parental influence and possible changing attitudes of the time. Many also recognised the entertainment genre of the text as shaping character and potential conflict within the plot. Some students offered insight around the portrayal of the stereotypical Frenchman, including a consideration of his use of a tag question linked to 2nd language use.

Successful responses tended to:

- focus on representation, especially stereotypes (challenged by Lisette; met by Nora)
- suggest these stereotypes were linked to the characterisation of protagonist/antagonist, linked to young readers aspiring to be 'like Nora'
- discuss both male and female representation
- show awareness of audience
- show awareness of purpose
- show awareness of genre, including the possibility that Nora may be a recurring character in the annual
- discuss the 1960s context and the possible role of women at the time
- take their discussion beyond gender including reference to occupation and power
- focus on specific language features in the data
- make telling observations about the competition between the two girls and how the writer had presented their differing characters looking carefully at the context of reception and the reader's likely response
- reveal a conceptualised understanding of the issue of representation, able to discuss relevantly and perceptively how this was revealed in the text incorporating relevant comment about changes in society and attitudes towards women
- analyse gendered 'weakness', commenting on Nora's hesitance, both verbally and in terms of clumsy actions
- explore Lisette's competitive behaviour as perhaps more linked to competition for a job than solely based on gender
- focus on the representation of M. Pallet, commenting on his French identity, or consider his role as owner of a ladies' dress shop
- offer more developed comments on M. Palett linked to his role and status as a dominant male in a patriarchal society who only employs women
- respond to a range of language features in the data to support their assertions, commenting on graphology, use of descriptive language including 'empty' adjectives and a range of spoken language features, including tag questions and intensifiers
- link the use of marked terms to changing attitudes with a clear recognition of the social context and women's roles in the 1960s
- integrate relevant gender studies into their response
- use their own research into representation – one senior examiner reported that one school/college had looked at specific representation texts and that students had referenced them in their response.

Less successful responses tended to:

- use less relevant concepts, making links which were very tenuous or inappropriate
- respond using theoretical ideas from language study as their starting point at the expense of looking at the actual data and the particular context
- identify features then linked these to comments such as 'this shows Lakoff's study was right' or 'this proves Tannen's theory' without thinking about the represented nature of this particular data
- make sweeping generalisations about females/males in the 1960s
- avoid discussion of audience
- avoid discussion of purpose
- avoid discussion of genre
- ignore the issue of representation
- wrote down all they knew about language and gender
- focus on conversational features they found in the text
- discussed the data as if it was a representation of naturally occurring speech.

Question 03 – Power

This also proved a very popular question and many students responded very well to the data, and were able to make fairly detailed comments about how language is used to assert power.

There was some clear focus on instrumental power, explored in some detail with reference to rules and consequences. Some students also referred to influential power, but with less detail offered as to how the audience was being influenced. Most students were able to recognise the power held by the boating company, but some students over-stated this somewhat, commenting on the fear and intimidation created by the language use.
There was some recognition of power linked to both the boating company and the audience regarding the hirer's reliance on the company if they require a boat and the company's need for future business.

Some students began to consider power within/behind discourse but there were fewer wider concepts considered than in previous series. However, many students focused on divergence to create distance, alongside absence of politeness and heightened formality. There were also some more general ideas from language study including asymmetry, synthetic personalisation and authority. Most points were relevant and explored with close reference to the data.

There was some clear engagement with context, with some students responding well to the idea that the document acted as a legal contract, designed to protect both the company (from losses) and the customer (from danger). Many, however, did not engage with some of these subtleties and instead only concentrated on the boating company's position.

Stronger comments were rooted in language detail, examining graphology/discourse structure, modality, sentence type/mood and lexical choices – linked appropriately to authority and consequences for failure to abide by rules. Many students also identified pronouns, focusing on the switch between second and first person at the end of the document, providing a voice for the audience. The pragmatic assumption that they would then follow the rules was sometimes explored.

Successful responses tended to:

- cover a range of power issues and concepts: instrumental, personal, legal, knowledge, roles, status, hierarchy
- refer to specific ideas from language study
- analyse a range of language features including modals, pronouns (and lack of direct address in places), discourse/enumeration, conditionals etc
- move beyond feature spotting features to link to ideas and concepts and contextual factors
- take a systematic structured approach to the data often using language methods to structure the response for example: lexis, graphology, grammar, discourse, allowing for a range of issues to be explored
- identify and explore the effect of the 3rd person distancing technique
- recognise that the dominant sentence type was declarative and that their function was directive
- give insightful comments regarding the legality of the text (the terms and conditions, the need to sign) but how this may not be legally binding like a contract
- identify passives and modals of obligations and possibility in sophisticated analyses carefully linked to the context of reception.

Less successful responses tended to:

- describe and feature spot
- show limited awareness of who the audience/customer may be
- paraphrase the data
- overstate the power communicated through the text, suggesting it was intimidating and threatening.
- make limited reference to language detail
- adopt a descriptive approach
- find it difficult to distinguish between a directive and an imperative, identifying 'must' as an imperative
- insist that 2nd person was the dominant mode of address
- make unproductive references to Grice's maxims.

Question 04 – Technology

This proved the least popular question, and those who did attempt it did so with mixed success. Stronger responses included reference to multi-media aspects and variety of speakers, often focusing on presenter and commentator roles. Many points were linked to the sports context, considering an audience with a keen interest in sport/swimming/Paralympics, and the need to both inform and entertain.

Stronger responses were also able to comment on the 'highlights' nature of the data and the carefully edited segments, interspersed with relevant cut-aways to the interview and M. Weggman's parents. Some students commented on the web-based nature of the data, and audience control over when to access the highlights, addressing the need for concise elements to ensure the audience remains on the website. There was also some developed comment on the nature of the broadcast as BBC and therefore focusing on a prestige/corporate need for professionalism. Some students compared the data with older forms of commentaries, radio, and the advances technology has made to incorporate visuals alongside auditory commentary, as well as considering the transition to the web in recent years. Most responses did remain rooted in the data, with fewer students abandoning the data to discuss wider aspects of technology than in previous sittings.

Successful responses tended to:

- show clear knowledge of conventions in the data – edited, highlights, voice-over, music, different videos, visual support, use of surnames
- address a range of language methods including discourse structure, subject specific lexis, declaratives to inform, fluency and non-fluency features, and the use of some emotive terms to engage the audience
- handle discourse well with clear comment on the audio-visual introduction, followed by the highlights of the race, followed by a personal account and culminating with anticipating the next race
- understand the planned and edited nature of the text
- acknowledge the dual purpose of the data
- comment on the different roles of commentator and presenter
- discuss the fact it is from a website not television commentary
- explore expectations of BBC coverage
- appreciate that there are spontaneous and pre-planned elements
- analyse the pace of this discourse and its impact on language use
- discuss the patriotic approach of the commentator and possible bias
- link points to the sports context, considering an audience with a keen interest in sport/swimming/Paralympics
- recognise the genre of sports coverage with interesting distinctions around the use of pauses by the presenter and commentator and the selection of some differences in language styles regarding formality
- understand the provenance of the text and link this to comments about the audience and purposes.

Less successful responses tended to:

- ignore the majority of the data and discuss mobile phones, text messages and technology in general with no real focus on answering the question
- ignore the visual aspects of the data, addressing the data as though it were radio commentary
- not recognise the 'highlights' aspect of the data assuming it was all 'live'
- note features typical of sports commentaries without considering why such variety was necessary
- demonstrate limited engagement with context
- address the data only as a piece of spoken data identifying a range of non-fluency features without any comment on technology or sports commentary
- get rather confused about the roles of the participants
- ignore the words 'highlights' and 'website' and treated the data as a live TV show, or as a verbatim recording of it
- rely on feature spotting.

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