

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2012

GCSE English Language (6EN03)
Language Diversity and Children's
Language Development

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General comments

This paper focussed on language change and diversity with an extract from the English section of

a multi-lingual sign in Cambodia and two pieces of archaeological writing from different times in section A and a mixture of written and spoken child language in section B.

It was pleasing to note that the variation between the different questions continues to narrow as candidates become more confident with the demands of section A. Lower level candidates lacked confidence with the application of key constituents, especially at the level of grammar and phonology, and often failed to identify a large enough range of issues to be awarded top bands.

As in previous series, there was a great deal of variation in the amount that candidates wrote for the longer responses. Some managed only two sides which meant that the opportunities to show an understanding of a range of issues and clear knowledge of key constituents were difficult to achieve. Others wrote at great length but sometimes spent too long on individual features. Such responses were self-penalising as the range of features covered was narrow. In the longer responses (1 and 2b) candidates should use the answer booklet as a rough guide to the expected length of a response and attempt to cover a range of features from each relevant key constituent (at least two or three where the data allows) as briefly and succinctly as possible.

Each individual question is considered later in this report but a general summary may be of benefit.

For Question 1a it was pleasing to see a reduction in candidates selecting more than two features to discuss but a number did not discuss differences between the data and Standard English. Many awarded marks in the lower bands seemed thrown by the data or didn't select relevant key constituents that allowed them to display the full range of their linguistic knowledge. Higher band responses, even if unfamiliar with translated English, successfully adapted the linguistic knowledge they had acquired in other areas of their studies to the data.

For Question 1b candidates need to remember the importance of covering a range of key constituents, including areas such as grammar, as weaker responses tended to limit themselves to lexical issues or merely listed features with little attempt to explain. Candidates at mid and lower bands tended to focus on the basic historical differences shown in the data (such as long 's' and verb endings) and did not consider other contextual factors such as function and how this form of writing has evolved and changed in response to a changing society. Such responses also tended to neglect text 3 because it had no obvious historical features on which to comment.

In Question 2a candidates needed to discuss two examples from the data that would allow them to display knowledge of the development of the written language, with reference to key theories. This type of question has

appeared before and caused candidates few significant difficulties in approach, although there was a great deal of variety in the level of detail offered in the responses.

Question 2b required knowledge of theories and key constituents but candidates need to respond carefully to the demands of the question. Merely identifying features in a list-like fashion or discussing theories without clear and explicit links to the source material is not likely to achieve higher band marks.

Question 1a

Question 1a followed the same pattern as the previous two series of the specification by asking candidates to focus in depth on two examples from text 1. The candidate was expected to demonstrate a firm grasp of the key constituents and the ability to relate the examples to context while referring to any related theories or concepts. The 10 marks available for this question (5 marks per example analysed) reflects the length of response that is expected from candidates. The first appearance on the examination of English as a foreign language/translated English did seem to be a surprise for some candidates.

Fewer candidates took a non standard approach to this question, although there were still a number who covered more than one key constituent and so produced a mini-analysis. Such responses seldom scored well as they were characterised by a lack of depth. Some candidates discussed mode, tenor, field and function. Such an approach did not allow for the discussion of the differences between English as a foreign language and Standard British English. Candidates need to be reminded of the importance of reading the question carefully to ensure they are meeting its demands.

In the lower mark bands, answers tended to be superficial and descriptive. Candidates often identified relevant features (such as the regularised past tense form 'braked') but lacked the terminology to describe the form convincingly. Some lacked confidence in describing the Standard form and were not able to offer explanations as to why such forms had appeared, with many merely claiming it was a spelling error. Lower band candidates also tended to have slightly judgemental approach to the language and often inaccurately described it is a Creole or claimed it was related to African American English. Some candidates demonstrated a choice of one or even two unsuitable key constituents such as the names of the Kings. Although accurate in the sense that these names would be rare in Standard British English, there was little opportunity to demonstrate linguistic knowledge.

Candidates in the higher bands selected examples which allowed for detailed exploration, most commonly the form 'braked' and the orthographically different representation of dedicated. These were then analysed closely using appropriate terminology. Unlike at the lower bands, candidates at this level described the feature, offered plausible explanations of its form, often adapting terminology they had encountered in other topics

such as regularisation and over generalisation or speculated about the Cambodian accent and its affect on the spelling found in the data.

Question 1b

This year this question focussed on two pieces of archaeological writing from different eras. As usual, the majority of candidates took the perfectly valid approach of writing on each text in turn with the comparison being integrated into the response with the use of phrases such as 'unlike/similarly to text 2/3'. Many candidates seemed comfortable with exploring diversity over time and there were a number of insightful and detailed answers. Although there was significant variation in the quality and length of responses, the majority of candidates were able to offer some comment on the different audiences for the texts, some distinctive features of archaeological writing, its purpose and what the data illustrated about the changes and evolution of this type of writing over time.

Responses in the lower bands, although often showing a clear awareness of the function of the texts were generally very narrow in range, with only a few features selected for discussion, and showed limitation and uncertainty in the application of key constituents. Areas for analysis were often limited to describing only some of the more obvious features that are no longer found in Standard English (long 's' etc) and all but ignored the other contextual factors such as how the texts achieved their purpose meaning high scores in AO2 and AO3 were elusive. Errors in terminology were common at this level and restricted the marks available in AO1. However, the frequency of candidates writing long narrative accounts about Caxton etc. was markedly reduced and the majority limited themselves to sensible and brief references to issues which were more directly relevant such as the Renaissance. Candidates in the lower bands sometimes lacked the confidence to explore text 3 in any depth.

Higher band answers had much greater security in their responses and applied a wide range of relevant key constituents to each of the texts as well as considering a range of contextual issues. They acknowledged and explored how the potentially different audiences' needs had changed over time and how this form of writing has changed while simultaneously acknowledging the similarities the two texts shared. It was disappointing that even amongst higher scoring candidates seldom discussed more advanced areas of grammar such as active and passive structures.

Question 2a

Like Question 1a, this is a short answer response worth 10 marks. The open nature of the question in this sitting meant few candidates had difficulty interpreting it.

On the whole, candidates seemed to feel comfortable with analysing a child's written language. Although the quality of responses varied from narrative descriptions to more incisively analytical answers, most candidates selected productive examples with phonological spelling being the most popular. Centres had clearly spent some time on theories and the stages of

written language development and many candidates were able to employ this information successfully in the course of their analysis.

Lower band answers usually identified some relevant features but tended to be vague narrative accounts with little attempt to explain why the feature was present. In other instances, the examples selected were not a significant feature of this stage of development and did not allow candidates to display their knowledge (such as linearity). It would be worth reminding candidates that some features will always allow them to display their linguistic knowledge more than others and they should consider this when selecting examples and planning their responses

Stronger responses for this question selected productive features such as grammar or phonological spelling and explored them with confidence. Such responses also included clear and sometimes inventive links to theories that were awarded if they were plausible. It is worth noting that few candidates made specific links to the phonic method of teaching spelling in schools.

Question 2b

Unfortunately, there was an error in the data for this question. The key and the names for each speech turn in the transcript did not match (Niamh given as N but labelled C in the transcript). Examiners were instructed to bear this in mind when assessing candidate's responses to ensure that no candidate was penalised for any confusion that may have been caused.

Once again, centres had clearly spent some time teaching and exploring child spoken language and many candidates seemed to approach this question with confidence.

Generally speaking, responses in the lower bands tended to either discuss theory without clear links to the data or would merely list the different speech patterns found in the text with very few links to theories or how interaction with others can aid the developmental process. At this level, the discussion of the father's influence was usually ignored. Discussion of issues like pronunciation tended to be limited to reproducing the IPA representations in the data with little attempt to say what area of phonology was causing difficulty and no plausible explanations of why the child had pronounced the word in the way it had and comments on such as grammar (where present) were limited to observations on what the adult form would have been. There was also some evidence of a judgemental approach and candidates didn't always seem aware of the influence more casual speech or region could have on language development. Consideration of contextual factors was often minimal at this level and some candidates muddled basic terminology such as grapheme and phoneme.

Higher band answers were careful to consider the contextual factors (e.g. comfortable family environment, imaginative play centred on physically present objects and the purpose of the language event) which was something that was often neglected in the lower band responses. Candidates also demonstrated secure and confident knowledge of theories (both developmental and functional) and were aware of grey areas where a

range of theories could be applied. The approach to the data was often systematic and candidates worked through a wide range of key constituents. For areas such as grammar and phonology (e.g. some of the elision and reduction) there was awareness that variation from the standard form could be caused by a variety of factors such as the influence of region and adult casual speech and may not have been wholly developmental.

Summary

It was clear that centres had worked hard preparing candidates for Unit 3 and that the students were eager to display their knowledge. Many candidates showed they had expanded the scope of their linguistic knowledge over the course of their A2 studies and there were very few who did not identify at least some issues in the data provided.

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