

Examiners' Report

Summer 2016

Pearson Edexcel IAL in English
Language (WEN01) Unit 1: Language:
Context and Identity

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This unit introduces students to how language is used in data from a range of sources. Students explore how the contexts of production and reception affect language choices in spoken and written texts. Students also explore how language reflects and constructs the identity or identities of the user and varies depending on the contexts of production and reception. Students apply appropriate methods of language analysis to a range of written, spoken or multimodal data taken from 20th and 21st century sources using the key language frameworks and levels. They also demonstrate their understanding through the creation of a new text for a specified audience, purpose and context.

Unit 1 is assessed by examination of 1 hour 45 minutes duration. Students answer two questions: one question from Section A and one question from Section B. The paper is marked out of a total of 50 marks with 35 allocated to Section A and 15 to Section B.

Section A: Context and Identity

Students answer one question on two unseen extracts selected from 20th and 21st century sources. They are required to produce an extended comparative response showing how the presentation of identity is shaped by contextual factors in both unseen texts.

The task is assessed across AO1, 2, 3 and 4:

- AO1: Apply appropriate methods of language analysis, using associated terminology and coherent written expression.
- AO2: Demonstrate critical understanding of concepts and issues relevant to language use.
- AO3: Analyse and evaluate how contextual factors and language features are associated with the construction of meaning.
- AO4: Explore connections across texts, informed by linguistic concepts and methods.

In the June 2016 examination Text A was the transcript of the speech delivered by American actress Angelina Jolie to the UN Security Council in April 2015. The speech builds on the professional identity of Jolie in her role as Special Envoy to the UN. It presents a prominent self-identity as a concerned individual using the scope of UN Council and her role within it to develop a collective responsibility towards Syrian refugees.

Text B was the personal account of Liberian refugee, Miriam Bah, who settled in Australia in 2005. Bah's account is part of an online collection of the personal experiences of refugees published on Australia's ABC News website. The writer presents a very clear personal identity which combines her sense of personal history, displacement and loss with her determination to build a new life in Australia.

The question asked students to analyse and compare how the language of both texts conveys personal identity. Three bullet points offered additional prompts and guidance directly linked to the Assessment Objectives (and the mark scheme) for

this component and reminding candidate of the specific areas of study they should apply to the task:

- relevant language frameworks and levels
- concepts and issues such as social, cultural and gender factors
- contextual factors such as mode, field, function and audience.

Centres are advised that the format and focus of the question will be consistent across the lifetime of the specification. Actual wording may, inevitably, change depending in the nature and content of the two unseen texts presented. However the focus of assessment is clearly stated in the question stem with its prompt to consider and compare how personal identity is constructed and presented in the source materials. The bullet points remind students of the areas of study they should apply to this comparative exploration and are linked directly to the Assessment Objectives applied by examiners to their responses. The mark scheme contains indicative content and may well provide centres with a useful resource when preparing their students for this examination.

In 2016 responses to Section A covered a full range of achievement. Most students offered consideration of the genre and context of both texts and were able to draw links between them based on their central focus on the issue of refugees and the fact that both were produced by women. They were also able to offer comparative consideration of the differing audience and context of each text and shape these – with varying success – through the differing perspectives and circumstances of Jolie and Bah. Only the very best offered considered/detailed exploration of the way in which the personal identities of the two women were constructed and presented and those that framed their analysis through this central focus were rewarded.

The range of specific analysis was extremely broad in this series. A significant majority of responses were able to identify rhetorical features and offer comment on the general features that shape a persuasive text and, as such, were more comfortable with the Jolie speech. Many were able to describe method and effect but struggled to apply specific language terms to their consideration of how – and why – these effects were produced. A more systematic approach, whereby comments are supported by evidence drawn directly from the source materials would have provided students with the opportunity to explore the language from which this evidence was comprised (applying concepts, terms and frameworks) and would have enabled them to reach the requirement for higher bands of achievement provided in the mark scheme. Some offered generalised comment on context whilst those that developed comment not only on the background context of the texts but also on key aspects of production and reception of each (including key generic conventions) were rewarded accordingly. A significant minority did not address AO4 and the requirement to comment on the links between the two texts and this made an upward movement through the bands difficult.

Successful responses to Text A looked at Jolie’s construction of her personal identity and its presentation to the UN Council via her speech. They offered consideration of the context in which the speech was delivered, exploring (and analysing) Jolie’s use of generic convention to achieve her persuasive and informative purpose. They looked at the conventions applied to structure and

sequence the speech and linked these to the context in which it was delivered. They cited the personal involvement of Jolie with the refugees, and her very personal and family-focussed response to their plight. They were able to comment on how this informed style, voice and identity and were able to explore the language choices made by Jolie in order to convey her emotional stance on the issue and the rhetorical devices used to address, challenge and persuade her audience. These were often able to extend the potential audience of the speech via a consideration of a broadcast context. The very best also offered comment on the individual experiences referenced in the speech and how this developed the personal identity of those cited by Jolie. Responses that were placed in the highest bands of achievement supported comment and assertion with evidence directly drawn from the speech which was used to explore the specific language choices made, applying terminology in good range at word, sentence and whole text level.

Less successful were those responses that offered generalised comment on the context of the speech and which adopted a very descriptive approach to its content. Those that offered limited exemplification and limited specific analysis of technique were anchored in the mid/ lower bands of achievement. Limited consideration the personal identity of Jolie also negatively impacted on the potential for reward.

Successful responses to Text B looked closely at the context of the account and its link to the Australian NBC website through which it reached its audience. The most successful also looked at the context of the overall collection and extended contextual comment to account for the ABC context, audience and purpose. They showed awareness of the conventions of personal accounts and the language used to comply with these, both in terms of the individual personal account, and the nature and structure of the account itself. They were able to comment of the personal identity constructed by Bah (and her host website) and the subtle changes in this identity as she recounted her experiences in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Australia. The best were able to provide specific evidence that English was not Bah's first language and were rewarded for this. A successful few detected shifts in register/tone/complexity and offered considered speculation on the possible contextual reasons for this. Many were able to explore the gender-specific threat recounted and comment on Bah as representative in this respect. Many commented on Bah's strength in adversity and considered the founding of the Migrant African Women's Association terms of what this reflects about Bah's identity and the use of her personal experience and suffering to help other women.

As with the Jolie text, less successful responses offered generalised comment on the context of the account and adopted a very descriptive approach to its content. A significant minority made judgements about Bah's use of 'incorrect' English at the expense of exploring the specific characteristics of her voice and the language through which it was constructed. Those that offered limited exemplification and limited specific analysis of the language used by Bah were anchored in the mid/ lower bands of achievement. Limited consideration the personal identity of Bah also negatively impacted on the potential for reward.

AO4 requires students to explore connections and contrasts between the source texts. Successful responses seized the many opportunities for comparison and contrast – many adopting an integrated approach to this aspect of the task. Many offered comment on the differences in scale and tone afforded both by the

writers/speakers that produced them. Many explored the purpose of the texts and developed links through the persuasive function of each (one explicit/forceful; the other subtle). Most picked up on the fact that both texts are clearly linked by the issue of refugees, better answers explored the fact that both convey personal experiences — although Jolie is a witness and Bah a victim. Many made interesting comments on gender based on the content of each text and the perspective of the women that produced them. The fact that Jolie's account is more graphic about the suffering than that given by Bah prompted some interesting comparisons about the identities of the two women. Jolie's speech contains personal accounts from individual refugees which offered opportunity to make links to the account of Bah. Many recognised the clear contrast between the overriding optimism of Bah's view of her personal future in contrast to Jolie's bleak evaluation of what the future holds for Syrian refugees.

Less successful responses outlined the links and contrasts between the two texts but failed to develop any but the more obvious or to explore the language which evidenced these. Such responses were characterised by an essentially descriptive approach.

Section B: The Creation of Voice

Section B of the examination is assessed against AO5: 'Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English to communicate in different ways' with a total of 15 marks allocated for this component. As such the task assesses both the fluency and accuracy of written expression and the ability to generate an original and (hopefully) engaging text.

In 2016 students were asked to write the text for a broadcast appeal drawing upon the source materials provided in Section A but reshaping to an audience of their peers from their local community. The task generated a full range of responses but many struggled to fully address the question in full and students are advised to spend time working through the question to be sure of its requirements in terms of genre, context, audience and purpose. The format of the question will be relatively constant but wording will, inevitably, change according to the nature of the creative task set. As this is a creative response examiners will accept any approach that concedes to the prompts provided.

The 2016 question stem was carefully worded to provide students with a clear indication of expectation:

Write the text for a broadcast appeal to raise awareness of how people your own age can support refugees settling in your local community.

The second part of the question:

In addition to your own ideas you must refer to material from at least one of the texts in the Source Booklet

Highlighted a key requirement of the task, that is the need to incorporate some material from one (or both) of the source texts into the broadcast appeal. This

proved problematic to a significant minority of students but is a key requirement which must be taken into account.

Successful responses demonstrated clear awareness of audience and function, conceding clearly to the broadcast context and the persuasive/informative function. There were some very fluently written and convincing new texts. The best adapted the source material fluidly – drawing upon the rhetorical voice of Jolie or the experiences of Bah (especially her experience of racism) to target an audience of similar age and locality to the candidate. The breadth of personal experience that many brought to this task, linking to the specific experience of refugees within their home country was interesting and something that should be encouraged if the specific task allows. Many fully engaged with the broadcast context some involving the audience directly, others using music/sound effects or using co- presenters/interviews. Such creativity was rewarded whenever possible provided that the central issues of the tasks were addressed.

Less successful responses were often restricted by flawed written expression – these proved essentially self-penalising. Some failed to address a local/peer audience using language that was not fully appropriate to either. Others did not concede to the broadcast context. A key discriminator was the incorporation on the source data; at the mid/low bands of achievement many made no concession to the source and all, others simply quoted directly from the texts, struggling to integrate the material and therefore disrupting the fluency of their response.

Grade Boundaries

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