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Examiners' Report
June 2017

GCE English Language 9EN0 02

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Introduction

This was the first sitting of the new A level Paper 2: Child Language in which students analyse a piece of spoken or written data. It is similiar in focus to the AS component 2 paper but, although it assesses the same AOs (AO1,2 and 3), there are differences in the level descriptors to reflect its status as a full A level paper. It is also similar to the child language section of the legacy A2 specification. It is perhaps this consistencey that explains why most students were able to adopt a valid approach and nearly all were able to identify some key examples.

This year, the data focussed on spoken language with the data exemplifying a parent/child interaction before moving into the two children engaging in imaginative play. Students were expected to focus their analysis on the language features shown by the children (both skills they had acquired and those that were shown to be still developing), the interactions between the family members and the context of the language – both as a parent and child interaction and the two children engaging in imaginative play focussed on characters with which they are obviously familiar .

Typically, lower band answers illustrated a lack of confidence with the application of language features at the level of syntax/morphology and phonology, and often identified only a narrow range of issues focussed on lexis. There was also a tendency to describe/ narrate rather than explain.

Higher band answers showed more confidence with linguistic issues and terminology and were able to offer analysis based on a range of language features while introducing a range of theories associated with child language and carefully considering the changing context of the conversation. Such students were also able to transfer knowledge from other parts of their course.

It was clear that centres had worked hard preparing students for paper 2 of the new A level and that they were eager to display the learning they had developed over the past two years. Many showed clear linguistic knowledge and there were very few who did not identify at least some issues in the data provided.

Question 1

This year's question and data required knowledge of the theories and issues that underpin development and the importance of interaction. It was expected that this would be supported with clear reference to a range of language features from different levels. Students needed to respond carefully to the demands of the question. Responses which just identified a list of features and discussed theories without clear and explicit links to the question or source material were unlikely to achieve high levels. Similarly, it was important to explicitly address context, as this is awarded under AO3. In this case, context included issues such as where the conversation took place, the purpose(s) of the conversation and the participants. Some students did not address the differences between the parent/child talk and the features found later in the transcript when the children are engaged in imaginative play.

Generally speaking, responses in the lower levels tended to be aware of common developmental and instrumental theories but tended to either discuss these at length without clear links to the data or merely listed the non-standard speech patterns found in the text with very few specific links to theories. Many at this level didn't always follow the basic approach of quoting an example, analysing it and relating it to research. The middle stage tended to be left out with examples only linked to a theorist (often stating, 'this proves the theory of...') but with no accompanying analysis. There was also some uncertainty regarding the analysis of phonology in responses placed in the lower levels and, as this was often an issue to some extent even at higher levels, it merits some discussion here.

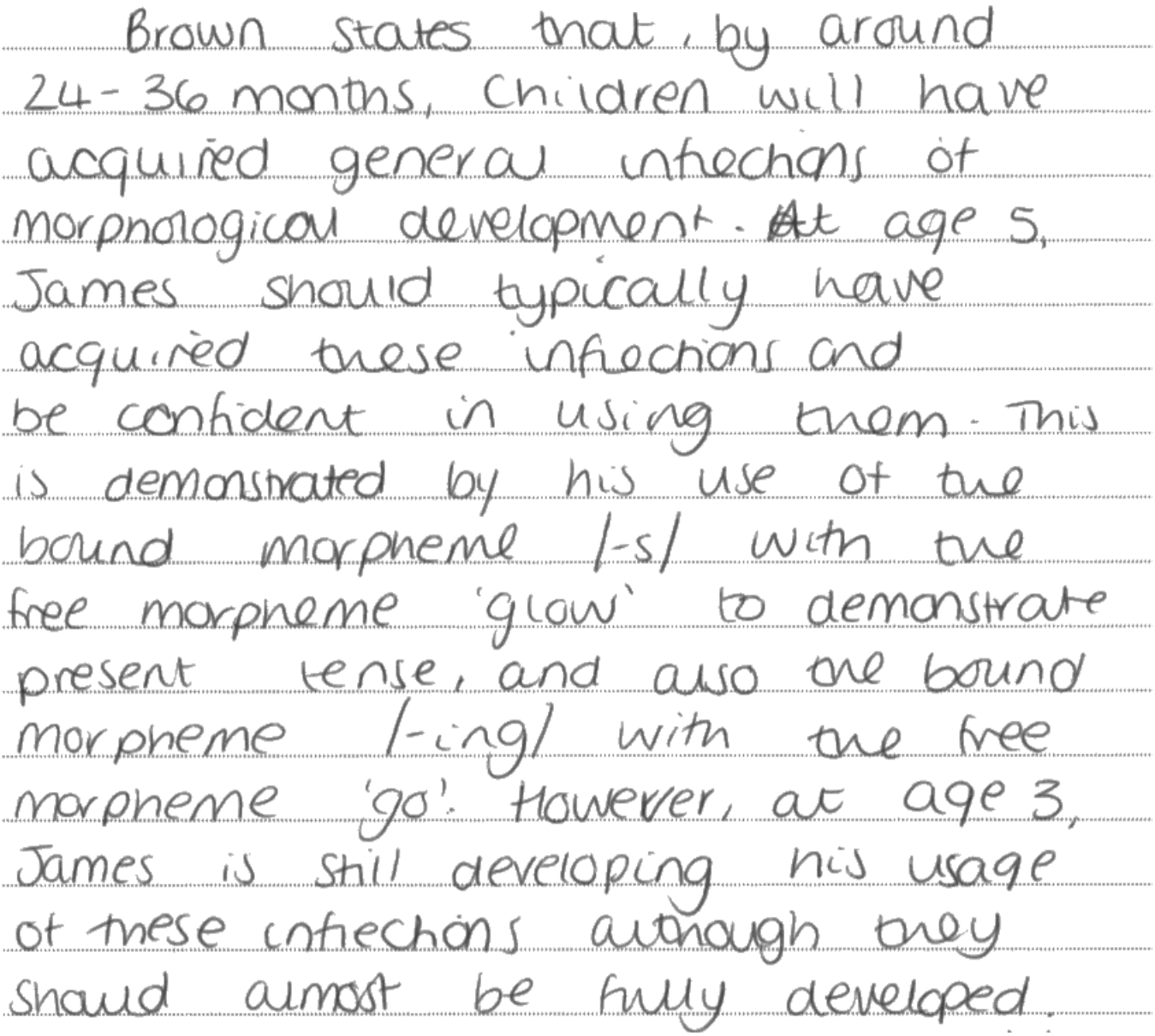
Despite the inclusion of an IPA reference sheet, some students attempted to use phonetic spelling to represent the pronunciation of words (with some even using this method on the examples already in the IPA). Additionally, there was some confusion around the differences in terminology for spoken and written language with many students at all levels describing the sound in 'throwed' as a diagraph and/or a consonant cluster. Lack of familiarity with the IPA and the differences between sound and spelling led some students to identify non-standard pronunciation where there was none such as the final consonant in 'says' which many identified as an /s/ sound. Others made errors because they failed to take account of graphemes that are not directly related to phonemes and so attempted to discuss issues such as the deletion of the /r/ phomeme at the end of 'stormtrooper' and 'Oscar' (a feature that admittedly would be present in a limit number of regional accents but not R.P, the standard for comparison). In some cases, exploration tended to be limited to reproducing the IPA representations in the data with few plausible explanations of why the child had pronounced the word in the way it had, or any issues concerning how this may relate to the context of the conversation.

Although most students were able to identify examples such as 'throwed' and missing copula and auxiliary verbs, comments on syntax and morphology at lower levels were often limited to observations on what the adult form would have been and some muddled basic terminology (such as identifying the contracted form of 'to be' in 'he's' variously as a morpheme or plural marker). There were often limited attempts to discuss how the children's syntax and morphology allowed them to achieve their purpose despite the non-standard aspects. Pleasingly, there was little evidence of a judgemental approach but lower level responses showed some insecurity with core concepts by attempting to discuss inappropriate features such as environmental print and spelling.

Higher level answers were careful to consider the contextual factors such as the environment (both that in which the conversation took place, as well as the effect of

other environments the children had experienced, such as school and the media), issues surrounding imaginative play and the relationship both between the two children and the children and their parents. Students demonstrated secure and confident knowledge of a range of theories (both developmental and functional) and were aware of grey areas where a number of theories could be applied or where whole or aspects of a theory could be dismissed based on evidence from the given data. At level four and five, the approach to the data was often systematic and candidates worked through a wide range of language features. Such students were also aware of the importance of looking for patterns of use across the given transcript to ascertain how developed a particular feature was and whether a child was consistent in use or not. For areas such as syntax/morphology and phonology, there was awareness that variation from the standard form may not have been wholly developmental and could instead be explained by a wide range of other factors such as region, the influence of carers and other language users, or the informal nature of the language event.

This extract is taken from a script that was just in level 4 for AO1 and 2 and top level 3 for AO3 because some aspects of context were neglected. In this section the student discusses morphology, including one of the most popular examples 'throwed', and shows aspects of a productive response to this feature.



Brown states that, by around 24-36 months, children will have acquired general inflections of morphological development. At age 5, James should typically have acquired these inflections and be confident in using them. This is demonstrated by his use of the bound morpheme /-s/ with the free morpheme 'glow' to demonstrate present tense, and also the bound morpheme /-ing/ with the free morpheme 'go'. However, at age 3, James is still developing his usage of these inflections although they should almost be fully developed.

For example, ~~when using a contraction~~ James ~~correctly~~ correctly uses the irregular verb 'told' to show past tense. However, he did not extend this correct form for the word ~~'throwd'~~ 'throwed'. Here, James has made a virtuous error due to overgeneralising the rule that /-ed/ conveys past tense, due to the irregular way in which the verb is changed for past ~~pluralised~~ tense, so here the addition of the bound morpheme /-ed/ to the free morpheme 'throw' for past tense is incorrect. As James has been able to avoid the virtuous error for the ~~tot~~ verb 'told' it is evident that he is aware of such irregularities but still developing his understanding

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Examiner Comments

The student introduces their section with a suitably brief reference to a theory but it is a shame that they have not briefly outlined what these 'general inflections of morphological development' are. The student is careful to evidence their assertion, using the clear examples 'glows' and 'going'. There is a small (and very common) terminology error here where the student identifies the third person <-s> inflection as indicating present tense and there is a missed opportunity to label the <-ing> ending. They begin to demonstrate discriminating and controlled application by contrasting the younger child's use with his older brother (the student has made an error with the names but the intention is clear). The section shows clear relevant application of concepts and name checks 'overgeneralisation' and 'virtuous error' but the relevancy of these is not explicitly explained. The fact that the writer of this piece contrasts the accurate use of an irregular past form 'told' with 'throwed' and links this to the child 'still developing his understanding' also shows the beginning of discriminating application. Throughout this section, the student uses discriminating examples and controls the structure of the response. They show aspects of a discriminating application of concepts and issues, but could have expanded this further by speculating about the developmental theories such forms could disprove. Additionally, they do not really engage with context in this section.

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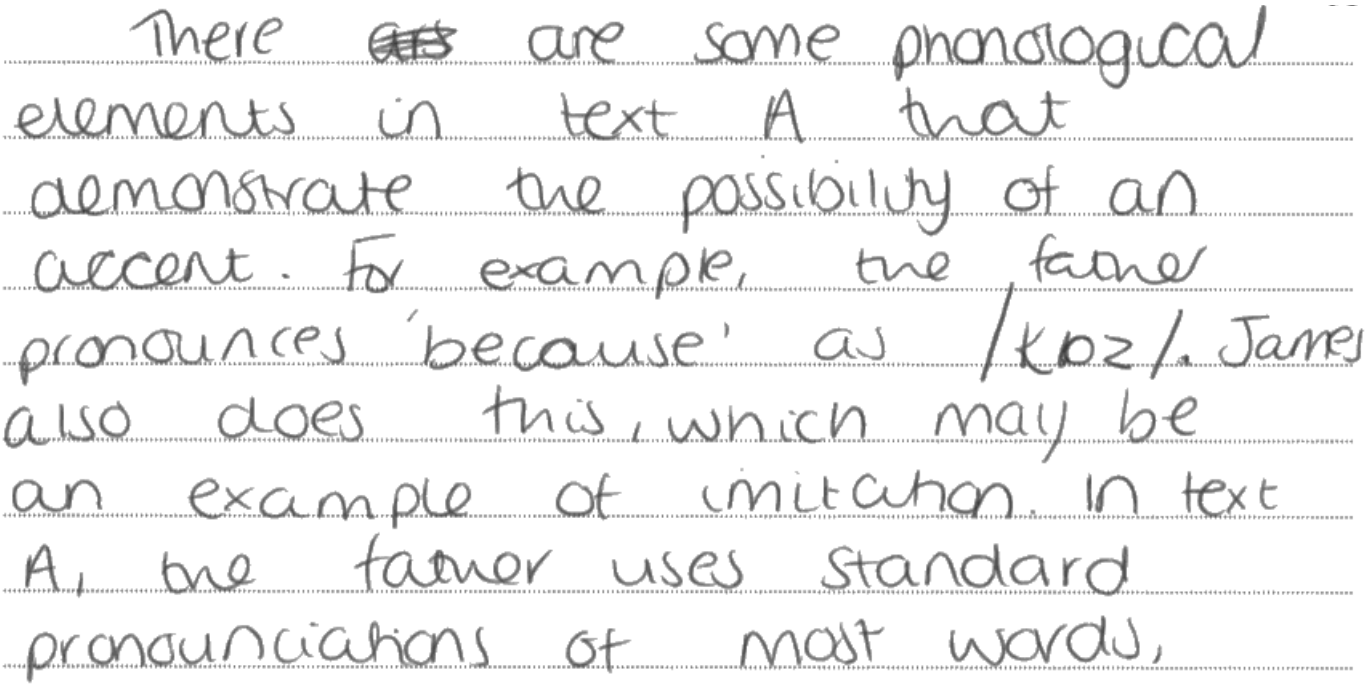
Examiner Tip

Remember to briefly explain the relevancy of any language issues and concepts that you introduce in the course of your analaysis. To show a more discriminating appliation of theories and concepts, you should attempt to both support and refute theories that you have studied.

In this extract from the same response as above, the student discusses some aspects of phonology. Although it shows some discriminating aspects, it is less convincing than the previous section as it lacks the development and is limited by some errors in analysis and terminology. Because of this, this section is more characteristic of level 3.


There ~~are~~ are some phonological elements in text A that demonstrate the possibility of an accent. For example, the father pronounces 'because' as /kɒz/. James also does this, which may be an example of imitation. In text A, the father uses standard pronunciations of most words,

however the contraction ~~does~~ of /kɒz/ and James' use of it as well may show a common accent. Similarly to this, the use of the /z/ in place of the softer /s/ sound when Ben says 'says' may also show an accent for this ~~word end~~ letter.

Rescorla proposed the idea that children simplify their speech in order to make it easier for them. In the transcript, James simplifies his speech through substitution. He substitutes the digraph ~~th~~ ~~/θ/~~ for a /d/ sound in the ~~word~~ determiner 'the'. This may be due to difficulty for James to pronounce the ~~/θ/~~ /ð/ sound, therefore he uses a simpler, more familiar sound. He also uses deletion of the /g/ in the /ŋ/ for the abstract noun 'nothing'. This may be due to the consonant cluster presented by the /ŋ/ sound

so he simplifies it to the more desirable consonant-vowel (cv) pattern typically favoured by children. Ben also uses deletion of the /g/ for /ŋ/ in the ward ~~goon~~ 'going' though, which may indicate that, rather than the boys simplifying the language, this may just be another feature of their accent.

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Examiner Comments

The writer's discussion of 'because' shows further understanding of key concepts by referencing 'imitation' but misses an opportunity to discuss the context in which the conversation is taking place and the suitability of informal forms. They could also have been more precise in their discussion of the process 'because' has undergone as labelling it as a 'contraction' is somewhat vague. There is also some evidence of uncertainty in the application of phonological knowledge here where the student wrongly believes that the final sound in 'says' is /s/.
Some accurate analysis but with further errors in terminology is continued into the next section. The notions of 'simplification' and 'substitution' are clearly referenced and explained showing clear knowledge and the student is implicitly implying that there are both environmental and developmental influences on a child's phonological development. The example is also clear, with accurate use of the IPA and terminology such as 'determiner', but there are errors here such as describing the sound as a digraph – a written language term. The candidate could have improved this section of the response by exploring whether this was a consistent feature of James' language and by considering how those around him respond to his non standard pronunciation.
The final section in this extract shows further misunderstandings that were common to a number of responses. Except in some regional accents, a /g/ is not present at the end of 'nothing' and, although <-ng> is a consonant cluster in writing, it is not so in speech. The writer does make a valid observation at the end of this response when they speculate that this could be an accent feature as it is found in both children.

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Examiner Tip

Errors in terminology and technical lapses will affect the awarding of a response. If these are frequent , it coud mean that the response has some level 2 aspects for AO1. Ensure that you are familiar with the key terms needed for the analysis of sound in spoken language and that the spelling of a word does not necessarliy match its phonology.
To make transcripts more managble in exam conditions, not all words will be represented in the IPA and the pronunciation of a specific word will only be represented once, unless the pronuciation changes. If a word is not represented, you should avoid commenting on its pronunciation, as you cannot be certain of the form the child has produced.

This response was awarded low level 5 for both AOs. It shows some critical and evaluative analysis but some level 4 characteristics prevent it from reaching far into level 5.

This section is part of the student's discussion of the mother's interaction with the younger child. It followed a brief introduction in which the writer referenced the children's expected stage of development as post telegraphic and high-lighted the conversations as taking place in a 'relaxed environment'.

The interactional purpose is further demonstrated by the use of interrogatives as a form of caregiver language, uttered by both Mum and Dad, for example, "did Oscar tell the teacher?", "but I thought Theo was older?" and "I think Oscars brave (.) do you?" when talking to James. The latter example, demonstrates Mum using a fallicitative tag question when replying to James. ~~This tag could~~ James Mum could be using this tag as a form of child-directed Speech (Bruner) in order to sway James thinking into thinking Oscar is brave. His Mum may be using the fallicitative tag to ensure James is being kind to Oscar at School and ensuring James' manners. According to Sinclar and Corthard this is a common form of teacher talk to give children the option to agree with their claim.

Additionally, interrogatives are used to stimulate conversation, another form of child-directed Speech, for example when Mum utters "James (.) Can you tell me what happened at School?" we can assume here that it is

at the end of the day and James' mum is curious to know what about James' day. The interrogative is engaging James into the conversation, therefore ensure social interactions with his parents to ensure he understands the art of conversational discourse. This reflects Bruners & socail interactionist theory, that said & children learn language & from others in a conversation (LASS).

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Examiner Comments

The reference to 'interaction' shows clear focus on the question and there is accurate use of terminology such as 'interrogative' and 'tag question', both of which show relevant links to language features and the context in which the conversation is taking place. The student then makes an interesting speculation about the function of the mother's tag question 'I think Oscar's brave...' with a reference to two theorists they have studied. This section shows a sophisticated structure and clear inferences about the construction of meaning in the data.
The student shows further evidence of the level 4/5 borderline by expanding their comments to include a secondary feature of interrogatives. Again, the example is discriminating and comments such as 'the interrogative is engaging James into the conversation ...' allow the writer to demonstrate a firm grasp not only on the specific focus of the question but also of the social interaction theory of language development. However, the student does not look at how the interactions between the two children later in the transcript may be similar and/or different and some students explicitly noted that James, as an older language user, may not require as many features of chid directed speech from his parents.

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Examiner Tip

Don't be afraid to use your linguistic knowledge to speculate as to why a feature is present. It is perfectly acceptable (and sometimes preferable) to offer a number of explanations for the presence or absence of a feature in the data. Discussing a range of resons why a particular feature is present is often a characteristic of higher level responses.

In this section, taken from the same response, the student discusses aspects of syntax. It has been included as a useful comparison to the low level 4 answer at the start of this section.

Throughout text A, Ben masters the use of function words, for example, he uses the copular verb "is" in the utterance "why is there a red light?" and in the enclitic contraction "it's" in the utterance "it's a red light that says /sez/ that says /sez/ you're bad luck." in the latter Ben also masters the function word "are" in the enclitic contraction "you're". Which suggests Ben is in the post-telegraphic stage of development as his sentences are syntactically sound. James, however, omitts the function words throughout the text, for example, "he older in the /dɚ/ older class" in this utterance he omitts the copular verb "is", whereas Ben has mastered this verb, therefore it could be due to James' age as he is 2 years younger than Ben, thus is yet to master function words. Similarly, in the utterance "The omission of the function words could also be due to the spontaneous element of the text, therefore James may not be concentrating on his syntax because he is in a relaxed environment and may be distracted by the star wars toys.

Additionally, due to the close tenor of the interlocuters James may not feel the need to produce syntactically sound utterances. Interestingly in the utterance, "... he's in our school(.)..." James masters the copular verb "is" in the enclitic contraction "he's", which therefore suggests James is in transition from the telegraphic stage to the post-telegraphic stage of development.

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Examiner Comments

The writer begins with a positive comment on the skills the older child, Ben, has already achieved and uses some detailed terminology in their exploration. They pick up on some subtle points by discussing the presence of both full and contracted forms and link this to the child's stage of development. In doing so they are showing some critical and evaluative characteristics. The response could have been further developed by speculating as to why he was using contracted forms (a context point) and how he would have developed these.
This positive discussion is balanced by similar discussion focussed on the fact that the younger child does not typically use these forms. Although the student does not explicitly relate the absence of these forms to a theory, they do clearly consider context as they speculate that the environment may have affected James' language. They also look for patterns of use in the data as evidenced by the writer noting that James does use a contracted form of the verb 'to be' on one occasion. Throughout this section, there is use of sustained examples, appropriate terminology and the writer examines relevant links between language features and context. Throughout, the student maintains a generally sophisticated structure – taking onto account exam conditions.

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Examiner Tip

Looking carefully for patterns of use of a particular feature can allow you to make more discriminating comments on a child's stage of development and the influences on their language.

This is an extract from a response that achieved top level 4 for both sets of AOs. It has been included here because it exemplifies a student who offers a number of alteranate explanations for their given example and who is able to consider the importance of context. Throughout this section, the expression is contolled and often sophisticated and a number of concepts and issues are clearly applied.

The importance of social interaction is highlighted through the conversation between James and Ben.
For example, James states "I have to stop you" and Ben replies with "no you help me", and Jame retorts with "I help you".
The imperative utterance by Ben supports Vygotsky's social interaction theory which states that language can only be developed through interactin with peers and older people. The fact that James repeats what his older brother has said suggests that Ben is acting at the 'more knowledgable other' as he is developing his brother's language through interaction. ~~However,~~ This may also support Skinner's imitation theory, however one may argue that the fact that they are playing with each other suggests that James does in fact agree with what Ben is telling him to do and is not just simply imitating.
Another interesting point to make is the children's use of vocabulary. For example, James states "we your servants". James repeats the noun 'servant' which one may think is unusual for a 3 year old to say. However, this can perhaps be explained by the fact that they are fans of Star Wars, therefore they have perhaps heard this term on TV and are therefore simply repeating it. Again, James omits the auxillary verb

'are' from his declarative utterance suggesting that he is not yet at a stage where he can produce full sentences with correct the appropriate function words.
Ben also makes a virtuous error as his states "my tummy glows ~~reach~~ red". Instead of using the third person ~~person~~ pronoun 'his', he uses the first person possessive pronoun 'my'. This may be due to the fact that he become confused because he was so preoccupied with playing with his toys. This inference can be made as he uses correct pronouns elsewhere in the text.

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Examiner Comments

The student's opening comment around 'the importance of social interaction' shows a clear focus on the question. The subsequent discussion is based around a clearly cited and relevant example and shows a student who can engage with aspects of context and underpinning issues. The use of the term 'imperative' shows some relevant application of language terminology and reflects the intended function of the utterance. The student speculates with some plausibility as to why James may have repeated his brothers utterance. The writer applies two theories during the course of this explanation and the use of 'however' signposts a contrast – something that is often indicative of higher level responses. At the end of the first paragraph the writer strongly implies that the children are negotiating roles in the imagiative play and so demonstrates relevant links to context – it is a pity that this idea was not developed more explicitly as it could potentially show firm level 5 characteristics.
The student then turns their attention to an aspect of vocabulary, again based around a clear example and relavant explanation. Terminology is used appropriatly and accurately and the central idea that 'servants' is an unusual word for a child of this age is plausible. This small section could have been more effective if a wider range of examples had been included and if the writer had contrasted these with some of the lexis that James was using in the first section when talking to his mother. The student does however successfully integrate another point at the end – that there is a missing auxiliary verb. This picks up on a point made earlier in the response (not included in this extract) and shows further accurate use of terminology. It would have been beneficial for the student to note that this utterance is repeated by the child as this could have allowed further developmental issues to be discusssed.
In the final section, the writer uses the context of 'play' to explain why the child uses a first person possessive instead of the standard third person. This again shows a student who can make relevant links to contextual factors and language features and is done succinctly. The analysis is benefitted by the brief comment that Ben's pronouns are standard elsewhere but unfortunately this is not exemplified.

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Examiner Tip

You should always consider aspects of context when analysing child languge. The precise considerations will be dependant on the data but common areas could include; what the child is doing during the language event, how the child has (or hasn't) developed an appropriate semantic field and who are they talking to and in what situation. All these as this may affect their language choices and reflect their stage of development.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- make sure you read the question carefully and follow its demands.
- some brief planning before you start to write may allow you to decide which examples best enable you to cover a range of language features and issues/concepts. It may also help you spot any relevant patterns of use in the data.
- avoid 'feature spotting' by always relating a language feature to a language development issue and/or a contextual factor.
- keep your focus firmly on the data and introduce issues such as child language development/instrumental theories only when they are relevant to the discussion of a specific example within the data
- if you are going to reference a theory associated with child development, you should explain it (to demonstrate your understanding) and its relevance to the data. If possible, you should consider introducing more than one theory and can, if relevant, use the data to refute any of the theories you have studied.
- develop your knowledge of relevant phonological terminology and the IPA to avoid errors in your analysis.
- take care with your written expression and avoid colloquialisms (such as 'kids') in your writing.
- if you have time, check your work for errors in terminology.

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