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In English Language (WEN01)
Unit 1: Language: Context and Identity
content

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Introduction

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 minute's duration. Candidates 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

Question 1

Candidates 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 language and 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 January 2019 examination Text A was an extract from a blog posted to the India Ink website by Saritha Rai, a columnist and journalist based in Bangalore, India. The blog references the personal experiences of Sheela Rao (67) and Krutika Kuppuraj (23) at a job fair in 2012. The blog presents Rai as a concerned individual seeking to highlight the developing plight of the elderly in Bangalore (and across India) and the changing dynamic of the Indian family. The individual story of Sheela Rao, 67, presents an elderly woman desperate to escape her dependence on her children yet frustrated by lack of experience of work, skills and qualifications. Krutika Kuppuraj, 23, a volunteer at the jobs fair that is the subject of the blog, is representative of the new, affluent generation of young professionals, yet is overwhelmed by the tales of despair around her.

Text B was an edited extract of an article written by freelance writer and editor Nicole Smith. Her article links to Text A in terms of its subject matter - attitudes towards the elderly. It was published in an online archive of articles produced in the U.S.A. in 2012. The article presents Smith as a middle-aged woman who contemplates how the younger generation will treat her as she approaches old age. She reflects on broader societal attitudes towards the elderly and how ageing will inevitably impact on us all – even the young for whom it is distant and intangible. It is this focus on the attitudes of the young, plus her own experience of ageing, that informs her voice and style.

The question asked candidates 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 candidates 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.

The texts were clearly linked by the issue of the elderly and attitudes towards them. Given the differing contexts of each, there was much opportunity for candidates to explore the links and contrasts between them. The focus of the question was the construction and presentation of personal identity, and the ability of candidates to incorporate this into their analysis proved something of a discriminator, with a significant minority struggling with this concept. Those that framed their analysis through this central focus were rewarded.

In January 2019 responses to Section A covered a full range of achievement. Most candidates 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 the elderly. 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 Rai (and of those she includes in her blog) and Smith.

The source texts proved to be accessible to most candidates and the majority offered a balanced consideration of both and the theme that linked them. Most candidates could differentiate context well and most responses across the range could point to more complex aspects of each such as the multiple functions of the Rai text or the contrast between the experiences of both writers and how these influenced their personal perspectives on aging and the elderly. There were also some very competent explorations of the cultural and societal attitudes towards the elderly.

It was pleasing to see that many centres had made use of the support afforded by the Examiner Report and the indicative content in the marks scheme produced after the June 2018 series. This enabled many to meet more of the specific requirements of the Assessment Objectives. Some used these documents as a framework for their responses which ensured coverage and structure in the mid bands of achievement, but which sometimes led to repetition at the lower levels and, in some, less frequent, cases, restricted responses at the mid to upper levels. In these instances candidates sometimes looked for direct points of comparison across frameworks that were not really evident in the texts themselves, and the subsequent analysis was, somewhat strained/forced as a result.

Many were able to describe method and effect but at the mid-lower levels of achievement 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 candidates 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 responses used a range of impressive language terms to describe language features but did not go beyond a descriptive approach and marks had to be restricted because of failure to link to context/purposes. A list-like approach/feature spotting is not a successful way to tackle this question.

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 levels difficult.

Successful responses to Text A looked the conventions of the blog itself and how its structure fulfilled both its informative/persuasive/promotional function and enabled the development and presentation of Rai's voice through her reflections and observations. The best differentiated the voices of Rao and Kuppuraj, whose personal experiences were incorporated into the blog to afford contrasting perspectives on the elderly and to offer comment on the changing social dynamic in India through the contextual framework of the increasingly globalised job market and the increasingly 'westernised' professional and personal aspirations of the younger generation in India.

Responses that were placed in the highest bands of achievement supported comment and assertion with evidence directly drawn from the text which was used to explore the specific language choices made, applying terminology in good range at word, sentence and whole - text level. These linked comment to the concept of 'voice'/persona as constructed by Rai and how relationships with her readers were shaped and developed. They showed awareness of Rai's as writer through consideration of her presentation of Rao (in particular) to elicit sympathy and offer comment on changing attitudes in Indian society and family dynamics. It is this link between form and function/effect that signals a successful response.

Less successful were those responses that offered generalised comment on the context of the blog and issues upon which it was based. These often adopted a very descriptive approach to its content. Some misread the prompts in the question and produced a discursive essay of the issue of old age, citing the experiences of Rao here in particular. 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 Rai as author or of Rao and Kuppuraj as representative of youth and age in India also restricted potential to reward.

Successful responses to Text B took cues from Smith's presentation of herself as someone in middle age and therefore in touch with the attitudes of the young and the elderly. They were able to comment on her crafting of the overheard conversation to trigger personal reflection and projection. They noted the shifts in register and tone as Smith moved from personal to wider social comment relating to discriminatory attitudes towards the elderly across the USA. The best were able to comment on Smith's belief that 'other cultures' treat the elderly with greater respect than those in the West and her citation to the growing power of Western youth culture and Western obsession with physical appearance as significant contextual factors in this. All this was accompanied in the very best with systematic exemplification and analysis at word, sentence and whole-text level.

As with Text A, less successful responses offered generalised comment on the context of the article and adopted a very descriptive approach to its content. Those that offered limited exemplification and lim-

ited specific analysis of the language used were anchored in the mid/ lower bands of achievement. Limited consideration the personal identity of Smith (and the others referenced in her article) and how this was constructed and presented also negatively impacted on the success of the response.

AO4 requires candidates to explore connections and contrasts between the source texts. Comparative work was usually helpful in lifting responses into Level 4 enabling candidates to demonstrate a more discriminating approach to the data. However many lacked confidence to deal with the texts in an integrated comparative approach and dealt with them in separate sections. The most successful responses seized the many opportunities for comparison and contrast – many adopting an integrated approach to this aspect of the task. Many explored the purpose of the texts and developed links through the persuasive function of each, these generally fared better than those

Most picked up on the fact that both texts were clearly linked by the issue of the elderly but were differentiated by context. Better answers drew interesting comparisons between Western and Asian society and culture in terms of family, society and attitudes to the aging process itself, commenting on the contrast in perspective here. Some better responses commented on the fact that gender was a more significant factor in the blog and used this as the basis of contextual comparison. Many developed interesting contrasts between attitudes and experiences across generations. The best picked up on Smith's assumption in the US article that other cultures have a more respectful attitude to the elderly and that this is challenged to a certain extent by the Indian blog. Others drew a contrast in the perceived root causes of the issue detecting that negative attitudes in India were largely attributed to current social and technological developments, whereas the article implies that attitudes are embedded in US culture.

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. A significant number of candidates took a summary approach to the content of the texts which is not a useful approach to achieve marks. This proves reading ability but not 'analysis' of language features in use.

The following excerpts are taken from a response that was awarded a mark of 29 for Question 1. The mark is at the bottom of the Level 5 which indicates that the response fully meets the 'discriminating and controlled' application that is characteristic of Level 4 and, on occasions presents the 'critical and evaluative exploration at Level 5.

It offers integrated points of comparison from the start:

The two texts have a common field; the elderly. However, in closer detail, A is about the elderly and their plight of securing a position in the ever-changing and highly competitive job market. B on the other hand dwells on how the elderly are viewed by the younger generation and the disrespect and negative ideology that some young people have towards them.

It makes valid linguistic points, exemplified with accuracy to link with some fluency to the central issue of identity:

confusion. Text B on the other hand has also displayed characteristics of transactional discourse but also alternates with expressive discourse due to the frequent rhetorical questions 'Are parents to blame? Is society to blame?' and the emotive language 'unnerving' 'appreciated'. This also displays ~~Smith's~~ Smith's identity as a woman who uses emotive language to express herself, her frustrations and her disappointments.

The persona of Rai, and her attitudes towards the elderly, is contrasted carefully with that of Smith on a lexical and cultural basis that shows real discrimination:

Under pragmatics, euphemisms have been used throughout text A in regards to the elderly showing Saritha Rai as someone who is respectful and socially aware. Instead of referring to them as old people, Rai has called them, 'the elderly', 'seniors' and 'senior citizens.' However, Smith is more straight-forward and refers to them as 'older people' frequently showing the differences in the Indian and American cultures. Text B's writer

Literary devices are identified with accuracy and linked both to their effect on the reader and their influence on the construction and presentation of identity:

the elderly. Extended metaphor has been incorporated into Smith's article 'Age is a disease caused by a bacteria called time...' This creates the identity of Smith as an artistic and creative thinker who is able to take a concept and make it easier to understand by likening it to something we can all relate to.

The following extracts are taken from a script that was awarded a mark of 15 which places it just into Level 3. It meets all the requirements of Level 2 in that understanding is mostly general but there are some (limited) occasions when comments are clearer and more relevant.

There is a worthy attempt at comparison, but links are mostly obvious/straightforward. Classification of the audience of Text A is apt but similarly formulaic and general:

Text A and text B both have an aspect in common. They both discuss about the elderly in the society and both have a common trait. How they are outcasted in today's society. The audience that is targeted in text A is primarily based to the Indians as it is posted on an India Ink website, more specifically the Bangalore citizens as the title suggests 'Bangalore's seniors head to work as traditional Indian family' dissolves while the secondary audience is targeted to the world at large as this blog is also notes on the world's largest democracy. Not only is it targeted for blog readers but is also targeted for the youth and for employers to know what it is like to be an elderly in this society and to feel shunned out.

The points on convergence are interesting but exemplification of method lacks clarity/security:

and editor. ~~The~~ She breaks down the style of speaking in her article to convergence. She is reducing the social distance between her and her readers by using ~~for~~ simple, clear and brief words. This links her work to Howard Giles theory where convergence is stated. Smith clearly displays that in her article. The text is filled with many short sentences at the beginnings and in between paragraphs so as to impact the reader and create a better understanding of what she is trying to speak out.

There is a clear attempt to contrast at word level although terms are not applied consistently:

very little, almost nothing. words, adjectives like "young, fickle, itinerant" are completely contrasting with the ~~elder~~ older employees who are described as "loyalty, experience and cost-effectiveness". The semantic field brings out

Reference to theory demonstrates general understanding at best. Such undeveloped comments add little to the response. Time had been better spent analysing the specifics of the texts themselves

Smith has conveyed herself to Bernstein's theory as she has fully outspoken and expressed herself. Sheela Rao's blog is solely based on how she has edited it out to Gunes Marxims theory on marxism of quality. All her paragraphs are facts, she also bases it on Gunes Marxims relation on how she has stayed on her specified topic. Both texts have the aspects of Marxims relation. They ~~haven't~~ have not strayed away at any point.

Section B: The Creation of Voice

Question 2

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.

Candidates are expected to demonstrate their own expertise and creativity in the use of English. They are encouraged to incorporate personal and local references. Candidates were expected to draw upon the at least one of the source materials provided in Section A but reshape them to meet the requirements of the context.

There was a marked improvement in Section B responses this series with many achieving marks from Level 4 and Level 5. This is very pleasing as the 15 marks available for this component can make a huge difference to the final grade awarded.

Successful responses effectively applied the conventions of a public speech and showed awareness of the youth audience and of the international nature of the conference. These produced clear, well-structured responses and demonstrated an understanding of writing for an audience, experimenting with register. Many, in the mid-range of achievement could adopt a tone or 'voice' which was convincing even if the technical accuracy in written English was lacking.

Less successful responses struggled with the precise purpose of the task or with maintaining the generic form and appeared to lack the vocabulary and control of syntax to fulfil the requirements of the task.

Timing appeared to be something of an issue with some short or incomplete responses although performance improved considerably this series. Centres are advised that although the paper is weighted across the two tasks (with 35 marks allocated for Q1) the 15 marks available for Q2 can be the difference between several final grades. Candidates are urged to set aside sufficient time to understand the specific requirements of the task in terms of genre, context, audience and purpose and to produce a meaningful

and, hopefully, engaging response. They are also reminded that they MUST draw on the material from at least one of the source texts – there were some very engaging responses that failed to do this and were essentially self-penalising.

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.

In January 2019 candidates were asked to produce the text of a speech to be delivered at an international youth conference. The question stem was carefully worded to provide candidates with a clear indication of expectation of context, function and audience. 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 report. This proved problematic to a significant minority of candidates but is a key requirement which must be taken into account. It is NOT necessary to incorporate every detail from the source; indeed, many that did produced lengthy and essentially pedestrian paraphrases that failed to engage. More successful were those that took only relevant information from the source materials and reworked this to a lively and engaging agenda better fit informative and persuasive better fitted to the prescribed context of delivery.

Successful responses demonstrated clear awareness of audience and function, conceding clearly to the context and the persuasive/informative function of the speech. There were some very fluently written and convincing new texts. The best adapted the source material fluidly – for example, drawing upon the rhetorical ‘voice’ of Smith or the experiences of Rao to target their audience.

Less successful responses were often restricted by flawed written expression – these proved essentially self-penalising. Some struggled to sustain a consistent tone/register given the nature of the task and the tone and content of the source materials. 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.

The following extracts are taken from a script which was awarded a mark of 10 which places it into Level 4. It is clear and relevant throughout and meets all the AO descriptors at Level 3. There is an originality here in terms of the integration of personal experience that tips it into Level 4 because of the discrimination in evidence. It is a brief response which limits certain aspects, especially assimilation of the source texts, and this, in some way, accounts for its final placement at the bottom of Level4.

The audience is targeted effectively from the outset, with a tone wholly appropriate to the context of the speech. Generic conventions are applied with some security: although the international nature of the conference is never directly referenced.

"Good morning boys and girls. Or rather, ladies and gentlemen as I am sure you don't like to be referred to as 'boys' or 'girls' anymore. I know I don't. It's funny isn't it? When we are younger, we all want to appear older. We wear more makeup, call ourselves men or women when in reality we are all merely children. We all try so hard to look older when we're young yet we don't want to grow old. It's a bit ironic.

What is particularly engaging about this response is the incorporation of personal experience, which reflects the culture of the candidate and meets the brief completely:

inspiring. ~~It~~ ~~you~~ ~~are~~ My grandmother taught me a lot about life. She taught me how to survive. Coming from a third world country, Kenya, life was not very easy in the 20th Century. Women had no rights and majority were uneducated. Just sitting down and listening to my grandmother talk about how she had to work at the farm where her family planted millet gave me so much inspiration. She taught me how to plant millet and ~~g~~ braid my ~~to~~ ~~own~~ hair. I wish I had spent more time with her before she passed. ~~†~~ .

This personal perspective is balanced with some confidence with reference, reworking and assimilation of the source materials but this aspect could have been developed more fully:

I can guarantee that you would learn so much from your grandparents, or any elderly people if you just gave them a chance and stopped assuming that they're 'boring' or 'a burden'. I read an article recently, by Nicole Smith, where she discussed the current attitude the youth have towards the elderly. And I saw something that I think I need to share with you all today. She said 'Why is it so difficult for the youth to realize that the elderly were once young too?' I think that when we see the

The following extracts are drawn from a response which was awarded a mark of 6 which places it at the top of Level 2. This is due to the general understanding of the source material, and the task that relates to it, that the response presents.

There is acknowledgement of audience and an awareness of the requirements of the task in terms of function but expression and register is awkward and content very straightforward:

Hi I am here standing before you because I'd like to encourage you, my peers on how and why we should improve our attitudes towards the elderly. Especially in this generation we all live in.

There is some link to the source material, here the use of the metaphor used by Smith, but this is undeveloped in what is a very brief response:

Most youths in today's world look down upon the old aged people ~~as~~ and treat them as if they were to have some sort of disease.