A LEVEL

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE (EMC)

H474
For first teaching in 2015

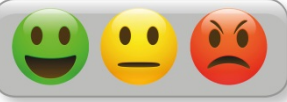# H474/01 Summer 2019 series
Version 1

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper 1 series overview

The two texts featured in the exam seemed to provide a greater level of challenge than in the second series. On the whole, candidates demonstrated less familiarity with the two text types, and a less insightful grasp of the speaker's and the writer's purposes. The texts seemed to offer less opportunity for a productive focus on the level of syntax and lexis, with candidates needing at least partly to consider the texts on the level of discourse, structure and metaphor in order to give a strong, comparative reading. As previously, every level of the mark scheme was represented in the responses marked.

Question 1

Text A from the anthology is an extract from Grayson Perry's Reith Lecture, (delivered in 2013), on becoming an artist, introduced by Sue Lawley.

Text B is an edited extract from the author Alan Bennett's introduction to *Talking Heads 2*, his second book of television plays written for single characters, (published in 1998). In it, he discusses the relationship between his life and his writing.

1   Carefully read the **two** texts and compare the ways in which the speakers in **Text A** and the writer in **Text B** use language to present their ideas.

     In your answer you should analyse the impact that the different contexts have on language use, including, for example, mode, purpose and audience. **[32]**

In general, the content and structure of responses were similar to those described in previous reports:

- Most responses began with an introductory overview, focusing on the key contextual factors of each text, usually phrased in a comparative way.
- Some candidates used their first few sentences to repeat verbatim the information about the texts given immediately above the question, in ways that gained no credit. A smaller number of candidates than last year showed evidence of not having made sense of this information. A few candidates referred to Text B as a spoken text, having mistakenly inferred that the extract had itself been broadcast on television.
- The question phrase 'present their ideas' seemed not to distract candidates, perhaps as a result of being more neutral than previous questions. Fewer candidates than in previous series hampered their responses by repeatedly returning these words.
- A smaller number of responses ended with a concluding paragraph offering no value in terms of the mark.

Concepts, methods and terminology (AO1); and Connections and comparisons (AO4)

Text B had something of a discriminating effect with respect to AO1, allowing a small number of candidates to demonstrate a level of conceptual understanding. These candidates commented, for example, on Bennett's use of a narrative discourse structure; they broke down the construction of his more spoken voice, discussing his parenthetical asides and his juxtaposition of colloquial and formal registers ('wanting a low-down on the text … thus unavailable for comment'; 'trace the origins … other stuff I've written'). A greater number of candidates applied terminology to Text B in a less coherent way, for example alighting on instances of alliteration with little sense of their immediate context or effect, or suggesting that 'dozens of letters' was a significant use of hyperbole.

Although the texts offered less opportunity for heavy use of terminology than in the June 2018 exam, language features provided several points of connection. The term 'semantic field' was applied in a broad and often superficial sense to both texts: Text A was said to have a semantic field of art and Text B a semantic field of plays. Pronoun reference offered a more productive angle for some candidates, who drew comparisons between Perry's open and inclusive uses of the first person and Bennett's characterisation of himself as 'the playwright' for much of the text. Mode became an unhelpfully single focus for some candidates, who organised their entire response around identifying features to prove that one text was spoken and the other written. Register as a framework allowed for some more purposeful analysis and broad connections, with discussion of Bennett's low-frequency lexis, compared to higher-frequency and/or low-frequency lexis in Text A. Syntax and mode were deployed in a similar way, with many candidates attempting to contrast the craft of Text B with evidence of non-fluency in Text A. Many candidates focused on the interrogatives in both texts. Some candidates identified the tag question in the

customs officer's direct speech; others helpfully used the term 'hypophora', and one or two used the term 'erotema' with partial understanding. More often, however, 'rhetorical question' was used as a catch-all term, usually without appreciation of the different forms of question in the texts or the voices they comprised.

Most candidates explored the metaphors in the two texts, competently comparing Bennett's conceit about a passage through customs with Perry's extended metaphor of his career as a journey. Many responses developed this with exploration of Perry's analogy between himself and Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*; some also explored the effect of Bennett's phrase 'covered in confusion'. Some took the opportunity to make connections between other figurative devices in the two texts, with mixed results. Bennett's phrase 'treat me like a dead author' was identified as a simile, and compared to Perry's 'spring fully formed, almost genetically gifted like mythological creatures from the womb'; few candidates, however, seemed sensitive to Perry's attempt to problematise this idea of the artist. Similarly, few candidates who explored the central metaphor in Text B demonstrated a clear understanding of the meanings in Bennett's analogy, and his implications as to the relationship between himself, his plays and his critics. Only a small number explored connections in a way that led to comparative exploration of the messages in the two texts. One response, for example, impressively suggested that both Perry and Bennett 'had the same underlying message', that artists should 'let go of what other people think or say about their art because it is going to mean different things to everyone anyway'.

Understanding of the significance of contexts (AO3); and Connections and comparisons (AO4)

As in mentioned in previous reports, there is a distinction to be made between, on the one hand, evidencing contextual knowledge which is more or less relevant and, on the other, showing understanding of the significance of contextual factors. To some extent, this can be detected in the structure of less successful responses: some candidates used an extended introduction to write with some understanding about the audiences and contexts of the texts, but showed little insight into contextual factors when they moved into quoting from the texts. As in previous series, higher-scoring responses tended skilfully to slot each text back into its original context, and to consider different aspects of these contexts throughout their analysis.

Insight into contexts offered means of making connections in some responses. These were often contrasts drawn between features associated with the spoken and written modes; fewer candidates identified similarities between the interested, culturally aware audiences. Many candidates picked up on the shared references within both texts, using the terms 'allusions', 'proper nouns', 'exophoric references' or 'members' resources' to compare Perry's assumptions that listeners were familiar with *The Wizard of Oz*, Picasso and Raymond Tallis with Bennett's reference to Tom Stoppard. Some candidates made less successful attempts to put the texts into historical context, for example suggesting that Bennett's word 'thus' was in common usage in 1998, and contrasting this with references to social media in the more modern text. Numerous responses tried to turn Lawley's mention of Twitter into an insight into contextual factors, mostly unconvincingly.

Genuine insight into the context of Text B was a distinguishing feature of some higher-level responses: few candidates demonstrated convincing thought as to Bennett's sense of who might be reading a book of his screenplays after their broadcast on national television; fewer still seemed sensitive to ways that an introduction might be expected to offer some intimate access to an established author, and the ways that Bennett distances himself from such expectations. There was an intricacy to the context of Text B which presented a challenge to candidates who tried simply to read off audience from content. Although a few candidates discussed the distinction made by Bennett in the direct address at the end of the extract, between 'you or the A Level students', most stated that Bennett was writing his introduction for A Level students, and looked for features that suited a younger audience (such as identifying 'disgustingly dirty underpants' as an example of childish humour, aimed at adolescents). While these inferences

evidenced some understanding of significance of contexts, they tended to be consistent with Levels 1–4 of the mark scheme, rather than Levels 5 or 6.

In general, candidates showed more understanding of the context, audience and text type of Text A. At the lowest end of achievement, a few candidates struggled to focus on the spoken text itself for Text A, instead analysing aspects of transcription (e.g. 'the word "APPLAUSE" being in capital letters brings a dramatic effect exaggerating the sound and implying it was a lot of people applauding'). Some candidates struggled to distinguish between the dialogue between Lawley and Perry and Perry's monologue, referring to the whole text as an interview, and suggesting that the whole text was either spontaneous or scripted. Many more made good distinctions between the audience present in the lecture theatre and the radio listeners, and explored Perry's mixed register in relation to the tradition of the Reith Lectures. A number of responses attempted to support their exploration of the radio audience with reference to parts of the Anthology text that had been omitted from the extract. Although the resulting comments on context were valid, candidates could not receive credit for analysis of language not included in the given extracts; they need to be able to respond to the versions of the texts they are presented with in the exam.

Candidates' familiarity with Alan Bennett as a result of his presence in the Anthology had both advantages and disadvantages. It seems certain to have helped some candidates to grasp Text B as an unseen, allowing for a stronger sense of Bennett's written and spoken voices, and helping them to hear his sardonic undertone and self-deprecating persona. For others, their engagement with both texts was rather overshadowed by biographical details, accurate and inaccurate. Bennett's sexuality was compared with Perry's transvestism; Bennett was said to be middle-class, in contrast to Perry's working-class background. In as much as such claims were made relevant to the text, they were often a kind of blind alley down which features led, for example: 'Perry has a friendly nature which links to his cross-dressing … whereas Bennett ignores his work, knowing that he had to cheat to get into the position he is in'. Even where such claims were accurate, they gained little credit in relation to the mark scheme.

Analysis of ways meanings are shaped (AO2)

As in previous series, responses which were rewarded highly in relation to AO2 were characterised by a careful selection of quotation and apt use of candidates' own vocabulary. Higher-level responses generated insightful interpretations of language use in the texts, developed through sustained analysis. One response, for example, argued that Perry's use of the metaphor of a journey 'suggests the process of becoming an artist isn't simple', that 'chugging along', 'tramline' and 'track' create 'the idea that you must keep moving towards finding yourself in the art world', and that Bennett's bathetic comparison of himself to a dead author 'pushes his desire to be left alone by his readers'. This combination of close reading and candidates' own interpretive words comprised the 'critical analysis' described in Levels 5 and 6 of the mark scheme. In practice, responses needed to make this kind of strong meaning from at least one of the texts in order to be placed in the highest level.

However, the majority of responses lacked these attributes, tending to prioritise language and contexts at the expense of meaning. Some used very generalised expressions which gained limited credit (e.g. 'the syndetic listing and repetition in "harder and harder and harder" prolong the point he is putting across with the emphasis of repeating the word'). The greatest gaps were in responses which applied broad frameworks in ways that led them to use analysis to categorise each text, rather than explore the meanings in either. Some, for example, discussed each feature in terms only of the level of formality it created, or its appropriateness for a particular audience. Many candidates structured large parts of their response around the basic distinction between written and spoken modes, identifying non-fluency features in the spoken text and arguing that it hadn't been fully prepared, and identifying lower-frequency lexical choices in the written text and arguing that it had been planned and edited. In some cases, these observations led to relevant understanding of the significance of contexts and critical analysis of ways meanings were shaped: Perry was said to use empty adjectives and hedges to establish a more

personal, less austere tone than might be expected from a Reith lecture; Bennett was said to have crafted a more conversational voice, establishing a rapport with readers familiar with his work who expected some intimate access within his introduction. More often, however, the singular focus on mode proved a blunt instrument: it did not facilitate access to Levels 5 and 6 with respect to AO3, and was more likely to produce 'some analysis' or 'limited analysis' of ways meanings were shaped than 'competent analysis'. Often, candidates who achieved highly in other respects struggled to focus on making meaning in a way consistent with the highest-level descriptors for AO2. A significant number were secure in their application of concepts and terminology (AO1), showed insight into the significance of contexts (AO3) and competently explored productive connections (AO4), but made very few points analysing the ways meanings were shaped, and as a result were placed in Level 4 rather than Level 5 of the mark scheme. These responses demonstrated just how challenging it is to address all four assessment objectives in this exam.

Exemplar 1

While both texts have engaging features, their primary purposes are to inform; although more so for Text A as a lecture, and because many people would read Bennett's book as much for entertainment as to learn. As Text A is a spoken radio text it is quite clear that the purpose has been partly prepared beforehand, even though its use of high register, low frequency lexis ("cliché in the psychotherapy world", "unselfconscious ... creativity", "genetically gifted"), references to other cultural and literary people and texts ("like Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz", "Duchamp said", "Pablo Picasso") & the use of quotations ("Art is expressing one's universal wound", "Every child is an artist"). Use of such features - especially the quotations - would be very difficult in an improvised, spoken text and show its preparedness. These features also

help to make the lecture both more informative and engaging as connections and quotations allow the reader to relate the concepts that Perry – the speaker – makes, with other people, texts and ideas they already know.

Despite Bennett's use of spoken features, Text B's written mode is apparent through its frequent usage of high register, low frequency lexis ("facetious", "commodius", "Whereupon, "contraband" (which is also usage of professional lexis associated with customs officials, thus adding to the believeability of the dialogue it features in)) & syntactical variation in the use of different sentence types (predomiently complex sentences like "And so the.... Suitcase, his play" along with some simple sentences – "Surely not") which allow for further inclusion of detail and generally make the text flow better and, again, make it more engaging. Not only that, but such lexical and syntactical variation shows off Alan Bennett's status as an established literary author through his command of language and references to one of his works "Talking heads" and the fact that it was "made part of the A level syllabus"; something that only a well written, literary text would be.

Exemplar 1 takes a comparative approach, exploring connections between texts. The focus on mode ('Text B's written mode is apparent through…') helps to demonstrate secure handling of concepts, appropriate use of terminology and clear and relevant insight into the significance of contexts. However, the analysis tends to be used to identify the kind of text associated with the features explored ('…something that only a well written, literary text would be'), rather than to make meaning.

Exemplar 2

Both texts have at least some elements which are pre-meditated, resulting in carefully crafted language choices, for effect ^used to present their ideas. In text A, Remy's lecture is somewhat pre-meditated. Although he is famous for not preparing his lectures word for word, his basic ideas would have been pre-planned, and this is evident in his lexical choices. The idea that artists are born with artistic talent is clearly one which he sets out to undermine. The language he uses to express this idea appears to have been crafted in advance: 'they sort of spring fully formed, almost genetically gifted like mythological creatures from the womb'. Although he uses the hedges 'sort of' and 'almost', which are features of spontaneous spoken language, his ~~str~~ use of the simile appears cleverly crafted. This use of the simile' like 'mythological creatures' presents the idea of artists being ^naturally ~~very~~ unique, fundamentally different from other people, as the collective noun 'creatures' ~~presents the~~ dehumanises them, and the pre-modifier 'mythological' has connotations of supernatural ~~and~~ creatures, only spoken of in legends and stories. This use of the pre-modifier 'mythological' is also effective as it ~~as~~ suggests that this idea of artists being born naturally with artistic talent is somewhat absurd, because such creatures are ~~the~~ creatures of myth. This creates humour because of this absurdity, suiting the lecture's secondary purpose, to entertain, but ultimately this simile contributes to its primary purpose of raising ideas about how artists come to be.

Text B uses a different analogy to present ideas. Bennett uses the analogy of the playwright being a person travelling through customs. As text B is entirely pre-meditated, the analogy is developed and detailed, becoming an extended metaphor for the way that people interpret his plays to contain deeply personal ideas about Bennett's identity which he is unaware of. He describes an official opening the playwright's suitcase to find 'a pair of disgustingly dirty underpants and some extremely pungent socks', which the playwright owner of the suitcase does not remember packing. Like Remy in text A, Bennett uses pre-modifiers to present his ideas. The pre-modifiers 'disgustingly dirty' and 'extremely pungent' present the contents of the suitcase as being embarrassing to the playwright. *This creates humour, like in text A.* These garments are metaphors for highly personal ideas or parts of Bennett's identity, which, unknown to him, are revealed in his plays. Thus, the pre-modifiers are used to suggest that his plays can be interpreted as revealing highly personal information about Bennett himself. This portrays Bennett's plays as multi-layered and profound, whilst presenting Bennett himself as humble, oblivious to his talent. While suggesting that he does not knowingly put these ideas in his plays for effect, somewhat undermining the reader's preconceptions of Bennett as a talented playwright, it also presents Bennett as likeable due to the fact that he is unaware of his own talent. Hence, Bennett's introduction suits its purpose of introducing his plays and persuading the reader to read on, carefully considering their own interpretations when reading. As a pre-meditated and written introduction by a well-respected writer, Bennett's use of language serves the text's purpose.

While Exemplar 2 also has some structural focus on mode ('Both texts have at least some elements which are pre-meditated…'), this leads to critical analysis of ways meanings are shaped. There are relevant insights into specific aspects of contexts ('its primary purpose of raising ideas about how artists come to be … undermining the reader's preconceptions of Bennett as a talented playwright … persuading the reader to read on, carefully considering their own interpretations'). The candidate frequently develops analysis of features with their own interpretive vocabulary: 'the simile … presents the idea of artists being naturally unique, fundamentally different from other people'; '"creatures" dehumanises them'; '"mythological" … suggests that his idea of artists being born naturally with artistic talent is somewhat absurd'; '.. present the contents of the suitcase as being embarrassing to the playwright … his plays can be interpreted as revealing highly personal information about Bennett himself'; 'This portrays Bennett's plays as multi-layered and profound, while presenting Bennett himself as humble'.

It is on the level of whole response rather than short passage that candidates need to address all four assessment objectives. Nonetheless, the extract from Exemplar 2, which comprises just over half of the whole response, demonstrates how connections (AO4), concepts and terminology (AO1) and the significance of contexts (AO3) can be combined with analysis of ways meanings are shaped (AO2).

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