General Certificate of Education

English Language 1706
Specification B

ENGB1   Categorising Texts

Report on the Examination
2009 examination - January series

Further copies of this Report are available to download from the AQA Website: www.aqa.org.uk

General

Just over 900 candidates sat this first examination for the new specification, and generally speaking, examiners were very impressed with the quality of responses from candidates.

Section A – Text Varieties

Question 1

The wording of this task, 'Discuss various ways in which these texts can be grouped, giving linguistic reasons for your choices', led to clear and often very interesting ideas for grouping, ranging from those that were led by language methods to insightful contextual groups. Examiners did note that the more successful candidates all demonstrated systematic language awareness to support and explain the choices made.

It is worth remembering that the task is marked out of 48, with marks divided equally between Assessments Objectives AO1, AO2 and AO3.

- AO1 - use of linguistic methods
- AO2 - grouping choices
- AO3 - contextual awareness

Candidates who arrived at a balance between an insightful and judicious range of grouping choices, supported with systematic, perceptive and accurate linguistic support and insightful exploration of contextual factors scored very well.

The specification (p6) suggests a range of possibilities for grouping, including audience, purpose and genre. These were often used profitably as the basis of categorising by many candidates. Examiners commented that the better quality responses refined these broad groups based on the texts on the paper, which also often led to insightful contextual comment.

Successful responses tended to:

- offer a range of interesting groups
- explore groupings (sub-groups, similarities and differences)
- use relevant linguistic methods to analyse the data
- recognise implicitly the complexity of the task, making connections between groups and noting cross-boundary texts
- use texts in a variety of different groups
- exemplify understanding through integrated detail from the data.

 Less successful responses tended to:

- misread contextual information, eg misinterpreting Text E as an e-mail and Text C as an article in a magazine. This sometimes led to data being forced to fit a context that did not exist
- offer extensive listing of many groups (sometimes up to as many as 19) with very limited exploration of reasons for grouping
- explore complexities then take a simplistic approach to the similarities and differences between the texts in the group
- attempt a sequential survey with limited success, this often involved the listing of texts and their features in turn leading to limited cross-referencing. (This was not observed as a whole centre approach, but as individual candidates taking an idiosyncratic take on interpreting what was required.)
- include texts from Section B which are not relevant for this section.

Section B – Language and Social Contexts

There were some really impressive responses to all three tasks, with sensitive linguistic analysis of challenging data linked to contextual considerations.

It is worth highlighting that this task also is worth 48 marks, but the weighting of the Assessment Objectives is different from Section A. AO2 is worth a maximum 16 marks, and AO3 32 marks. Centres should therefore remain aware of the significance of contextual analysis in terms of teaching and learning for this section.

Successful responses tended to:

- start with the contextual information, exploring the AO3 pressures in the light of the data
- approach the data sensitively and intelligently without feeling the need to 'drop in' theory that had limited relevance to the data
- use linguistic methods accurately and systematically
- weave AO3 awareness into their data analysis.

Less successful responses tended to:

- apply a 'commentary' style analysis running through the text in a way that was merely descriptive
- reveal misunderstanding of this section's focus on language and social contexts
- be brief and undeveloped.

Question 2

Language and Gender

Many candidates who chose this question focused on the provenance of the data in terms of its date of publication, dealing sensitively with the representations male and female aspirations/equal opportunities. The data afforded candidates a range of potential starting points for their responses, many acknowledging the changing roles of men and women at this time.

Successful responses tended to:

- understand the writer's purpose in giving advice to young school leavers about potential career avenues
- appreciate the writer's desire to represent career opportunities equally, given the 1939 publication date
- consider how the audience of the time might have received the enthusiastic voice
- integrate ideas about marked and unmarked language, often using the data as a springboard to show AO2 knowledge
- integrate a wide selection of language features
- cluster examples from the data to support their analysis
- comment successfully on roles and stereotypes as represented by the data.

Less successful responses tended to:

- ignore the given contextual information
- treat the data as typical of the sexist attitudes of the time
- offer a running commentary from start to end of the data
- force AO2 ideas to fit the data, rather than approach it in an open-minded fashion
- take a pejorative approach to the roles of men and/or women – often focusing on their own views and ideas.

Question 3

Language and Power

This was a popular question offering much opportunity for examining roles and status as well as the shifting nature of power as the debate ensued. Candidates who explored the context of parliamentary debate (as opposed to 'conventional discourse') were often able to explore some of the more subtle elements of the data.

Successful responses tended to:

- explore the unusual etiquette of Prime Minister's Question Time
- examine the shifting nature of power in this context, including reference to the Speaker's role
- systematically examine the linguistic features that enabled the three speakers to 'claim the floor'
- appreciate that non-fluency features such as repetition could be both a sign of power and an indication of thinking 'on the spot'
- understand the semi-prepared nature of the debate
- cluster features such as use of statistics, humour, emotive lexical choices, triadic structure and phonology as methods of claiming power in debate
- understand the dual audience of Prime Minster's Question Time
- understand the archaic nature of addressing the opposition through the Speaker.

Less successful responses tended to:

- describe the data in a linear fashion
- make overly assertive statements about the aggressive nature manner in which Cameron and Brown addressed each other
- misunderstand the address terms and the context of the discourse
- assert their views without sufficient evidence from the data
- misunderstand the complexities of the power shifts across the data.

Question 4

Language and Technology

This question was slightly less popular than the Power and Gender questions. However, examiners were pleased that many candidates produced some strong responses led by contextual detail. Most candidates understood that the data had been recorded on a landline and appreciated the difference this would make to language choices.

Successful responses tended to:

- analyse a range of salient language features, particularly discourse and grammatical choices
- note differing levels of formality and address across and within the messages
- cluster language features when exploring ideas across the data
- understand shared frames of reference between the caller and receiver
- explore the differing purposes of the messages
- acknowledge that the receiver would recognise the voices of the speakers
- offer a range of relevant reasons for the non-fluency features
- consider the politeness markers and associated pragmatic aspects.

Less successful responses tended to:

- take the examiner on a linear journey through the messages, leading to repetition of language features and limited overview of the data
- talk at length about text messaging and email and their effect on language, rather than addressing and engaging with the data provided
- describe the content of the messages with limited reference to the technology focus or language features
- take a pejorative and/or simplistic approach to non-fluency features.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the **Results Statistics** page of the AQA Website.