



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2011**

English Language B

ENGB1

(Specification 2705)

Unit 1: Categorising Texts

Report on the Examination

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General

Senior examiners commented that the paper was highly accessible for candidates of all abilities; the data for both sections proved to be both enabling and challenging. Centres have clearly prepared candidates well for the differing approaches necessary for each question and candidates were generally approaching unseen data in an open-minded way.

Section A – Text Varieties

Question 01

The best approaches to this categorising question were data-led; in other words, candidates did not use pre-prepared grouping ideas but allowed the texts to guide their choice from the wealth of possibilities. Candidates on the whole seemed to be taking a more practical view of the task and there were far fewer attempts to create multiple, largely descriptive groups.

However, prescriptive approaches to the grouping task do not always pay dividends, especially where more esoteric groupings are taught. One senior examiner commented that candidates appeared to have been taught to group based on whether texts are permanent or ephemeral; this usually led to discussion based on speculative contextual factors rather than language features. It was often apparent that this was sometimes a whole centre approach. Where concepts are harder to understand or unhelpful, weaker students can fare less well than if they choose more obvious reasons for grouping such as purpose, audience or graphology. The suggestions outlined in the specification are a good starting point when exploring possibilities and centres are advised to encourage their students to think about range and variety of grouping choices.

There were very few instances of listing a large number of groups with limited discussion or sequential surveys where candidates deal with the texts one at a time without comparing or grouping.

Many candidates responded with real insight and regard for some of the subtleties of the groupings, especially around the humour of Texts D and F. Audience as a grouping also yielded some very perceptive discussion as did graphology in Texts C, E, F and G. A more focused sub-group of shared cultural referencing with the use of signs and symbols proved more data-led. An interesting group paired Texts D and F as handwritten with interesting exploration of their very different purposes and audiences. A spoken grouping was a popular choice for Texts A and B with exploration of the clipping linked to informal context or accent. Discourse was also a good choice for those who wanted to explore the typical structures of recipes, letters and announcements. Stronger candidates recognised the intertextuality of the recipe conventions in Oliver's humorous parody of a recipe in Text D sometimes grouped it with Texts E and F on that basis. Language based groupings were profitable if discussion didn't lead to feature spotting but explored the use of the chosen feature in context.

Examiners are instructed to be open-minded in terms of the number of groupings; it is the quality of discussion and exploration of complexities that spring from their initial links and subsequent sub-groupings that is evaluated. It is also worth noting that 'exploring complexities' means doing more than noting simple differences such as audience and purpose. It involves recognising that making links between texts is a complex exercise; analysing the different ways in which two texts are humorous, for example, and explaining the different ways in which they create amusement for the target audience. On another level, 'exploring complexities' is often recognition that a text can be linked to others in more than one way.

Successful responses tended to:

- show good coverage of the data
- use terminology accurately
- employ a range of language methods
- select a range of interesting groups
- take an open-minded approach to grouping texts
- link groups together to show cross-boundary texts
- place the same text in different groups
- explore subtle differences between texts within one group using comparative vocabulary
- link language methods to contextual factors insightfully.

Less successful responses tended to:

- include theorists from gender, power and technology in detail - more appropriate for questions 2-4
- employ a pre-planned approach which often led to unconvincing groupings
- use language methods to feature spot with no discussion of influential contextual factors
- employ limited terminology
- use a narrow range of language methods
- list many groups, often with very limited discussion and development.

Section B – Language and Social Contexts

General

It has become a pattern that Gender is the most popular choice of task, followed by Power then Technology. It is worth noting that many of the strongest responses come from those who choose Power and Technology. Reasons for this notable trend could possibly be connected to candidates' desire to display awareness of learned knowledge and the fact there is less theoretical knowledge afforded to Technology particularly. One main pitfall is when candidates apply these ideas from language study to the data in a rigid and narrow-minded manner. The most successful responses apply learned knowledge where relevant and where they feel AO2 ideas do not shed light on the data they challenge the received wisdoms. Clearly this takes confidence and a conceptualised understanding of the theoretical ideas.

The other pitfall is when candidates allow learned knowledge (AO2) to dominate the response rather than an exploration of language features linked to contextual factors. AO2 is worth 16 marks and AO3 (language awareness linked to contextual factors) 32 marks. This weighting should guide students towards exploring significant contextual factors other than for instance gender - age, possible location, established relationship, roles and functions of the conversation in the case of this January's data were all relevant factors to link to the language being used by the Barbara and Andrea. It is the synthesis of ideas learned about the topics, the language features identified in the chosen data and the influence of contextual factors that leads to higher achievement.

There was occasionally a whole centre focus on one particular topic area probably due to the time constraints of preparing candidates in one term.

Question 02 – Language and Gender

Successful responses tended to:

- integrate relevant AO2 knowledge into the response to support points raised from the text; Lakoff, Tannen, Coates and Zimmerman & West were referenced in some detail but candidates did begin to extend beyond just gender-based theory to also consider politeness and accommodation theory
- there was some clear focus on dominance by many candidates, with clear comments linked to Andrea's dominance due to her role in the conversation as narrator
- comment on support strategies adopted by Brenda and clear comment provided on stereotypical topic choices, linked to established research.
- show clear recognition of the roles adopted by the two speakers, recognising Brenda's supportive listening role, but relatively few students commented on Andrea's dominance due to the narrative function of her language (ie it was *her* story they were discussing)
- explore how gender was not necessarily the only influential factor - other factors included: age, relationship, established friendship and shared knowledge, single sex, shared experiences.

Less successful responses tended to:

- identify only one factor influencing language behaviour rather than a range of factors
- approach the data with very fixed ideas of what would be found
- ignore any contextual influences on the data
- reveal knowledge of AO2 but with limited relevance to the actual data
- identify features followed by, for example 'this shows Lakoff's study was right'/'this proves Fishman's theory' without thinking more open-mindedly about this particular piece of data
- become preoccupied by speculating how men would behave linguistically in the same situation
- overstate roles assuming that Brenda was simply 'bored' by her friend resulting in some rather speculative comment
- be preoccupied with incorporating much named research at the expense of actual data analysis
- make limited reference to context beyond brief repetition of the rubric at the beginning of the response.

Question 03 – Language and Power

This question produced some very strong, engaged responses. Many candidates appreciated the campaigning role of Amnesty; stronger candidates understood the subtlety of the influential power drawing on the theoretical ideas of Fairclough in the main to explore how language features were creating power within discourse. Some students explored references to influential, personal, knowledge, political and emotive power types, but for many candidates, power concepts remained rather implicit. Stronger answers explored the political power of a pressure group and the ideologies implicit behind the data. A wide range of language features was analysed systematically, including the use of graphology with the image of the faceless woman and the Amnesty logo. One senior examiner commented that 'it was the stronger candidate on the whole who made detailed reference to the graphology – the picture of the woman – with some subtle nuances being drawn.' Overall, candidates responded very well to this text, with most engaging well with the emotive aspects of the text, considering the use of a case study to shape the discourse and thereby influence the audience. Context was mostly very well handled. Most candidates were able to comment on the main purposes of the text, with more perceptive responses addressing dual purposes to inform and persuade about a number of different possible actions. Audience was also addressed in some detail; some students speculated unnecessarily on social status of the target audience, and some lost focus somewhat by addressing gender issues in unnecessary

detail. However, there were some sound comments about direct address, placing emphasis on the audience's role and empowerment.

Successful responses tended to:

- reflect on the use of the semantics of shopping culture to influence the reader
- develop points effectively: for example the use of pronouns to create a synthetic relationship with the reader building up a sense of responsibility to act
- explore the use of influential and instrumental power
- recognise that this was linked to the discourse structure of the text
- identify a range of strategies used by the text producer to create a sense of guilt: case study of Sonya, statistics, emotive lexical choices, that these atrocities are occurring on our doorstep
- take a systematic approach to the data often using language methods to structure the response
- recognise the reader is empowered when given a choice at the end of the text
- realise that the small print at the bottom completes the narrative, creating a convincing story.

Less successful responses tended to:

- have difficulty engaging with different types of power, not clearly distinguishing between instrumental and influential power
- adopt quite a narrow exploration of the data, addressing the use of graphology and the use of modal auxiliaries, but without full exploration of why key features were utilised in the data
- describe and feature spot.

Question 04 – Language and Technology

This question invited candidates to explore a range of conventions associated with email. The nature of the data was an informal exchange between two male friends, one of whom was emailing from work – a contextual factor noted by many. They made use of a range of features common to CMC including: hyperlinks, declaratives, imperatives, ellipsis, level of formality, field specific lexis, emoticons, symbols to represent kisses and hugs and a range of non-standard features such as typos and acronyms. Most candidates recognised the relationship between the two participants, but some only made a cursory reference to this and as such, context was under-explored. Stronger candidates engaged well with the purposes of the email exchange (to house hunt *and* to make arrangements to meet later), the date of the messages, the level of shared understanding and the circumstances under creation of message (work vs personal emails). Some candidates were able to explore these features with clear reference to communication between the two participants – particularly linked to the use of 'lol' and capitalisation to communicate tone. There was little reference to established research beyond very brief references to Shortis and Crystal, allowing students to concentrate on the data itself.

Only a few candidates demonstrated an unhelpful prescriptive approach to the data, condemning John particularly for his lazy approach to writing. Most realise that these features are acceptable, particularly given the informal nature of this exchange.

Successful responses tended to:

- identify a range of email conventions
- explore how the constraints and affordances of non-face to face asynchronous communication affected the use of language
- discuss the roles of the interlocutors and comment on their differing styles of writing – John being much less concerned about the accuracy of his messages and Brian’s use of standard punctuated sentences
- understood how the use of hyperlinks allowed the exchange of much information
- integrate ideas from language study seamlessly with language features and contextual discussion
- recognise how other contextual factors such as age, gender, established friendship, shared understanding affected language use.

Less successful responses tended to:

- be descriptive and focused largely on the more obvious features of emoticons and acronyms such as ‘lol’
- rely on general learned information on such technologies as text messaging and social networking sites with limited reference to the data
- address wider technology points rather than addressing email offering a limited response to the data
- offer a general discussion of technology advances
- make inappropriate links between the data and irrelevant technology features such as text talk
- feature spot.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.