



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE
A LEVEL**

SUMMER 2018

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2018

COMPONENT 1 – LANGUAGE CONCEPTS AND ISSUES

General Comments

There was, as last year, plenty of evidence that a lot of centres had prepared their students very well for this component with many candidates tackling the contrasting challenges of the two sections effectively. In Section A, the choice of scripted work taken from television documentaries obviously meant that there was less to say about spoken interaction but the best candidates explored how the language used conveyed attitudes with real insight. There was a wide variety of responses to the questions in Section B, with many answers showing an impressively wide range of knowledge about language issues. There was a very even distribution of answers, with Question 4 very marginally the most popular.

Section A: Analysis of Spoken Language

Most candidates were able to write at reasonable length about both texts and show an awareness of language. It is clear that many centres are working hard to encourage their students to use linguistic terminology in their analysis, even if, inevitably, some candidates made a number of errors when identifying word classes and phrase types. In the better answers, both accurate and wide-ranging terminology was used. Furthermore, despite some surprising views about 1970s television (it was occasionally seen as a medium in its infancy and only accessible to a wealthy elite), the understanding of documentaries as a genre was generally secure, suggesting that candidates were well prepared in this regard.

What distinguished the best candidates, however, was their ability to read carefully and explore the attitudes of the two documentaries. The most successful essays often contrasted the elegiac tone of the opening of *The World at War* with the patriotic focus on British heroism in *Twentieth Century Battlefields*. Some also identified the shift in tone in the middle of *The World at War* extract, where the change to the present tense captures people's reaction to the rise of the Nazis in the 1930s. In addition, the best candidates were able to explore the language in context, noting, for instance, that the tripling of the past participles ("*torturedembittered...demoralised....*") underlined the social factors that led to Hitler's rise to power rather than being, as was more commonly argued, an indication of the difficulties of life in wartime. Significantly, only the most capable answers recognised that the noun phrase "*vulgar little corporal*" reflected the casually dismissive attitude of Hindenburg rather than simply revealing the documentary's hostility to Hitler.

It was precisely this ability to read closely for meaning that opened up the higher marks for candidates. Less successful answers tended to write more generally about genre, arguing that the lack of non-fluency features was an indication of scripted language and the use of proper nouns to establish the setting fulfilled the informative purpose of the texts. While both are perfectly reasonable points, a number of candidates wrote very lengthy paragraphs on each, limiting their opportunities to explore the attitudes of the documentaries in greater detail. A more productive line of analysis centred on the attitudes revealed by the language choice, exploring, for instance, the way in which the adjectives "*freezing...exposed...wide open*" emphasised the British soldiers' vulnerability and courage in Text B. Similarly, many good answers commented on the use of the dynamic verb "*provoked*" and the abstract noun "*invasion*" as significant in allocating the blame for the war on Argentina. The ability to explore the connotations of language in context in this way was a common feature of the most successful responses.

The two approaches to structuring the essay seen were equally acceptable, with some candidates comparing the two texts in each paragraph and others handling the texts separately with a comparative conclusion. Again, the best essays based the comparison on ideas. Some insightful responses noted the focus on the brutal horror of war in Text A (the use of passive verb phrases “*were gathered....were driven*” suggesting the treatment of the victims as animals) in contrast to the speakers’ dramatising of the conflict in Text B (evidenced, for instance, in the prosodic stress on the adverb of degree in the adjective phrase “*spectacularly uneven*”). Weaker essays, in contrast, tended to compare more generally, identifying features such as the prosodic stress on individual words, again without exploring their significance in context.

Finally, two issues mentioned in last year’s report are worth returning to since they can be relatively easily addressed by centres. The first relates to the use of theory, which many candidates resorted to frequently, nearly always in a contrived and unconvincing manner. Arguments made by many candidates included: the Snobs follow Sack’s model for turn-taking since they are respectful of each other as family members; the lack of interruptions in both texts contradicts Zimmerman and West’s research on male discourse; the voiceover in Text A provides evidence of Fairclough’s notion of synthetic personalisation; the critical reference to Hitler is an example of Brown and Levinson’s Face Threatening Act. All of these points showed a misunderstanding of the genre and limited the time available for candidates to explore the texts in an appropriate manner. Centres should discourage their students very strongly from using theory in Section A unless it genuinely illuminates their interpretation of the texts. Discussion of the texts’ attitudes towards war was absolutely sufficient in addressing AO2; theoretical perspectives are best left for Section B.

The other issue raised last year relates to the length of introductions. Too many candidates are still writing the best part of a page at the start, in which they provide a very general overview of audience, purpose and register. While some initial comparison of texts is helpful, the introduction should be short, especially given the time constraints. If candidates limited themselves to two or three sentences of overview before moving to detailed analysis, they would unquestionably have a greater opportunity to undertake the sort of detailed analysis of the texts’ meaning which lay at the core of the best essays.

Characteristics of successful responses

- Detailed focus on how the attitudes towards war and the different conflicts are revealed through the language.
- Some comparison of how those attitudes are similar and/or different in the two texts.
- Sustained and accurate use of wide-ranging linguistic terminology in each paragraph.
- Brief comparative introductions so the discussion moved quickly on to close analysis of language.

Areas for improvement

- Genuinely engaging with the meaning of the texts, exploring language in context.
- Excluding inappropriate and unconvincing references to theory.
- Using a wide range of accurate terminology.
- Restricting introductions to two or three sentences.

Summary of key points: key considerations for centres

- The analysis must show that the candidate has read and thought about the meaning of the texts.
- Comparison should focus on the ideas and attitudes rather than vague notions of genre.
- Candidates should be discouraged from using theory in Section A (it is much more appropriate in Section B).
- Candidates should start detailed analysis quickly after a brief comparative overview at the start.

Section B: Language Issues

This part of the examination seeks both to provide candidates with opportunities to demonstrate a more academic grounding in linguistic debates and to enable them to learn material rather than be assessed entirely on skills-based exercises. The range of knowledge shown by candidates in most centres suggests that it is achieving both of these aims. The best essays were informed, carefully shaped and academically precise; they reflected some excellent teaching. Where responses were less successful, they often suffered from either a tendency to make sweeping unsupported statements or a failure to engage consistently with the question. Candidates need both to have knowledge and to be able to marshal that knowledge effectively to answer the question if they are to do well.

Question 2: Child Language Acquisition

The focus on Child Directed Speech, while causing problems for some candidates, drew many cogently argued and intelligent responses. The best answers used the extract as a prompt and went on to discuss other examples to make their case. Some candidates wrote about the specific nature of CDS, exploring features of lexis, grammar and phonology while providing their own examples of exchanges between adults and children (sometimes drawn from their own experience). Others took a more theoretical approach, exploring the work of different theorists such as Skinner, Chomsky, Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky in assessing the relative importance of CDS in the process of language acquisition. Both approaches were perfectly fine. Some evaluative analysis of the contrasting claims of Nativism and Behaviourism or Interactionist approaches was often very helpful in considering the role of CDS. References to particular case studies such as Genie or Bard and Sachs' work on Jim, as well as classic research such as Berko's "Wug" Test or Berko and Brown's "fis" phenomenon were also adeptly integrated into a clear developing argument.

Even less successful answers here usually showed some knowledge. A number of candidates, however, tended to write all they knew about Child Language Acquisition with barely any reference to the question at all. Lengthy and detailed accounts of a child's development from pre-speech to the post-telegraphic stage were not uncommon. Even here, if the candidate argued that the regularity of the pattern itself supported Chomsky's belief that our capacity for grammar is genetically programmed, which suggests that CDS is less significant in language acquisition, then the approach was clearly relevant. Quite a lot of candidates struggled to do this, however, and, as a consequence, failed to shape the material effectively into a cogent answer.

Pleasingly, the vast majority of candidates used the extract as a prompt material, identifying features of the parents' language such as the use of interrogatives and tag questions before moving onto other material for the bulk of the essay. Latitude was allowed for those who used it more extensively, but it is not intended to provide the sole basis for the entire essay. Inevitably, those (relatively few) candidates who simply focused on the extract alone produced rather narrow essays.

Question 3: Standard and Non Standard English

There were some very strong responses to the question on social class with many candidates showing a good understanding of the issue. A few candidates simply wrote an essay on prescriptivism as opposed to descriptivism without any explicit reference to class whatsoever and, as last year, a surprising number took Trudgill's position in the extract to be fiercely prescriptivist. The majority of answers did, however, address the question directly and, in many cases, argued coherent and thoughtful cases. Interestingly, quite a number challenged Trudgill's view that class was a determiner of standard and non-standard use, arguing coherently that code-switching was a crucial feature in all social classes, often supporting their case with well explained examples. Other answers supported Trudgill's view, citing the range of evidence provided by classic studies such as those by Labov, Cheshire, Milroy or Trudgill himself. Both approaches produced some excellent answers.

Where responses were less successful, they tended to be much vaguer, often resorting to very generalised statements about class of the "all working class people are uneducated and have not learnt Standard English" type. Obviously, such answers generally failed to engage with the complexities of social judgements and language variation. While some candidates quite reasonably supported the views of a writer like Lindsay Johns on the need to recognise the cultural capital of Standard English, it was hard to reward those who wrote simply about "correct" English and the need to speak "properly". There also remained some lack of clarity in many answers about the distinction between accent and dialect, with Received Pronunciation (RP) in particular being used as a synonym for Standard English.

As always, the use of the extract varied with some candidates simply noting its descriptivist stance and others analysing the linguistic variations of Speaker A and Speaker B in detail. Both were absolutely acceptable. However, a small number of candidates analysed Trudgill's own language in great detail, exploring the significance of his use of the pronouns "you" and "we" and the repetition of the adjective "different". In this case, there was little to be gained from such an approach since it did not really address the question.

Question 4: Language and Situation

The question on the use of language in different speech situations was a broad one and, unsurprisingly, prompted a wide variety of answers, many of which were precise and well supported by examples. Most candidates explored the co-operative relationship between the speakers in the extract quite thoughtfully, with many undertaking precise analysis of the language used. Insightful points included a recognition of McDonald's use of declaratives rather than interrogatives to prompt Robbins' thoughts and his repair of the prepositional phrase ("*in many respects* (.) *in every respect*") to emphasise his politeness and admiration. Only a small minority of candidates focused solely on the extract with most using it appropriately as a springboard to a discussion of language in other situations. Some essays focused on different types of interviews while others ranged more broadly to explore classroom discourse or the language of the courtroom. Given the openness of the question, both approaches were obviously fine as long as the examples were explored precisely.

The problem that some candidates faced was their determination to write a pre-planned essay. Last year, quite a few candidates tackled a question about power by writing solely on politeness (a question on the sample material). This year, too many simply wrote an essay on power, with little sense of situational variation of speech. It is crucial that candidates shape their material to the question itself, using topic sentences that frame the argument effectively. The best essays did this deftly, using theory appropriately such as Giles'

Accommodation Theory or the flouting of Grice's maxims to explore variations in discourse. Indeed, Fairclough's ideas about power could also be relevantly used as long as the focus of the paragraph was on particular speech situations. The best answers explored a range of examples with linguistic precision, noting how contextual factors altered the use of language in the different exchanges.

A final, and very important, point should be made about preparing students for Section B. It is expected that centres will teach all four topics so that candidates can choose the most appropriate question for them when they get into the exam. The choice of the three questions will not necessarily be made on a strict rotational basis so it will be impossible to predict which questions will come up. By covering all four areas, centres will clearly give their students the best chance of success.

Characteristics of successful responses

- A consistent focus on the specific question with evidence of a thoughtful response.
- A clear paragraphing structure with relevant topic sentences.
- Sustained evidence of linguistic knowledge either through use of terminology or through reference to theoretical approaches (or both).
- Fluent and lucid expression.

Areas for improvement

- Ensuring that the material used is relevant to the question.
- Improving topic sentences so that the sense of a developing (and relevant) argument is clear.
- Avoiding broad generalisations without supporting evidence (a particular problem on Q3).

Summary of key points: key considerations for centres

- The ability to answer the precise question directly, and shape material to this end, is a crucial skill – candidates cannot simply write all they know about a topic.
- Improving topic sentences so that they develop the argument would allow candidates to marshal their material more effectively.
- Centres should teach all four topics to give their students the best chance; it will be impossible to predict which questions will come up.

Conclusion

The two central issues – namely, reading for meaning and contextualising the analysis in Section A and answering the question in Section B – continue to limit the achievement of some candidates. Nevertheless, the component overall appears to be working well with very few short answers and, as last year, considerable evidence of knowledge both of terminology and linguistic issues. At the top level, there is some outstanding work, revealing an impressively sophisticated engagement with language.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE
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COMPONENT 2 - LANGUAGE CHANGE OVER TIME

General Comments

Candidates seemed to enjoy writing about the genres (advertisements and email subject lines) and had appropriate linguistic knowledge to tackle the questions. There were fewer issues with timing this year and almost all candidates managed to complete the three questions, spending an appropriate amount of time on each task. The period and contemporary texts seemed to engage candidates, but close reading was not always demonstrated, and some responses did not answer the question set – particularly in Section B. Where candidates did not respond to the question prompts, they were less able to access the full range of marks. There were also still some cases where candidates wrote extensively about language change. While they demonstrated a good range of historical knowledge, the discussion was not focused on the texts: the approach became discursive rather than analytical and evaluative. This clearly had a significant effect on the marks that could be awarded: there tended to be little use of textual support (AO2); meaning was not explored and contextual references were not related to the texts (AO3); few connections were established and the use of linguistic terminology was often very narrow (AO4).

Section A: Language Change Over Time

Four equally weighted assessment objectives are covered in Section A with AO1 linked to the short questions and AO2, AO3 and AO4 linked to the extended response. In Question 2, marks are awarded for each separate assessment objective.

AO2 (20 marks)

Candidates needed to demonstrate their knowledge of the advertising genre explicitly, with a clear focus on the target audiences and on the medicinal properties of each product. Language change as a broad concept was not relevant unless addressed in the context of the texts and linked to meaning e.g. random capitalisation of thematic nouns (*Grain, Berry, Remedy*) or references to changing medical practices such as obsolete medical terms (*defluxion*), archaic medical principles (*humors*) or illnesses (*Dropsy, the Kings Evil*). Discussion of issues (e.g. changing attitudes to medical products; references to the development of scientific knowledge) was valid where it was linked directly to the content of the texts. Appropriate and concise supporting quotation was needed to support points made.

AO3 (20 marks)

Candidates needed to engage with the advertisements, exploring details and interpreting meaning. Addressing context was central to the question e.g. the presentation of the products as wonder cures for contemporary illnesses and references to the times in which each advertisement was written (e.g. point of sale locations suggesting the local range of Texts A and B; price; post-industrial revolution air condition in Text C).

AO4 (20 marks)

Candidates needed to develop links between the texts which amounted to more than the occasional use of basic connectives (e.g. “However”, “Furthermore”, “Moreover”). The use of linguistic terminology was also assessed under AO4. Candidates needed to analyse the advertisements using a range of terms to support the points made. More effective responses moved beyond the labelling of word classes and covered a range of language levels.

Question 1 (Short questions)

The approach to the short questions was more systematic this year, with many candidates recognising the importance of precise labelling and concise description of each language change feature. Last year’s advice that responses to Q1(a) to (d) could be tackled in less than a page had clearly been noted, and most responses were of an appropriate length. It is worth reminding candidates of this regularly, however, since there were still some who wrote more than was necessary. There was evidence of sound knowledge of language change, but identifying word form continues to be a challenge for many candidates.

Part (a)

This question tests knowledge of word classes and archaic spelling patterns. There are 3 marks for identifying the form, and 3 marks for an appropriate explanation of the linguistic variation in each case.

Most candidates did well in this first question, identifying all three word classes correctly and describing the *i/y* and *u/v* interchanges and single final consonant appropriately.

Part (b)

This question tests the candidate’s knowledge of word classes, language variation over time and language change concepts. There are 2 marks for identifying the form, and 2 marks for two distinct points relating to language change. Candidates cannot be rewarded for repeating the same point (e.g. inconsistency, or a lack of standardisation) for each pair of examples.

Identifying word classes was slightly more difficult for candidates in this question. There was some confusion about the difference between adverbs and adjectives, and many candidates described the uninflected *exceeding* as a present participle verb – they failed to recognise that while the form of the word was different, the function was the same. Any reference to a noun was accepted for *Dropsy/Dropsie*.

The other two marks could be awarded for describing the pattern of variation (e.g. inconsistent use of *-ly* inflection, *ie/y* interchange, random capitalisation of nouns), for referencing language concepts such as semantic change (words falling out of use), for naming a key linguistic work (e.g. Samuel Johnson’s 1755 dictionary, Robert Lowth’s 1762 grammar book, or another significant work), or for commenting on inconsistency or the lack of standardisation. In citing key language works, there must be a reference to the name of the author and the publication date. Most candidates demonstrated sound knowledge and made their points clearly.

Part (c)

This question tests the candidate’s knowledge of word classes, phrase structure and archaic grammatical features. There are 2 marks for identifying form, and 2 marks for an appropriate explanation of the linguistic variation in each case. Where the examples represent commonly occurring features of EME, candidates should be precise in their linguistic description.

Candidates found this question more difficult. To gain the four marks, they needed to describe *suppreseth* as a **present tense verb** and a *Clock* as a **noun phrase** (or reference the determiner/indefinite article). The second mark required them to show understanding of the archaic grammatical features e.g. a reference to regional inflections (-s northern; -eth southern), to the fact that the -eth inflection is obsolete, or to the PDE form 'suppresses'; a reference to pronunciation (a phonemic representation of 'o'clock'), to the absence of a prepositional phrase, to the lack of contraction, or to the PDE 'o'clock'. Since candidates may not have seen this time reference before, a range of responses was accepted. Where candidates referenced random capitalisation, this was not credited because the question focus is on grammatical features.

Part (d)

This question tests the candidate's ability to identify and describe EME grammatical structures and punctuation features. There are 3 marks for identifying distinctive EME usage and 3 marks for selecting and describing an appropriate example. Responses needed to be analytical rather than observational, with clear evidence of language study. Candidates should be reminded that references to EME spelling are not relevant in part (d). Some candidates lost a significant proportion of the 6 marks because their points were based on orthography.

Many candidates cited random capitalisation identifying the thematic capitalisation of common nouns (e.g. *Drink*) and adjectives (e.g. *Dry*). It is important that a word class term is used to explain the variation from PDE. References to the capitalisation of the initial determiner *THE* were not accepted since this is a typographical feature of printed text which is still used in PDE. A few discerning readers recognised the omission of possessive apostrophes (*the Grand Seigniors Dominions, The Turks drink*). A broad observation about a "missing apostrophe", however, was not sufficient to gain a mark. Candidates need to be able to distinguish precisely between omissive and possessive apostrophes. Some sensible points were made about the absence of omissive apostrophes in the repeated main clause *It is ...* (rather than 'It's ...').

References to the high levels of subordination or to multi-clausal sentences were valid as features typical of EME. The example cited, however, had to do more than mark the beginning and end of a particular section of the text (e.g. "It is a simple thing ... by reason of that heat."). To be awarded the second mark, there had to be evidence of clauses (even if they were not highlighted in some way): for instance, "It is a simple thing, composed ... by being dried ..., and ground ...".

Many candidates referenced comma splicing as a typical EME feature. While there is a frequent use of commas to mark out the subordinate clauses, this is not an example of comma splicing, which occurs between two main clauses. Equally, claims that the Oxford comma is a distinctive feature of EME since we "no longer use it" were too broad. Where the point was accompanied by evidence of linguistic understanding, the marks were awarded (e.g. "During the EME period the use of the comma before the coordinating conjunction 'and' would not have been considered non-standard or controversial, unlike in PDE."). Broad points about the "excessive" use or "misuse" of semi-colons are not credit worthy. In EME texts, the punctuation is very precise, designed to guide the reader through the complex clauses.

Candidates should be reminded that they cannot repeat examples from part (c) in part (d) e.g. references to obsolete verb inflections.

Characteristics of successful responses:

- concise responses with very focused content
- precise and accurate linguistic labelling of examples
- clearly expressed descriptions of distinctive EME features
- an analytical (rather than an observational) approach.

Areas for improvement:

- the focus of part (d) responses
- the ability to identify and accurately describe word classes and phrase structure
- precise descriptions of EME language change features.

Question 2 (Essay)

This question tests the candidate's ability to analyse and evaluate the content and meaning of the texts in context, to establish meaningful connections between the texts, and to apply knowledge of relevant concepts and issues in order to explore the writers' language choices.

Candidates needed to consider three advertisements written at different times, focusing on the product being sold (coffee, Viper-drops, asthma cures) and its supposed medical benefits (cure-alls in the EME/ModE periods, and a more targeted product in the LME period). It was good to see that many candidates engaged with meaning. They connected the texts in interesting ways exploring key features of the genre, the presentation of the products, claims for their efficacy, and changing attitudes based on contemporary scientific knowledge. These kinds of links gave candidates the opportunity to explore the texts meaningfully and to meet the requirements of AO4 effectively. Topic sentences based on linguistic features, however, made it more difficult for candidates to engage. Identifying the use of specific word classes (e.g. proper nouns, abstract nouns, adjectives), 'parallel phrasing', 'syndetic lists', 'grammatical structure' or 'declaratives' was less productive – this kind of approach resulted in observational comment rather than analysis of meaning.

Most candidates had a good understanding of the advertising genre and effectively explored conventions (e.g. persuasive language choices, the use of modal verbs, branding, product placement) and genre changes over time (e.g. providing information and instruction for a new product, Text A; the use of a testimony, Text B; point of sale addresses, Texts A and B; synthetic personalisation, Text C). There was a clear sense of how each text aimed to engage readers, with a sensible understanding of the exotic background created in Text A, the sensational link to the viper in Text B, and the simplicity and immediacy of "Potter's Asthma" products in Text C.

Given that the third text was dated 1910, references to informalisation were often overstated. There was a clear change in tone, but the use of rhetorical questions did not make the text "informal." It was also better to refer to the text as an example of Late Modern English rather than Present Day English. Most candidates made effective points about the relationship established with the reader through the repetition of second person pronouns, but some extravagant claims were made for declaratives. Links between declarative sentences and the "truthfulness" or "trustworthiness" of the writer or the product were unconvincing – the grammatical mood of the sentences would be the same whether the claims were true or not.

Discussion of the ways context shaped each advertisement was constructive and it was good to see candidates making sensible use of the contextual information provided. An awareness of limited personal travel experiences, cultural references to *cleer and white* skin, the names of diseases and conditions indicative of the period, and the emphasis on a local target audience were explored in relation to the two earlier texts. There was some sensible discussion of gender with the reference to *Mis-carryings* in Text A, which was linked to discussion of the high child mortality rates in the seventeenth century. A misreading of *Spirits*, however, led to some unconvincing discussion about religion in Text A – better comments were focused on the connotations of *Miracle* in Text B. The contextual factors addressed for Text C often included the effects of air pollution post-industrial revolution, the fact that a flyer can be distributed to a wide audience cheaply and the low price of the product (linked to the adverb *but*, l.19). Contextual factors such as these often formed the basis for useful links between the texts.

In terms of approach, there are certain things which candidates could do to improve the overall quality of their responses. It would be sensible to gather together common elements of discussion across the three texts. Text A, for instance, was identified as having a primary conative function and a secondary referential function, and this information was then repeated in the discussion of both Text B and Text C. It would be far more efficient to have a comparative introductory paragraph (AO4), linking the texts by establishing their similarity of purpose. Lists of quotations should be avoided – when candidates try to address a range of textual support at the same time, discussion of meaning becomes too general. Similarly, overly broad statements are not helpful. References to figurative language and subject pronouns “making the tenor informal” or to any adjective with positive connotations “making the tone hyperbolic” suggest a misunderstanding of linguistic principles and a lack of engagement with the examples in context.

There were still a number of responses where description of language change features replaced meaningful engagement – either throughout the whole essay or in substantial parts of it. While demonstrating secure knowledge, broad observations about spelling, key linguistic publications, and references to the examples cited in parts (a) to (d) prevented candidates from answering the question. Unless references to language change are directly tied to the texts, they lead candidates away from the task. It is worth reminding candidates that they need to use a range of appropriate terminology to support their discussion of the texts – linguistic knowledge is an integral part of unseen analysis.

Characteristics of successful responses:

- well-shaped essay responses that clearly address the question
- an explicit focus on genre
- engagement with details of the texts
- discussion of contextual features linked directly to content and meaning
- the use of relevant terminology to underpin points made.

Areas for improvement:

- close reading of the texts
- engagement with meaning and interpretation
- the use of a wider range of terminology (beyond basic word class labelling)
- more careful focusing of the essay content in the light of the question
- technical accuracy and fluency of expression.

Summary of key points: key considerations for centres

- responses should address a range of points
- explicit references to the content should form the basis for engagement with meaning
- grammar teaching needs to address all the language levels.

Section B: English in the Twenty-First Century

Three assessment objectives are covered in Section B: AO1, AO2 and AO3. The marks for these are not equally weighted. Since AO3 is worth double, it is important that candidates spend sufficient time exploring context and the construction of meaning (AO3). In Question 3, marks were awarded for each separate assessment objective.

AO1 (10 marks)

Candidates needed to demonstrate their ability to use a range of appropriate linguistic terminology to underpin analysis of the email subject lines. This enabled candidates to develop a critical approach. The fluency and technical accuracy of the writing was also assessed here.

AO2 (10 marks)

Candidates needed to demonstrate their knowledge of the genre and medium explicitly. Discussion of relevant issues (e.g. social groups, corporate groups, attitudes to language use) and concepts (e.g. informalisation, language functions, sociolect, accommodation, synthetic personalisation) was valid when it was linked directly to the genre and the content of the data. The ability to provide appropriate and concise supporting quotation was also critical.

AO3 (20 marks)

Candidates needed to engage with the data, exploring details and interpreting meaning. It was important that the data was analysed, but other examples of email subject lines could be discussed. Because of the mark weighting, addressing context (e.g. different types of subject lines) and other contextual factors (producer, target audience, purpose) needed to form the basis for the discussion.

Section A: English in the Twenty-First Century

Question 3 (Essay)

This question tests the candidate's ability to analyse language using accurate terminology and an appropriate style, to evaluate the construction of meaning in context, and to apply knowledge of relevant concepts and issues in order to explore the writers' language choices.

Candidates seemed to enjoy writing about the data and demonstrated a good understanding of the medium (email) and genre (subject lines). Background information was mostly well integrated, although there was some awkwardly placed discussion of prescriptive and descriptive attitudes to language (sometimes with a paragraph on the candidate's personal feelings). In these cases, focus on the question was lost because this was very obviously pre-learned material, which was recounted rather than applied. Wider examples often lost focus on the genre – messaging and social media posts rather than examples of subject lines were cited. Where examples did draw on the medium, they tended to be more typical of the body of an email than the subject line. The question draws attention to the specific genre in the italicised information above the question box and in the question itself. Candidates would be well advised to highlight the genre to ensure that their focus does not drift.

There was some effective grouping of texts according to their function, the sender, the intended audience, and the relationship between producer/receiver. Candidates used the contextual information provided in brackets sensibly to help them organise their approach. This helped them to address the linguistic features typical of particular types of subject line (e.g. personal vs corporate; referential vs conative). Appropriate references to other contextual factors demonstrated sound knowledge e.g. discussion of variations in marketing style (Texts 1 and 5), the role of shared knowledge (Texts 3 and 7), distinctive features of phishing emails (Text 10), the use of seasonal references (Texts 1 and 5). Other approaches included sensible groupings such as "people you know, websites you use, and unsolicited messages". A brief overview in the introduction was an effective method of setting up this focus, allowing candidates to establish the direction of their essays. Where candidates analysed a range of examples from the data, their responses were well balanced.

Responses were less effective when candidates did not foreground context. Exploring the data text by text is an acceptable approach to answering the question, but candidates must address contextual factors in order to meet the requirements of AO3. In many cases, topic sentences focused on key features of digital English (e.g. the lack of punctuation, non-standard spelling, colloquialisms). This often led to essays which became list-like, with a focus on recounting broad knowledge rather than on analysing and evaluating. In these responses, there was little sense of engagement with meaning.

Discussion of non-standard language features typical of twenty-first century English demonstrated sound knowledge of language concepts, but the use of linguistic terminology to describe the form of features (AO1) was often underdeveloped. For instance, clipping was identified as a distinctive feature of notifications, but few candidates described *Mon* and *Nov* as proper nouns (form); many identified the non-standard capitalisation of *Guys*, but few described it as a vocative (function); the phonetic fricative *Pff* was appropriately linked to meaning (indicative of disappointment or annoyance), but it was not described as an interjection. To fulfil the requirements of AO1, candidates should be using a range of terminology to describe the features they explore.

Many candidates explored the data sensibly. They recognised different techniques of engagement in promotional subject lines (Texts 1 and 5), explored the unspoken subtext of personal communications (Texts 3 and 7), evaluated the economy of notifications (Texts 2, 8 and 9), and considered the effect of transactional messages (Texts 4, 6 and 10). There were, however, places where candidates could be more subtle in their discussion of meaning in context. The use of capitalisation, for instance, does not always represent “shouting”. Those who explored it as a typographical feature to attract attention in a crowded inbox tied their discussion more closely to the question. Similarly, the use of ellipsis and the @ symbol does not make Text 2 “informal” – it is evidence of the economy principle.

Where references to theory underpinned analysis of the data it was useful. Discussion of synthetic personalisation and the pseudo-relationship created with the audience, of informalisation, online disinhibition and the economy principle demonstrated understanding of concepts and the way subject lines work. There were some astute readings of the data which recognised the positive connotations of *Kicking ass* (Text 4) and the gender-neutral meaning of *Guys* (Text 7) in contemporary usage. Discussion of Text 6 was also insightful, with candidates exploring the negative politeness of the request (the use of the modal verb *would*) and the implicit suggestion by the company that in unsubscribing the user would be losing something. There were also some perceptive, topical references to GDPR and issues of consent. Where candidates described features but did not engage with meaning, it was harder to access the full range of marks in AO3.

One of the pleasures of marking Question 3 is the obvious enthusiasm of the students and the currency of work on computer-mediated communication going on in the classroom.

Characteristics of successful responses:

- clear organisation and fluent, accurate expression
- an explicit focus on different subject lines and wider contextual factors (often through carefully composed topic sentences)
- analysis of the data using appropriate linguistic terminology
- a demonstration of wider knowledge about the medium and associated concepts.

Areas for improvement:

- covering a range of contexts
- selecting wider examples that are tied closely to the focus of the question
- using a range of terminology to underpin analysis.

Summary of key points: key considerations for centres

- learning to read the question, the contextual information and the data carefully will help candidates to shape their response appropriately
- practising close reading of data sets will help candidates to develop their analytical and evaluative skills.

Conclusion

There was evidence across the bands that candidates had followed a language course. They had clearly been prepared for the demands of the paper and most demonstrated a range of appropriate knowledge. Where the emphasis was on relating this knowledge directly to the question and on using a wide-range of terminology to underpin exploration of meaning, and where there was evidence of personal engagement, responses were a pleasure to read.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2018

COMPONENT 3 - CREATIVE AND CRITICAL USE OF LANGUAGE

General Comments

Almost all candidates seemed well prepared to choose their preferred question by topic or tasks, and to complete all parts confidently. Most had clearly practised responding to set tasks and demonstrated awareness of crafting writing for a specific audience and purpose. As last year, the main discriminator was the ability to tailor an appropriate response to the specific details given. Candidates seemed more at ease in writing commentaries this year. The commentary is worth just 25% of the marks for this paper and therefore should be concise.

Question 1

The estate agent's particulars for Bridgedown, Dorset, described a substantial, historic building and grounds. The extract from the property brochure was easily understood. True to genre, it gave a positive description of the property's less common assets, enhancing its otherwise formulaic listing of rooms and grounds. The property's wealth of features offered material for the writing tasks.

- a) The question asked for a radio script appealing for volunteers. There were a number of specifics in the task:
- the appeal was to be broadcast on local radio (Dorset)
 - Recover, the charity given the property, planned to use Bridgedown as an educational and recreational centre for disadvantaged children
 - the volunteer help required included painting, cleaning and gardening
 - the advised length was 250 words.

Successful responses had a spoken voice appropriate for local radio, e.g. a spokesperson for the charity was sometimes introduced by a radio presenter. Effective persuasive techniques were used and combined with a friendly tone. The need for volunteers was succinctly explained with clear contact details. Weaker responses did not focus on aspects of the task: some were appeals for money for the charity; others were anecdotal on the problems for disadvantaged families; a few were over-creative on the jobs volunteers could do and how it would be of benefit to their future careers; some were verbose, while many did not provide basic contact information. A few lacked a spoken voice or sense of audience address.

- b) This question required candidates to write an extract from a spy thriller novel in which Bridgedown featured as a setting. While the genre and location were specified, candidates were otherwise free to create character and situation. Strong responses created tension and atmosphere effectively, aware that this was an extract from a novel and therefore a resolution was unnecessary. Dialogue was often used to good effect and a first person viewpoint or present tense usage sometimes intensified the reader's engagement.

Less successful responses often lost narrative control, for example with too many characters or in an unlikely gun fight. Some tangled past and present tense or failed to create atmosphere. A few missed the instruction to use Bridgedown as a setting and used tropical islands or even an aeroplane as the background for unclear missions. Some attempted a spoof of the James Bond style, even in one case using rats as characters, but these were seldom sufficiently well realised to entertain.

Question 2

The fictional stimulus material depicted a character struggling to settle down to work as she is distracted by her surroundings in an ancient library. The description richly evoked the smells, sights and sounds which challenge her concentration. This question was chosen by a majority of candidates who clearly empathised with her situation.

- a) Candidates were required to write an article on the problems of maintaining concentration while revising. This was for an edition dedicated to revision for their school magazine. The task asked for the article to be lively and entertaining and to include some helpful advice. The candidates who chose this clearly saw it as their specialist subject and were not at a loss for content. Almost all were confident in matching an apt form of address to their target audience of peers. The challenge was in the tight focus on the problems of maintaining concentration while revising, rather than giving general advice on revision.

Strong responses were well structured, often with a title and subheadings, to create a convincing magazine article. The audience was targeted through shared references and empathy with their situation. The tone and content were carefully balanced between humour, understanding and advice. Problems were identified, often with apt examples, and sensible solutions offered, such as new ways of working. The best avoided multiple imperatives, offering mitigated suggestions.

Less successful candidates often wrote at length about the distractions, especially phones, nights out, *Love Island* and football. Solutions offered were breaks, treats and looking forward to the summer. The tenor was sometimes either inappropriately informal for a school publication or tediously didactic. A few adopted the persona of a teacher giving advice but these were less plausible.

- b) This second task, writing a descriptive extract from a short story in which the surroundings distract a character, allowed candidates freedom to choose their own genre and scenario. There were some powerful descriptions in the stronger responses, often multi-sensory as suggested by the stimulus material.

The distraction took many forms, from absent mindedness to mania. Many took inspiration from the exam situation, reporting the pressure of a ticking clock, coughs, squeaking chairs and the clicking high heels of invigilators as distractions. As this was an extract from a short story, there needed to be some development of character and/or consequences beyond the exam hall.

As last year, a minority of weaker responses seemed ready-prepared and forced to fit the given task. A few appeared to have practised and inappropriately repeated responses to the 2017 dystopian task. Others wrote horror tales where the distraction was extreme and implausible. In some, the imagery was over-elaborate impeding communication of meaning.

Questions 1 and 2 (a) and (b)

Characteristics of successful responses

- Engagement with the stimulus material and close reading of each task.
- Checking genre, audience, purpose(s) and ensuring these inform language choices.
- Bringing fresh thinking to each task asking what would work for this form? This audience? This purpose?
- A planned, structured piece with some guidance of audience response and a confident voice.
- Consistent narrative control including tense and viewpoint.
- A fluent, accurate, well-judged style.

Areas for improvement

- Misreading the task or using pre-prepared ideas.
- Unplanned, inconsistent pieces – sometimes short or over-long.
- Loss of narrative control.
- Technical inaccuracy: punctuation and spelling (including words given in the materials); failure to use paragraphs.
- Florid lexical choices and impenetrable imagery.

Key points for centres

- Candidates should practise unpicking the specific requirements of each task.
- Encourage an individual, tailored response.
- Many unnecessarily exceed the advised word count.
- Advise candidates to spend a few minutes planning and proof-reading work

(c) Candidates chose one of their two creative pieces for comment.

Strong commentaries focused on the linguistic choices made purposefully for the given context. These explored specific features which created, for example, an appropriate audience address, a persuasive tenor or a disturbing atmosphere. A range of accurate terminology was used and anchored with precise examples. Each technique was linked purposefully with others in topic paragraphs. Evaluation was embedded in the analysis of the effects of the conscious choices made.

Less developed commentaries tended to identify linguistic features using basic terminology, often word classes, but failed to anchor these sufficiently in an analysis of the construction of meaning or appropriateness for context. Some simply identified features in a fairly meaningless list. Others used more sophisticated linguistic terminology but failed to achieve a high mark as its purpose was not sufficiently analysed or evaluated. A few were simply inaccurate and struggled to explore their text. Evaluation should be embedded in the discussion. Many weaker candidates spent time describing their failure to include certain features. This is not evaluation of their writing and could not be rewarded.

Characteristics of successful responses

- A succinct discussion of the linguistic and stylistic techniques chosen and how these combined to shape the piece for audience, purpose, genre and form.
- Accurate identification of selected, specific linguistic features, apt illustration and exploration of their effects in context.
- Topic paragraphs to link points which contributed to the same effect, e.g. description of surroundings.
- Embedding evaluation in the discussion.

Areas for improvement

- Lists of terminology often with relevant quotation but lacking exploration.
- A narrow range, often limited to word classes.
- Inaccuracy, especially frequent in identifying types of phrases and sentence types, e.g. clauses were often identified as verb phrases and exclamative was used for any sentence ending with an exclamation mark N.B. Exclamatives begin with 'How...!' or 'What...!'
- Irrelevant discussion of what was not included.
- Vague and unfocussed overview and evaluation.

Key points for centres

- Avoid lengthy overviews, use the context to discuss language choices.
- Advise use of topic paragraphs to link exemplified points with effects.
- Practise accurate identification of linguistic features in own writing.
- Evaluation should be embedded in analysis.

Conclusion

Nearly all candidates were able to complete all three parts of their response, suggesting that the time given was sufficient and that they were able to apportion this time appropriately. There were few rubric infringements.

This component requires the application of knowledge gained in all aspects of the course. Candidates may be confident with, for example, analysing journalism but using this experience to write an article needs practice. Those candidates who read the non-literary tasks thoroughly, 1a and 2a, were able to create apt responses well-matched to purpose. Where this close reading was less evident, or where candidates misunderstood the key features of the given genre, achievement was significantly lower. Practising short specific tasks in class would be helpful preparation.

1b and 2b offered more freedom in approach but candidates should be aware of form. An extract from a novel does not require a climax and resolution. An extract from a short story needs some clues to development.

Many candidates were on more familiar ground with their commentary and able to use linguistic terminology with precision. Identification is not enough here, though; AO3 requires analysis and evaluation of contextual factors and the construction of meaning.

Most candidates produced thoughtful and engaging responses and the examining team for this component found marking a rewarding experience.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2018

COMPONENT 4 – LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

General Comments

Now in its second year, the new specification NEA has really taken off. There were very few problems and certainly both centres and candidates seem to have coped extremely well with the opportunities offered by the increased length of the investigation. Nearly all centres encouraged their candidates to select an aspect of language study of personal interest to them and this was apparent through the evident engagement demonstrated in the investigations themselves. As last year, the most successful investigations had a consistently strong linguistic focus, embedded theory and were written in a coherent, academic style. Most candidates included bibliographies and appendices where relevant.

There were some problematic areas this year, which need to be addressed. A number of candidates, from different centres, chose to include Disney film scripts as part of their data, with the most popular being *Brave*, *Tangled*, *Frozen* and *The Little Mermaid*. The difficulty with using this type of data is that the characters are fictional constructions yet many candidates treated them as real people, which resulted in discussions centred on characteristics rather than identity. In addition, the language used within such films rarely offer candidates the scope of discussion required for an A level investigation. Finally, most discussion was centred on gender stereotyping, whereas the focus must be on language and identity. Candidates who chose to examine fairy tales – another popular choice – often produced more successful studies as many included the work of feminist writers such as Angela Carter, as part of their data. These tended to have a much closer focus upon how women were identified by society at different periods.

Another problem across the cohort was the lack of explicit focus on the main theme of language and identity. Candidates are still using terms such as stereotyping, ideology and representation instead of identity. It was suggested last year that including the word 'identity' in the investigation title would be helpful in sustaining a focus on this central theme. To this end, examples of tightly focused titles and other less successful titles have been included in the report of each of the four language areas. It would be good practice for candidates to produce titles that clearly show how language and identity will be at the centre of their investigations.

Finally, a small number of candidates opted to produce diachronic studies of advertisements. There were some problems with these, as often candidates chose to prioritise graphology over language. Others used media based terminology such as the hypodermic needle theory rather than linguistic theory. Many such investigations were quite generic and descriptive with a tendency to discuss stereotyping and gender differences. The more tightly focused a study is, the more successful it is likely to be.

Assessment Objectives

The majority of centres this year demonstrated a very good understanding of AO1b and AO1c, with the investigations being generally well organised with an obvious linguistic focus.

As was stated in last year's report, however, to score well on the double weighted AO1a, it is necessary for candidates to demonstrate that their study is clearly focused on identity and language thereby offering a secure interpretation. It is difficult for candidates to do this if they do not even mention identity when setting out their initial hypothesis. Similarly with AO3, a candidate must be able to offer both an overview of their findings and some evaluation as to how contextual factors and identity have been shown to be associated in the body of their work. Regarding AO2, many candidates were able to offer a competent critical understanding of relevant concepts and issues; however other candidates used irrelevant or dated theory. This was not always used to inform the study, sometimes merely being described. It is vitally important that candidates are taught what is required by AO1a, AO2 and AO3, as between them they are worth 75% of the marks awarded.

Four Language Areas

1. Language and self-representation

Fewer candidates opted for this aspect of study compared with last year. Their studies were, however on the whole, well-focused and analytical. The best studies demonstrated a strong grasp of issues and concepts, and candidates used relevant linguistic theory to inform their work. A number of candidates chose to examine politeness strategies and issues of formality by sensibly referring to, for example, Goffman's Face theory, Giles' Accommodation theory and Brown and Levinson's work on Positive and Negative Politeness. The best candidates offered a variety of both written and spoken data. The less successful studies tended to merely describe language choices with only limited analysis. A minority of candidates are still misinterpreting this aspect of language study by discussing the representation of others rather than themselves.

Two examples of closely focused titles

- *How do I use language in different situations and contexts to represent myself and construct the linguistic **identities** that constitute my personal linguistic repertoire?*
- *An investigation into the ways I use language in order to construct different **identities** and **idiolects** for myself, depending on context.*

Two examples of less focused titles

- *Does the medium and context of a conversation affect the register and formality I use?*
- *Does my context, audience and purpose have an impact on the way I speak in terms of grammar, lexis and formality?*

2. Language and gender

As in previous years, gender was the most popular choice for candidates. Some of the best studies used song lyrics as a way of examining gender and identity. Others made use of texts written by feminists. Investigations into language and identity focusing on drag queens and the transgender community were generally, but not always, thoughtful and well researched. The less successful candidates tended to merely examine gender differences by choosing to concentrate on stereotyping instead of identity. Other investigations were very broad and failed to have a definite focus. There was also a tendency to exclusively reference theorists from the 1970s such as Lakoff, and Zimmerman and West, whose ideas have been challenged over the intervening years, instead of including more contemporary sources or even alternative readings such as O'Barr and Atkins, and Beattie.

Two examples of closely focused titles

- *Using relevant data, investigate and analyse the ways by which female artists use their music to reclaim their female **identity**.*
- *How has the representation of women's **identity** changed over time in children's stories? What does this tell us about attitudes to women in each society?*

Two examples of less focused titles

- *What is the relationship between language and gender in transgender autobiographies?*
- *Do girls give linguistic direction more effectively than boys in a co-coaching environment?*

3. Language and culture

There was a truly diverse range of investigations within this language area. The majority of candidates had clearly been allowed to define their own areas of study and to collect their own data, which was frequently quite fascinating.

Studies included issues such as: mental health and identity; criminality and criminals' identity; how Donald Trump has used language to create his own unique identity; how newspapers manipulate language to create identities, and many other highly original approaches. There was generally a strong sense of personal engagement in these studies and they were often wide-ranging and enlightening.

Two examples of closely focused titles

- *Using relevant data, investigate and analyse the presentation of the **identity** of Liverpool fans in the language used by The Sun at the time of the Hillsborough disaster and later, when the paper apologises for false statements made in the original report.*
- *How do the sermons of three Christian church services reflect the **identity** of the specific denominations?*

Two examples of less focused titles

- *Using relevant data, investigate and analyse how these 21st century Christian songs convey the cultural ideologies of Christianity?*
- *Do certain situations in football alter the ways in which language is used by football-fans?*

4. Language diversity

It was good to note that many more candidates chose to explore and interpret aspects of diversity this year. Some of the most successful studies involved studying song lyrics in order to show how distinctive varieties of English may be linked closely to identity. Grime was a popular choice as was Rap, with candidates able to produce academic studies investigating how an identity might be created by the lyricist's choice of language.

There were also some interesting studies exploring urban youth language and AAVE. Less successful studies tended to focus almost entirely on class stereotyping linked to language choices, frequently using television scripts. These studies invariably lacked an explicit emphasis on identity with a number of candidates failing to move beyond characterisation.

Two examples of closely focused titles

- *Using relevant data, explore and analyse how speakers conveyed a Mancunian **identity** in the aftermath of the Manchester bombing of 2017.*

- *Using relevant data, investigate and analyse the ways in which Grime artists use language to create diverse **identities** in the Grime music scene.*

Two examples of less focused titles

- *To what extent does the language of the law in the media reflect real life?*
- *Using relevant data, analyse and investigate the ways in which the characters in 'Only Fools and Horses' comply with cultural working-class stereotypes.*

Characteristics of successful responses included:

- a clear focus on language and identity
- a range of sustained apt terminology
- a well organised study with topic sentences used throughout
- well-embedded linguistic theory used to inform the investigation
- an understanding of how contextual factors are associated with the construction of meaning
- a familiarity with the assessment objectives and their descriptors.

Areas for improvement:

- a knowledge of genre
- a clearly defined hypothesis closely linked to language and identity
- the selection of concepts and issues relevant to the investigation
- analysis of data rather than description
- the use of data that provides enough breadth and depth for an A level investigation.

Summary of key points: key considerations for centres

- the main theme of language and identity must be a focus for investigations
- theory must be used to inform
- language and self-representation must be an investigation into the learner's own language choices
- investigations covering fictional genres can be successful but are often problematic
- when mentioning linguistic research or theories try not to use dated material
- ensure that all candidates understand the requirements of AO1a, AO2 and AO3
- replace terms such as stereotyping, ideology and representation with identity.

Conclusion

Once again, my team of moderators and I would like to take this opportunity to commend centres for their professionalism and enthusiasm. We recognise the effort made by both centres and candidates in order to produce a successful submission. There were many examples of good practice this year and it is heartening to note that many of the points raised in last year's report have been acted on by centres.



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