A level

English Language

Component 1

Language, Concepts and Issues

Conference booklet

**Activity 1: Section A**

Read these four extracts from candidates’ work and put them in order of success. Highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Candidate 1:

Boris Johnson uses a lot of prosodic features when answering Eddie Mair. He emphasises the words “sure” and “that” to make his point and sometimes slows up (line 9) and sometimes speeds up his talk (line 16). It is Eddie who does more overlaps, though (lines 5 and 14). They are clearly not getting on well and the fact that Eddie overlaps Boris shows that he is not very happy with the answers Boris gives and is really cross with him. Another prosodic feature is the way in which Boris says “you know” which uses the phonetic alphabet. This is called a filler. Prosodic features are a very important element of spoken language.

Candidate 2:

In contrast, Hannity is much more supportive when interviewing Trump. His use of back channel communication such as “right” and his co-operative overlap on line 9 where he praises Trump’s ideas both contrast with Mair’s hostile questioning of Johnson. He describes the fact that some people did not vote for Trump as “frustrating and disappointing”, adjectives which indicate that he shares Trump’s unhappiness with them. He also responds to Trump praising his ratings by saying “they’ll be higher tonight”, where the comparative adjective “higher” indicates that Trump’s appearance on the programme will increase the ratings further.

Candidate 3:

Johnson’s language seeks to downplay the seriousness of his failures throughout the exchange. Where Mair uses the phrasal verb “made up”, Johnson uses the clause “I mildly sandpapered something” where both the adverb “mildly” and the dynamic verb “sandpapered” make the distortion appear minor and inconsequential. Where Mair’s discourse remains face threatening throughout with noun phrases such as “a barefaced lie” and “a nasty piece of work”, Johnson seeks to avoid discussion of these issues from his past. He even directly challenges Mair’s role as the approved topic manager by using the interrogative clause “why don’t we talk about something else?”.

Candidate 4:

Trump’s selling of his policies is clear in his long turns near the start of the transcript. He says that he healthcare is going to be “great” (an adjective) and later says that it will be “fantastic” (another adjective which he stresses for greater emphasis). He makes it clear that lots of people will do well and specifically mentions “truckers” (noun). He uses statistics to show how many will gain going as high as “50%”, although he does seem a little uncertain about it, in the end saying it will be “a large percentage”. Overall, he is very confident that his policies will pass and he makes them sound very good and appealing.

**Activity 2: Question 2**

**Sample Paragraph A**

Another example we studied in class is Parkinson interviewing Beckham. Parkinson is quite aggressive and face-threatening saying that the team’s performance was “awful” (an adjective) and that English footballers are very stupid. Beckham hedges his response saying “maybe” and seems uncomfortable, recognising that he is under attack. He is less certain in his speech and use a lot of non-fluency features showing that he is very nervous. Parkinson is the topic manager here and determines what is being spoken about. He is also more powerful and holds the floor for longer. He speaks at length about a discussion he has had with a former England manager in which he said that English footballers were “less intelligent” (an adjective phrase), showing his desire to dominate the conversation and humiliate his guest. This is not necessarily typical of most chat shows as often the discussion is more friendly with the two speakers making an effort to get on. In this case, there seems to be a breakdown of relations between the two as Parkinson is antagonistic.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *AO3 Strengths* | *AO3 Weaknesses* |

**Sample Paragraph B**

Chat shows are another example of speech situations where speakers alter their discourse depending on the audience. Michael Parkinson’s final show in 2008 involved a series of famous guests. His language in interviewing Michael Caine was predictably respectful, involving a lot of face work such as consistently using the vocative “Sir Michael” and the noun phrase “our greatest living film actor”, where the possessive determiner “our” suggests a national pride in his achievements. In contrast, when interviewing David Beckham after the English football team’s failure to win an important game, he is overtly face-threatening. His use of the adjective “awful” to describe the performance as well as the challenging tag question “wasn’t it” holds Beckham personally responsible for the defeat. Parkinson’s contrasting use of language in handling his two guests possibly reflects his own feelings: his respect for Caine and his disappointment about England’s defeat. Despite the clearly defined roles in a chat show, Parkinson changes his language depending on the interviewee.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *AO3 Strengths* | *AO3 Weaknesses* |

**Activity 3: *The Voice***

**Read and annotate the following extract with both of the following questions in mind.**

Question 1

**Analyse and evaluate the ways in which politeness influences spoken interactions.**

Question 2

**Analyse and evaluate the ways in which participants can control and dominate spoken interactions.**

**BG**: Boy George **N**: Niamh

**BG** ⭧hello (.) what's your name
**N** my name's Niamh I'm eighteen and I come from County Donegal in Ireland =
**BG** = a good Irish girl *{loud audience cheers and Niamh raises her hand}* let me
 tell you why I didn't turn (.) I thought it was a little bit of a shaky (.)
 // performance I mean I could really (.) tell your nerves but you have a **really**
**N** // yes
**BG** // pretty voice (.) and unfortunately with a song like that (.) it's all about your
**N** //yeah
**BG** //voice and the guitar and so when you're exposed (.) and you wobble (.) it's
**N** //yeah (.)
**BG** I know (.) I mean listen about a year ago I did a performance on Strictly Come
 Dancing when I howled my way through Karma Camelian // a song that I'v e
**N** // *{laughs}*
**BG** been singing since I was /twen?i:/ one and you know it turned out I had a
 polyp on my th. throat but I was ready to retire (.) people saying // oh my God
**N** // *{laughs}*
**BG** accel he's really lost his voice just give up /jənəʊ/ so really the point of me telling
 you that story is that there is something there (.) and it's definitely worth
 exploring (.) and you know us not turning is not (.) you know (.) give up (.) it's
 like (.) you didn't nail it in **this** performance but other people have seen you
 and you've got something to build on and what you **do** with that is really the
 essential // thing but ⭨yeah you're a beautiful Irish girl and I wish you all the
**N** // course course
**BG** luck in the world =
**N** = thank you very much (.) thank you

Question 1: **Analyse and evaluate the ways in which politeness influences spoken interactions.**

|  |
| --- |
| Topic Sentence: |

|  |
| --- |
| Plan/Draft the rest of the paragraph: |

Question 2: **Analyse and evaluate the ways in which participants can control and dominate spoken interactions.**

|  |
| --- |
| Topic Sentence: |

|  |
| --- |
| Plan/Draft the rest of the paragraph: |

**Exemplar Responses**

*Question 1:* Analyse and evaluate the ways in which politeness influences spoken interactions.

Even in speech situations where you might expect less emphasis on politeness, speakers’ desire to avoid face-threatening features is often clear. In an extract from the TV series “The Voice”, Boy George uses the adjective “shaky” to describe the voice of a young Irish woman, who has not performed well. Interestingly, he seeks to mitigate the criticism through face work, using prosodic emphasis on the intensifying adverb in the noun phrase “really pretty voice” and on the demonstrative determiner in the clause “you didn’t nail it in this performance”, implying that her failure was not an indication of the overall talent. In the closing sequence, he uses a compound utterance “you’re a beautiful Irish girl and I wish you all the luck in the world” where his use of the pre-modifying adjective “Irish” seeks to narrow the social distance between them with the implicit reference to his own family background. Even in this context where the primary purpose of the exchange is to make critical judgements, Boy George’s discourse is marked by his desire to ensure, in Brown and Levinson’s words, that other participants “feel affirmed in every social interaction”.

*Question 2:* Analyse and evaluate the ways in which participants can control and dominate spoken interactions.

In many speech situations, the asymmetrical nature of the exchange means that the roles played by speakers predetermine the control of the conversation. In the TV talent show “The Voice”, the judges comment directly to the performers, acting as topic managers throughout and having a markedly higher MLU. Boy George’s dominance in one exchange is also revealed by the directness of his initial interrogative “what’s your name” when addressing the contestant as well as his repeated use of imperative verbs “let me tell you” and “listen about a year ago”. His ability to control the exchange is also revealed through the minimal responses of Niamh, the young contestant, whose overlapping of Boy George’s speech with the colloquial interjection “yeah” shows her acceptance of his dominance and her unwillingness to challenge his authority here. This is entirely characteristic of what Norman Fairclough would call an “unequal exchange” where the power relations allow one speaker to impose conversational constraints on another.

**Contextualising Analysis: Comparing Paragraphs**

Look at the following three examples of paragraphs for both Questions 3 and 4, putting them in order and noting their strengths and weaknesses

Question 3:

Analyse and evaluate the ways in which children acquire language up to the age of 24 months.

Material Used: Two Word Stage

A. The next stage is the Two Word Stage. Here, children use two words rather than one which is what they have been doing in the One Word Stage. This allows them to say more complex things because they can use more words to describe things or to convey their feelings more. It is true, however, that some utterances made at this point are still unclear so that the parent has to try and work out what is being said. It is only later on as the child acquires more words and can use more complex forms that understanding improves. The adult spends a lot of time encouraging their child to speak, since communication is so crucial.

B. Having acquired the capacity to use single words in the Holophrastic Stage, children progress to the Two Word Stage, generally when they are around 18 months. Characteristically, a child may combine a noun and a verb (“Mummy kiss”) or a noun and an adjective (“water hot”). This is a crucial moment since it marks the beginning of syntactical forms, albeit at a basic level. Roger Brown’s work also reveals that the first use of inflections can occur at this point, specifically morpheme “-ing” in the present participle “Daddy going”. Again, the fact that inflections are acquired in a specific order by children supports Chomsky’s belief in a genetic dimension to the process.

C. The Two Word Stage occurs generally between 18 and 24 months. In this point, children combine two words together to form elementary sentences such as “Johnny slow” or “train running”, missing out a lot of words. Although not necessarily as exciting for parents as the child’s acquisition of their first word, it is nonetheless a crucial moment in the process of acquisition. Here the child is developing a grammatical understanding of language and research suggests that by 24 months, nearly all children have acquired the capacity to do this. The ability to use three or more words in an utterance (commonly called the Telegraphic Stage) follows from this but usually takes place after 24 months.

Question 4:

Analyse and evaluate the ways in which some people see standard forms of language as having a higher status than non-standard forms.

Material Used: Lindsay John’s views of non-standard forms

A. The prescriptivist view is clearly unconvincing, therefore. The very fact that standard English changes over time makes it impossible to claim that it is inherently “correct”. For instance, multiple negation is a common feature in many dialects today (“she never said nothing”), with prescriptivists insisting that the indefinite pronoun should be “anything”. However, in Middle English, multiple negation was common and Chaucer used it consistently to emphasise a point: “there never was no man nowhere so virtuous”. Interestingly, some writers such as Lindsay Johns, while accepting this point, nevertheless argue that it is crucial for young people to use standard forms because of social judgements that are made about it. He believes that features of Multicultural Urban English such as the tag question “innit” make the speaker sound unintelligent in, for instance, job interviews. The ability to use standard English is, according to Johns, a crucial skill in contemporary Britain.

B. Lindsay Johns and Michael Rosen disagree about standard English and non-standard English. Johns thinks that non-standard forms are bad and that children at school should be corrected when they use them. Young people use a double negative, for instance. In contrast, Rosen thinks they are fine and that children can learn to speak differently in different situations. Going back to what was said earlier, Johns is a prescriptivist but Rosen a descriptivist since he just wants to describe language rather than suggest one form is better than another. These different views show that this remains a very controversial issue and that many people disagree about whether it is a good thing to use standard forms all the time or whether it doesn’t really matter.

C. Lindsay Johns argues that children acquire power by speaking in standard forms. For instance, in a classroom situation, the teacher has the power and initiates the turns. This is what Sinclair and Coulthard would call IRF – Initiation, response, feedback. So, the teacher would say “when did the war start?” and the student would say “1939” and the teacher would say “good”. In this case, the teacher is the topic manager and controlling the conversation, asserting their power in the exchange. If the student was to say something wrong or not speak properly, the teacher would be critical of this. If the student is to have power, they have to use standard forms so that they can be understood. If a student refuses to do this, it is called a face-threatening act and can be said to be challenging the authority of the teacher. Johns does not approve of this as he thinks children should speak correctly in the classroom.