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# **GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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## **ENGLISH LANGUAGE A LEVEL**

**SUMMER 2017**

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**GCE A LEVEL ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**Summer 2017**

**COMPONENT 1**

Most centres, approaching this component for the first time, have clearly prepared their students very well for both parts of the exam. The texts on Section A were accessible to a wide range of candidates with many answers comparing the transcripts from “Strictly Come Dancing” and “The Voice” with precision and insight. The essays on Section B marked a departure from previous WJEC exams and it was pleasing to note that many candidates relished the challenge of using a wide variety of material in answering the questions. All three questions in Section B were popular with Question 4 (Standard and Non-Standard) marginally the most popular.

**Section A: Analysis of Spoken Language**

Candidates responded well to both texts and, for the most part, judged their timing well. In general, many answers revealed a strong grasp of spoken language features and explored the similarities and differences between the two texts with a clear sense of the genre. In many cases, candidates were able to explore the differences between the largely complementary responses of the judges in Text A and the ways in which the judges in Text B used a variety of devices such as hedging to mitigate their criticism of the performer.

The best candidates successfully related their general understanding of genre and the speakers’ roles to a close analysis of the language used by specific judges. Many candidates profitably compared the hyperbole of Bruno’s language with the discourse used by the other judges, commenting thoughtfully, for instance, on Craig’s use of a face threatening act as establishing his different persona. Similarly, on Text B, there was a lot of intelligent analysis of how the judges sought to support Niamh, despite not having turned in their chairs, as well as how their anecdotes and praise for her as a person attempted to close the social distance between them. This sort of analysis was generally much more profitable than rather vague and often quite lengthy paragraphs, which simply noted non-fluency features and commented broadly on the spontaneity of the speech. A reasonable point in itself, it could have been made in a couple of sentences.

Crucially, the most successful candidates combined a clear overview with detailed use of terminology, including accurate identification of word classes and phrase types. At their best, answers explored the language in context, showing attentiveness to the speakers’ attitudes. For instance, while many commented on Tess’s overlapping of Craig’s turn, the more alert observed how it showed her desire to defend Jay from criticism rather than simply noting that there was competition for the floor. Similarly, while Niamh’s use of backchannelling was widely recognised, some candidates took it to be a constant desire to interrupt and challenge the dominance of the other speakers, which was hard to justify in the context.

A word should be said about the use of theory in this section. While it is certainly permissible to reference theory, it is not essential for candidates to do so in order to score highly on AO2. By thoughtfully analysing the roles of the speakers, their attitudes and relationships within the context of the genre, candidates were able to access high scores. Indeed, sometimes in their desperation to use theoretical approaches, some candidates arrived at somewhat tortuous readings of the texts, arguing, for instance, that Boy George and Ricky Wilson were oppressive patriarchal figures who consistently interrupted Niamh in an attempt to assert dominance. More nuanced use of gender theory, such as observations about Darcey's use of more personalised face work in her use of the noun phrase "a very sensitive man" and the prepositional phrase "in my book", were obviously entirely acceptable. In short, candidates should only use theory when it aids their interpretation.

In addressing AO4, it is important that candidates do seek to compare the texts in some way. However, it is entirely optional whether they choose to use a comparative structure moving between the two texts or to deal with each text in turn, making comparisons as they go along. If they do use the second approach, however, then it is helpful to have a comparative concluding paragraph.

In contrast, introductory paragraphs in many instances were too long. Especially now with less time in which to construct an answer, spending one page of a four page essay commenting quite generally on the audience, purpose and register of the two texts proved a hindrance to candidates. Two or three sentences, focusing briefly on a similarity and/or difference between the texts was often more successful, allowing more time to explore the language in greater detail.

### **Characteristics of successful responses**

- Thoughtful exploration of the attitudes and roles of specific speakers
- Consistent identification of word classes and phrase types as part of the analysis of language
- Clear focus on the precise context in which language was used, revealing an attentive reading of speakers' relationships
- Brief comparative introductions, before moving quickly on to close analysis of language.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Not writing too broadly about genre without referencing specific speakers' attitudes
- Using terminology consistently within each paragraph
- Not forcing in reference to theory in a contrived manner
- Keeping the introductions shorter.

### **Summary of key points: key considerations for centres**

- Focused analysis of the speakers' attitudes with consistent use of terminology in each paragraph allows candidates to read texts attentively
- Unconvincing use of theory does not help candidates and they do not need to reference it at all in order to score well for AO2
- Introductions should not be too long, given the time constraints.

## **Section B: Language Issues**

Centres clearly had taken different approaches to teaching this part of the exam and candidates responded in a variety of ways. Any approach was rewarded that allowed for a clearly expressed and well handled discussion of the topic (AO1), an intelligent awareness of the issues with some possible reference to theory (AO2) and an ability to use contextualised examples to support the argument (AO3).

### **Question 2: Child Language Acquisition**

Many candidates showed a genuinely thorough knowledge of Child Language Acquisition, providing evidence of very careful teaching of the topic. The stimulus material was used either as a brief springboard for further discussion or was returned to at various stages throughout the essay. Either approach was perfectly acceptable. Candidates who focused solely on the stimulus material with little or no reference to anything else did not score very highly, however.

Many answers made effective use of theoretical approaches (referencing either some, or all, of Skinner, Chomsky, Piaget, Bruner, Vygotsky) and relevant research such as Berko's "Wug Test". In contrast, others focused on analysing their own examples of young children's speech, identifying specific linguistic features of the telegraphic and post-telegraphic stages. Again both approaches worked fine as long as the question was addressed directly. Some candidates wrote at length without ever really focusing on the development of language between 24 and 42 months. Obviously, addressing the question is crucial and reproducing a pre-planned CLA essay irrespective of what has been asked is unlikely to score highly. Page-long accounts of the first twelve months of a child's development scored little, however accurate they were. Nevertheless, the best essays showed not only extensive knowledge but an ability to shape the material into a focused and engaging answer.

### **Question 3: Language and Power**

The crucial element in answering this question was having a range of different contextualised examples to explore. While many candidates did successfully use theorists to help frame the argument (Fairclough and Wareing were especially popular), the most common approach was to spend a paragraph or so exploring the implications of Pinker's ideas before going on to consider the use of power in a range of contexts. Analysis of political language (including often intelligent observations about the language used in the latest election campaign) was especially fruitful but candidates also explored advertising, classroom exchanges and legal discourse in an insightful manner. Consideration of how language was used in interpersonal situations drawn from the candidates' own lives was also well-handled by some as long as the examples were linguistically precise.

Where candidates did less well, it was often because their answers were too broad or lacked close analysis. While there is less focus on terminology here than in Section A, answers that did little analysis or failed to explore specific examples of language use tended to fall back on unhelpfully broad statements about the nature of power in our society. Simply noting that teachers are more powerful than students, or even merely giving a general account of Sinclair and Coulthard's IRF model, is not so helpful. More specific exploration of how power is negotiated in this classroom was essential. There was also a danger that some candidates wrote an essay on politeness without maintaining the focus on power. Again, it is crucial that candidates both answer the question directly and analyse specific examples in support of their overall argument if they are to do well.

#### **Question 4: Standard and Non Standard English**

Most candidates again showed an impressive range of knowledge in answering this question, adopting a variety of approaches. The distinction between descriptivism and prescriptivism proved generally helpful for many in framing the argument. Weaker answers sometimes confused the two terms with some candidates misunderstanding the stimulus material and assuming that Trudgill did genuinely think that “low social status” made the accent “bad”. Most, however, used the material effectively as a springboard to a discussion about social attitudes to accent and dialect. One popular approach was to order the argument around a writer with prescriptivist views (Lindsay Johns’ critique of Ghetto Grammar was a common choice) as opposed to a descriptivist approach (both Trudgill and Crystal were well used here). By providing specific examples, including some from their own experience, candidates were able to argue a coherent case, exploring the competing arguments thoughtfully and often reaching cogent conclusions themselves.

Equally, candidates who focused much more heavily on research undertaken in the field were also well rewarded. Trudgill’s own work as well as that by Labov, Milroy and Milroy, Cheshire and Petyt featured prominently in this approach. This ensured that concepts were intelligently explored and, where explanations of the research findings were precise, well supported by contextualised examples. Again, the real skill was to relate the research findings to a cogent overall argument about social attitudes.

One thing worth emphasising, though, is the need for students to be clear on the distinction between accent and dialect. Even if some latitude is allowed for the definition of dialect, confusion between Received Pronunciation and Standard English was apparent in the work of quite a few candidates.

#### **Characteristics of successful responses**

- A clearly shaped and fluently expressed argument, showing a confident grasp of the key issues and concepts
- A direct answer to the actual question, with material appropriately selected to support the argument
- Consistently effective reference to contextualised examples in support of the argument
- Brief but effective use of the stimulus material as a springboard to a broader discussion.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Ensuring that the question is addressed directly rather than simply writing down a lot of pre-learnt material without an argumentative focus
- Including sufficient specific examples of language use in context rather than writing very broadly about issues
- Avoiding confusion over key concepts (such as the distinction between accent and dialect in Standard and Non Standard English or the names of developmental stages in Child Language Acquisition)
- Using stimulus material as just that rather than basing the whole essay simply on it (more common in answers to Question 2 than Questions 3 or 4).

## Summary of key points: key considerations for centres

- Pre-planned essays where the question is not directly addressed do not allow candidates to do themselves full justice
- Having specific contextualised examples that can be explored precisely ensures that arguments are more persuasive
- A clear grasp of research and theorists does ensure that candidates frame their arguments academically but there are other approaches, such as exploring their own specific examples of language use, which also enable them to discuss ideas precisely.

## Conclusion

Despite the challenges of time, most candidates seem to have coped well with the demands of the new paper; there were relatively few very short answers. In addition, the essays in Section B did show evidence of considerable understanding of language issues and allowed candidates of varying ability to be rewarded for working hard in learning and understanding a range of issues.

Inevitably, there were a few slips with the use of linguistic terminology but it might be worth putting on record that getting absolutely every single piece of terminology correct is not at all easy. Candidates should certainly be encouraged to use terminology fully rather than write more generally in the hope of making fewer mistakes. In the light of this, it might be helpful to finish by simply identifying just three common errors made by many candidates rather than providing an exhaustive list:

- “my” and “your” (as in “*in my book*” and “*your Strictly Champions*”) are best thought of as possessive determiners rather than possessive pronouns which are “mine” and “yours”; many candidates call them personal pronouns
- “your work is done” is a clause; it is not a verb phrase which should include only verbs (“is done” is a verb phrase)
- When Boy George says “*th.throat*”, it is a hesitation rather than a false start which has to include some syntactical re-formulation of the utterance (such as his “*it’s (.) I know (.) listen*”)

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**COMPONENT 2**

It was good to see that candidates seemed to be familiar with the genres (diaries and Facebook posts) and had appropriate linguistic knowledge to tackle the questions. The contemporary texts engaged all candidates, but, as may be expected, the period texts were challenging because of the formality and complexity of the style. Candidates often struggled to demonstrate close reading and to answer the question set. The focus of Question 2 and Question 3 was precise: Question 2 focused on changes in diaries over time; Question 3 focused on the ways in which different contexts affect lexical and grammatical choices in Facebook posts. Where candidates did not respond to these prompts, they were less able to access the full range of marks. Almost all candidates managed to tackle the three questions on the new-style paper, but there were some issues with timing. A number of scripts demonstrated a mismatch between the amount written and the marks available. In writing three pages for Question 1 (20 marks), three pages for Question 2 (60 marks) and four pages for Question 3 (40 marks), for instance, candidates were misjudging the requirements of each task. In such cases, the overall mark for the paper inevitably reflected this.

**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.

For Question 2, marks were awarded for each separate AO. For AO2, candidates needed to demonstrate their knowledge of the diary genre explicitly. Discussion of relevant issues such as gender, religion and social status was valid where it was linked directly to the content of the extracts. The ability to provide appropriate and concise supporting quotation was also critical here. For AO3, candidates needed to engage with the diaries, exploring details and interpreting meaning. It was important that discussion focused closely on the texts rather than on diaries in general, or on language change as a broad concept. Addressing context (e.g. the way in which the diaries and their writers were a product of their times) was central to the question. For AO4, candidates needed to develop links between the texts which amounted to more than the occasional use of basic connectives (e.g. “however”, “also”, “similarly”). The use of linguistic terminology was assessed under AO4. Candidates needed to be able to analyse the diary extracts using a range of terms which went beyond labelling word classes, and which supported the points being made.

**Question 1 (short questions)**

This was a new approach to testing candidates’ knowledge of language change. The questions are very focused and require precise answers, which often depend on a secure understanding of word classes. For a number of candidates, this was challenging. Their knowledge of historical language features was sensible, but they lost marks because they could not identify nouns, pronouns and verbs. The wording of the questions is designed to alert candidates to the kind of content required in each case: (a) focuses on spelling; (b) on language change; (c) on archaic grammar; and (d) on distinctive EME grammatical structures and punctuation. There was a tendency to miss these key word prompts,

particularly in (d) where many candidates only identified features of spelling. Candidates need to be aware of the number of marks for each question, and how these marks are allocated. There is no need to write at great length since precise labelling and concise description of the language change feature in each case is all that is needed. Where candidates wrote 3-4 pages in response to Question 1, they were limiting the time they could spend on the high-tariff essay questions. Full and detailed answers should take no more than one page – and could be completed effectively in less.

### Part (a)

In this question, 2 marks were awarded for identifying the basic word classes, and 2 marks for an appropriate explanation of the linguistic variation in each case. Where *wikes* was identified as an adverbial (though not as an adverb), candidates were awarded the mark, but checking the word in context (where it is preceded by the pre-modifying enumerator *three*) should have provided sufficient clues to identify the word as a noun. Pronouns continue to cause confusion. Candidates were awarded a mark for identifying *thei* as a pronoun, but few were able to identify it as a third person plural form. Almost all candidates recognised the *i/y* interchange (*thei*). Most were able to make some valid comment about the variation in the vowel pattern (*wikes*), with sensible links to the sound of the vowel substitute and possible pronunciations.

### Part (b)

In this question, 2 marks were awarded for identifying the basic word classes, and 2 marks for two separate points relating to language change. Where words are clearly related (e.g. variant spellings of the same word or suffix), there is no need to discuss each example separately. A number of candidates missed the spelling inconsistency of the verb 'made' and wrote about the adjective 'mad' and its change in meaning. It is important to check the cited words in context: these two verbs were part of a parallel structure (*shuld be made duc ... should be mad Barons*). Many were unable to identify *preparacion* and *lamentation* as (abstract) nouns. The language change points could be specific (e.g. omission of the final -e, or alternative spellings for the /ʌn/ suffix), or could be related to broader concepts such as Samuel Johnson's 1755 dictionary and the emergence/role of standardisation. Candidates demonstrated some sensible knowledge about language change, but should be reminded that they cannot be rewarded for the same point twice. A reference to Johnson's dictionary, for instance, can only be used to explain one pair of words. Broad references to "the dictionary" will not be credited; candidates need the correct date and the name of the author to gain a mark.

### Part (c)

In this question, there are 3 marks for identifying the word class or form of the examples, and 3 marks for describing the archaic language feature in each case. The examples here represent commonly occurring features of EME. Candidates therefore needed to be precise in their linguistic description. It was insufficient to state that "an apostrophe is missing" (*kinges oncle*). There had to be some reference to the possessive, either in describing the function of the apostrophe or in describing the linguistic form (e.g. "possessive noun" or "possessive noun phrase"). Similarly, discussion of *I knew not* needed to include an explicit reference to the negative, either in the description (e.g. "negative clause" or "negative verb phrase"), or in the explanation (e.g. "the absence of the dummy auxiliary 'do' for the negative"). A significant number of candidates referenced "the inversion of subject and verb". While the word order is certainly different to PDE, the subject and predicator are not inverted. Rather, the negative particle appears after the lexical verb where in PDE it would appear before (i.e. after the auxiliary). Candidates needed to identify the form of the *-eth*

inflection precisely to gain the mark (i.e. “a third person present tense verb”). For the second mark, there needed to be some reference to the fact that the inflection is now obsolete, or to its replacement with the northern dialect -s form (or to PDE ‘has’).

### Part (d)

In this question, candidates needed to select their own examples from the extract given. Discussion of grammatical structures included references to the passive voice, the regularised past participle inflection on the irregular verb (*shewed*, PDE ‘shown’), words which are not yet compounded (e.g. the adverb *after ward*), and the lack of a plural inflection (*nin yere*). Many candidates effectively described random capitalisation and the elision of the determiner creating a compounded word (*th’eight*). Broad references to “multiclausal sentences” or to “a high level of subordination” must be underpinned by precise linguistic knowledge (e.g. identification of specific examples of subordination and coordination using appropriate terminology). Candidates also need to make sure that their responses are analytical rather than observational. Non-linguistic generalisations such as “Text A uses commas instead of full stops. Where as (sic) by Text B full stops are used.” cannot be credited. Explanations must include specific examples and demonstrate evidence of language study (e.g. *After wardes al things being prepared for the coronation, ...* → commas to mark out adverbial clauses; *the King being then but nin yere old, passed* → comma separating subject and predicator, or possibly an omitted comma after *King* making the non-finite clause parenthetical). In many cases, the focus of the question was missed and candidates only cited examples of spelling change (e.g. *u/v* interchange, presence/omission of final -e, double consonants). This often meant that no marks could be awarded.

### 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:

- awareness of the demands of each question
- identification of basic word classes
- accurate and precise descriptions of EME language change features
- the use of appropriate terminology demonstrating linguistic knowledge.

### Question 2 (Language Change over Time essay)

The essay required candidates to consider the diary genre over time, with a clear sense of who was writing the entries and how the contexts shaped each diary. In many cases, this focus was not evident and candidates spent the majority of their essays describing language change features. Observations about spelling and references to the examples cited in parts (a) to (d) do not enable candidates to answer the question because discussion is broad with little reference to the meaning of the texts. The essay is not about language change, but about close reading of texts from different times in the light of a given focus. Conclusions often highlighted the fact that candidates had missed the necessary focus on diaries and their writers: “The progression of English language through time shows that the spelling of the English language changes regularly and at a fast pace.” It is important that candidates read the question carefully so that they can shape their writing appropriately. Responses should demonstrate understanding of the genre, engagement with the texts and evidence of interpretation.

While the focus on genre was not always fully developed, most candidates recognised at least some of the key features of diaries (e.g. the essentially private and personal audience; the use of dates and time adverbials; proper nouns to identify significant people and places; the role of shared knowledge). Most also sensibly explored the atypical use of third person pronouns in Text A, making appropriate connections with the traditional first person pronouns in Text B, and the implied first person in the elliptical Text C. The exploration of reasons for this choice was often thoughtful, with candidates suggesting the inexperience of the writer, his need to control personal outpourings as a representative of the state, the distant relationship between Edward and his father, or the fact that the diary was an educational exercise. This kind of discussion was effective because it demonstrated engagement with the text's meaning.

Many candidates recognised the importance of diaries as a form of self-expression. There was a clear understanding that private emotions and feelings are recorded for personal reasons (e.g. reflection, recollection, personal relief). The emotional detachment of Text A was set against the demonstrative Text B, where Dorothy Wordsworth uses interjections and emotive language to express her sadness at the departure of her brothers. There was some interesting discussion of Wordsworth's focus on the details of the natural world as a distraction from her loneliness. Many candidates explored the impersonal record of day-to-day events in Text C, and saw an underlying link between the repetition of negative adjectives describing the weather (particularly the repetition of *cold*) and the writer's mood. While references to 'pathetic fallacy' were not quite right (the descriptions of the weather are literal rather than figurative), there was clear understanding of the writer's despair. A few discerning readers identified the adjective *Homesick* and the negative semi-modal *Daren't build up (hopes)* as explicit expressions of the writer's state of mind.

Candidates often demonstrated their secure knowledge of language over time, but they need to be careful that such information is directly linked to the texts. Paragraphs of pre-learned information which made no connections with the diary entries were not relevant. In some cases, a page or more was written about orthography, Samuel Johnson's 1755 dictionary, standardisation and prescriptivism with no reference to the diary entries. While demonstrating broad knowledge, this approach did not allow candidates to answer the question. To fulfil the assessment objectives, such information about language change should be embedded within discussion of the genre and the writers. For instance, reference to random capitalisation (no capital at the start of the opening prepositional phrase; lack of capitalisation for some proper nouns) could be linked to the fact that Edward was only twelve; use of the verb *taried* (now chiefly literary in British English) could be linked to the time at which Edward was writing. Similarly, for AO2, candidates need to ensure that broad discussion of gender, religion and social status is linked to the examples on the paper. Where candidates linked gender issues directly to the texts, on the other hand, discussion was often meaningful (e.g. the lack of female names in Text A; the fact that Dorothy Wordsworth was left behind by her brothers and appeared to have time to wander through the countryside; the never-ending domestic duties of the writer in Text C).

Understanding the texts in context is an important part of the question. Most candidates were able to make some reference to the death of Henry VIII and Edward's coronation (Text A), the departure of Dorothy Wordsworth's brothers (Text B), and the effect of the war (Text C). Discussion of the symbolic hurling of the staves and archaic traditions (*general pardon*) in Text A, the importance of (and delay in receiving) letters (Text B), and the subject specific language related to WW2 in Text C formed the basis for some useful exploration of the texts. Many candidates did not explore the link between the writer and the kind of text produced explicitly. Where this was addressed, there was some sensible comment on the age of Edward (e.g. the repetition of the coordinating conjunction; the deletions; inconsistencies in spelling such as *duc/duke*); the poetic style of Wordsworth's writing and the influence of her

brother (e.g. the strings of premodifiers; the range of concrete nouns reflecting her engagement with the natural world; figurative language); and the responsibilities of a mother evacuated from London (dynamic verbs linked to domestic tasks; the elliptical style reflecting her lack of time). It was very good to see that most candidates had read the contextual information carefully and used it effectively to underpin their reading of the texts. In recognising a potential secondary audience for each text, they were able to make some sensible comments about how this would have shaped the content and lexical choices. There were, however, some misjudged references to “readers” which implied a general audience (e.g. “people who want to know about Edward’s coronation”, “people who want to learn about the war”).

Most candidates made a concerted effort to make connections between the texts. These were most successful where they went beyond the identification of broad features (e.g. multiclausal sentences, asyndetic lists) and explored similarities and differences in terms of the genre, context, writer and themes. Some sound discussion emerged based on what was described as “a common theme of loss”. While there was an impressive range of terminology in some scripts, in many it was very limited. Candidates should be reminded of the importance of using appropriate terms to underpin their discussion (AO4): this paper focuses on the analysis of unseen texts and there must be evidence of relevant linguistic knowledge if candidates are to access the higher bands.

#### **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 that are linked directly to the content and meaning of the texts
- 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
- technical accuracy and fluency of expression.

#### **Summary of key points: key considerations for centres**

- grammar teaching needs to underpin all work on the ‘Language Change over Time’ paper
- candidates must learn to apply their knowledge rather than recount it
- responses should contain explicit references to the content of the unseen texts (rather than being broadly relevant to the genre, or to other examples of the genre)

#### **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 (AO3 is worth double). It is, therefore, important that candidates spend sufficient time exploring context and the construction of meaning (AO3).

Marks were awarded for each separate AO. For AO1 (10 marks), candidates needed to demonstrate their ability to use a range of appropriate linguistic terminology to underpin analysis of the Facebook posts. This enabled candidates to develop a critical approach. The fluency and technical accuracy of the writing were also assessed here. For AO2 (10 marks), candidates needed to demonstrate their knowledge of the genre and medium explicitly. Discussion of relevant issues (e.g. social groups, age, gender, attitudes to language use) and concepts (e.g. informalisation, sociolect, accommodation, synthetic personalisation) were valid when they were linked directly to the genre and the content of the data. The ability to provide appropriate and concise supporting quotation was also critical. For 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 Facebook posts could also be discussed. Because of the mark weighting, addressing context (e.g. different types of pages) and other contextual factors (producer, target audience, purpose) needed to form the basis for the discussion.

### **Question 3 (English in the Twenty-First Century essay)**

Candidates seemed to engage well with this task and all demonstrated a good understanding of the genre and medium. Background knowledge was better integrated here, with broad references to Facebook used in the introduction to set up the context. Most candidates then proceeded to analyse the data as examples of different kinds of Facebook posts. Where wider examples were referenced, candidates sometimes lost focus on the genre, citing Twitter and other social media platforms like Instagram and Whatsapp instead of analysing examples of Facebook posts. The question draws attention to the specific genre both in the italicised information above the question box, and in the question itself. Candidates would be well advised to underline or highlight the genre to ensure that their focus does not drift.

Since AO3 carries double weight, responses should demonstrate an explicit focus on context. While there is no requirement to make connections between the texts, the contextual information provided in brackets draws attention to distinctive Facebook contexts (e.g. official pages, personal pages, group pages). This is designed to encourage the necessary focus on context: candidates should discuss linguistic features that are typical of the different groups of texts. This discussion can be developed with reference to other contextual factors. For instance, the two examples of personal pages are very different in style perhaps because of the age and gender of the posters. The introduction of the essay can be used to set up this focus and establish the direction of the essay. The extract below demonstrates how one candidate did this briefly before tackling close analysis of the data:

There are a number of contextual factors which affect the lexical and grammatical choices in Facebook posts. These include whether the text is being posted on a personal profile or a public page, the intention of the post, as well as the identity of the poster (e.g. age and gender). Language used online often reflects the 21<sup>st</sup> century shift towards the spoken form, so language used often has features of spoken language, as such non-standard English is common.

Where candidates did not foreground context, responses were less effective. In many cases, topic sentences focused on key features (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. Candidates also often failed to connect the features they were exploring with particular Facebook contexts and users.

Discussion of non-standard language features 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 posts on personal pages with *bro* cited as textual support, but few candidates were able to describe this as a noun (form) or as a vocative (function); the elision in *movin* ('-g clipping', or '-g deletion') was identified and appropriately associated with pronunciation, but few candidates were able to describe it as a verb or present (or *-ing*) participle. Candidates should be using a range of terminology to describe the features they explore.

There was some effective engagement with meaning. Many candidates explored the enthusiasm expressed in Text 1 and were able to link it to its promotional purpose. Discussion of synthetic personalisation and the pseudo-relationship created with the audience demonstrated understanding of concepts and the way official Facebook posts work. With Text 4, there was some astute reading, with the best responses fully engaging with UKIP's implicit suggestion that only they can offer voters anything new. Discussion of meaning was less effective where candidates relied on broad interpretation rather than on engagement with specific contextual factors. Many candidates made broad references to "the serious message communicated to the village" (Text 5) without stating what it was. To fulfil the requirement of exploring meaning for AO3, candidates need to ensure their discussion demonstrates close reading. The use of repeated exclamation marks in exclamatory sentences, for instance, was often seen to represent "excitement". While this was relevant for Text 1, the exclamatory minor sentence in Text 6 was a reflection of the poster's appreciation of the joke she was sharing. The adjective *Brilliant!!!!* was less about excitement and more about enthusiastic evaluation. While a number of candidates identified the use of first person pronouns (*I*) and determiners (*my*) in Text 3, few recognised their function as a persuasive technique to engage the audience (i.e. Father Christmas speaking directly to the reader).

#### **Characteristics of successful responses:**

- clear organisation and fluent, accurate expression
- an explicit focus on different Facebook contexts and other 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:**

- close reading of the data
- engagement with the content of the data
- the use of a range of terminology to underpin analysis.

#### **Summary of key points: key considerations for centres**

- candidates must learn to read questions carefully so they can shape their response using relevant topic sentences and appropriate content
- the weighting on AO3 should alert candidates to the importance of close reading, analysis and interpretations of the data, and an explicit focus on contextual factors.

#### **Conclusion**

Candidates had clearly been prepared for the paper and demonstrated a range of appropriate knowledge. In some cases, lack of exam technique meant that this knowledge was not used effectively to answer the questions. There was evidence across the bands, however, that candidates had followed a language course and were trying to address the demands of a challenging paper.

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**COMPONENT 3**

As assessment of creative writing has been through coursework in the A level specification for some years, the move to an exam for this element has been one of the more significant changes. Previously, candidates were able to select genre and to redraft their work. While this produced some excellent submissions, in many ways, this exam component is a clearer test of a candidate's ability to "demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English to communicate in different ways" (AO5). Candidates need to have developed skills in understanding and replicating key features of a genre, responding to audience expectations and creating an appropriate tenor to engage readers and guide their response.

In the exam, a choice of questions allowed candidate to follow their interests by topic or given tasks. The majority of candidates seemed well prepared to choose effectively and complete all parts of the question within the given time. Most were able to demonstrate different styles of writing adapted to the tasks and to "analyse and evaluate" (AO3) their work.

**Question 1**

The mock weather reports for 2050 in the stimulus material gave an overview of some of the implications for three countries if climate change continues unchecked. The reports indicated risks to lifestyle, food security and health, and were followed by a quotation suggesting how alternative action now could mitigate danger. The candidates who chose this question seemed very alert to the risks of climate change and understood the text readily.

- (a) The question asked for an extract from the opening chapter from a dystopian novel and many successful pieces were set in one of the countries mentioned in the stimulus text, although this was not a requirement. Other locations were more general, e.g. deserts, bomb-blasted cities or remote outposts of survivors. These were often very effectively realised with an accumulation of significant details and apt imagery to aid the reader. Other candidates offered scenarios of political oppression, some with more familiar 'The Hunger Games' or 'The Handmaid's Tale' themes. A sense of threat was often depicted effectively through first person narration, by a focus on a character's experience or the immediacy given by direct speech. The protagonist's familiarity with deprivation, squalor or disturbing regulation could create an unease in the reader unmatched by omniscient description. Some used flashbacks of shifts in tense to explore contrasts. Features of the dystopian world were frequently identified with well-judged neologisms. Less successful responses sometimes lost narrative control. Some attempted to create whole stories in 350 words. Others became lectures on the theme of climate change or relentless dire predictions of apocalypse.
- (b) This question required candidates to write an advertisement for a job. There were a number of specifics given, including the age of applicants, the tenure of the job, what it would involve and where it would appear.

Surprisingly, candidates seemed less well prepared for this task. The best organised the material clearly and considered not only how to attract applicants but also how to inform them succinctly about the job details and application process. Some used effective devices such as hypophora, others headings to shape content.

Weaker approaches included much information and statistics from the stimulus materials, often verbatim, in an attempt to persuade that this role was needed or to harangue the audience, but this was redundant here. Generally, candidates were more successful in targeting the audience and using persuasive techniques than honing and simplifying material to meet the brief. Marks awarded were proportionate to the success of the piece in meeting the specific brief in the task.

## Question 2

Following an introduction indicating likely scenarios for missing people, the fictional stimulus material posed a mystery in which John Fielding, landowner, business man, Conservative MP, husband and father, went inexplicably missing. Details in the text depicted a settled, if busy, lifestyle with multiple public roles. Of the two, this was the more popular question. Candidates were clearly engaged by the human interest of the story.

- (a) Candidates were given a title 'The John Fielding I knew' and asked to write an article for the Daily Mail, three months after his disappearance, by his personal assistant.

Strong responses wrote in the first person creating an engaging portrait, through apt reminiscences, of the man who seemingly had it all. Many were aware of the audience's need for confirmation that the mystery was as profound as ever or for subtle hints of revelation. Light references to unusual callers, erratic behaviour, odd emails intercepted or empty pill boxes etc. engaged, although several took this to extremes, apparently unaware of what might be legally printed. Many effective pieces included an appropriate journalistic introduction, briefly outlining the situation and introducing the PA's article.

Weaker candidates frequently misread details of the task. Instead of creating a character portrait, some focused on the moment of disappearance in the style of a crime or even horror genre. Others ignored the 'three months' signal with pleas for witnesses from yesterday or last week. A few got tangled with tenses, leading to some loss of coherence. Others wrote in the third person with no mention of the PA or solely addressed John himself in a plea to return.

- (b) This second task, writing an extract from a short story in which a character is missing, allowed candidates freedom to create their own individual, fictional scenario. There were some excellent, controlled, moving responses. Often, they showed a relative grieving, conjuring up the missing person by the hole left behind. Others offered the voice of a cynical detective, touched by this one case. Among the best were simple tales of a lost friend, where teenage experiences of partying and alcohol were credibly realised as the backdrop to a disappearance. Some wrote as the missing character and some were experimental in exploring the representation of amnesia.

A minority of weaker responses seemed ready prepared and forced to fit the given task. These included some horror, crime or romance tales where the missing character was almost peripheral to the action. A few continued the story of John Fielding; this was not proscribed but the resulting pieces did not recommend this approach.

## Questions 1 and 2 (a) and (b)

### Characteristics of successful responses.

- Evidence of close reading of each task and careful reading of the stimulus material
- 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
- A consistent narrative control including tense and viewpoint
- An accurate, well-judged style with some fluency.

### Areas for improvement

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

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

The most successful commentaries demonstrated that candidates had made conscious and purposeful linguistic choices which they analysed and evaluated. In the best, candidates used a wide range of appropriate terminology accurately identified features, for which examples were cited. Candidates developed points by explaining the reason for using each feature and evaluating its effect in terms of genre, targeting an audience or managing an effect.

Less developed responses tended to identify linguistic features using terminology but insufficiently anchored these in an analysis of the construction of meaning or appropriateness for context. Some simply identified features in a fairly meaningless list. Others used 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.

### Characteristics of successful responses

- A succinct discussion of context and how this shaped the piece.
- A three-part approach: accurate identification of selected and specific linguistic features, apt quotations and exploration of their effects in context.
- Linking points which contributed to the same purpose, e.g. targeting on 18 – 25 year old audience.
- Embedding evaluation in the discussion.
- Confidence in highlighting the linguistic and stylistic choices made consciously in their creative writing.

## Areas for improvement

- Lists of terminology often with relevant quotation but lacking exploration.
- A narrow range, often limited to word class.
- Inaccuracy, especially frequent in identifying types of phrases and sentences. N.B. not all questions are rhetorical, and exclamations begin with "How ...!" or "What...!"
- Vague and unfocused evaluation.

## 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.

Those candidates who read the more directed tasks thoroughly, 1b 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.

1a and 2b offered more freedom in approach but candidates should be aware of form. An extract from the opening chapter of a novel does not require a climax and resolution. Familiarity with the key features of common genres e.g. newspaper articles and job advertisements is expected but some candidates seemed unable to replicate these with conviction.

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 and positive experience.

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**COMPONENT 4**

It was really heartening to note that nearly all centres successfully took on the challenge of this new specification's NEA. Despite some initial anxieties, there was much evidence to indicate that centres had familiarised themselves with the requirements of this new 2,500 – 3,500 word investigation, with most seeing it as an exciting opportunity for their candidates to undertake an independent and more sustained study than previously into an aspect of language use, of personal interest to them. In general, learners demonstrated that they were able to hypothesise a theory in relation to language and identity, gather and interrogate data, and finally reflect upon their findings. The best investigations had a consistently strong linguistic focus, embedded theory, and were written in a coherent, academic style. It was good to note that transcripts were generally used very effectively for data, and that the increased length of the investigations largely facilitated greater depth and breadth.

However, it was apparent that some centres misperceived some key aspects of this new non-exam assessment. Most importantly the focus of the investigation must relate to the theme of language and identity. This was often implied either in the title or the investigation by using one or more of the following terms: bias, stereotyping, perspectives. Using these labels invariably resulted in studies based around differences rather than an investigation into language and identity. Those learners who made reference to identity in their investigation title, tended to be able to clearly demonstrate appropriate methods of analysis, linked to this central theme. It is important that in future submissions, learners are able to demonstrate how their study relates explicitly to language and identity.

Another misconception apparent in some samples concerned the information included on the front cover. The aspect of study required is not language and identity but rather one of the four prescribed language areas given in the specification. In addition, learners must choose only one of these, not a combination such as gender and culture. More worryingly, some centres allowed their candidates to create their own areas for their language investigation such as political language, advertising and language over time. Fortunately, this was the case in only a minority of centres.

Finally there were some problems regarding the content of some of the investigations. Some learners chose to investigate aspects of child language acquisition. It is difficult when looking at the language of very young children to sustain links to language and identity or to reach relevant conclusions appropriate to this main theme. Another problematic area concerned the use of fictional texts either print or media. As characters are themselves constructions within a narrative, discussions of identity should really focus upon how the writers, rather than their characters, view matters of identity and language. This was not always understood by those learners who opted for investigations of this type.

## The Assessment Objectives

There are three assessment objectives for the non-exam assessment: AO1, AO2 and AO3, with AO1 having double the weighting of the other two. It might be helpful to look specifically at the descriptors for Band 4 across the AOs. In order to gain Band 4 in AO1 it is necessary to demonstrate the following: effective knowledge and methods of analysis; secure interpretation of topic; sustained, apt use of a range of terminology; accurate and generally fluent expression and effective organisation. The key words here are **effective**, **secure** and **sustained**. Learners who are able to demonstrate that their study is clearly focused on identity and language, thereby offering a secure interpretation, should score well on the double weighted AO1a. In order to score well on AO1b, it was not enough to use sound and accurate terminology, there has to be evidence of the use of a **range** of apt terms sustained throughout the investigation. Finally for AO1c, the study has to be effectively organised by making use of topic sentences throughout and including a bibliography.

To score well into Band 4 for AO2, learners have to move beyond sound understanding and sensible discussion of concepts and issues. Once again the key word for Band 4 is **secure**. To show this level of understanding, learners need to identify concepts and issues most relevant to their own specific investigation. It is vital that an understanding of genre is present. Theory should be embedded and used to support and inform the learner's particular discussion. Finally to score well for AO3, the key word is **effective**. Learners must demonstrate that they effectively understand how their chosen data offers links between contextual factors and the construction of meaning. It is not enough to indicate that a text was created for a specific purpose. The contextual factors e.g. author, period, place, must be fully investigated in order for the learner to reach insightful conclusions.

## The Four Language Areas

No one specific area was more successfully attempted than the other three although language and gender and language and culture were by far the more popular options. There was some fascinating data, both primary and secondary, used across the language areas so it seems sensible to discuss each area separately. It is worth noting here that if there are a large number of tables for example, it might be sensible to include appendices.

### 1. Language and self-representation

It was clear that this language area in particular really engaged the learners who chose it. They embraced the opportunity to explore and interpret their own idiolect with enthusiasm and interest. For the weaker learners this often did not move beyond an examination of how they might change their communication strategies depending on context and audience. There was much useful discussion regarding the informality/formality of exchanges with different family members and friends both online and during face to face interaction. The best studies were well grounded in theory including Levinson, Grice and Leech. Many learners discussed face theory and politeness theories and related them to their own interactions.

There was some misinterpretation, however, by centres who allowed their candidates to look at how other individuals represent themselves according to context. The specification states quite clearly that this language area is applicable only to the learners themselves. Studies of others' communication strategies must be placed in one of the remaining three areas.

## **2. Language and gender**

As in previous years gender was by far the most popular choice. The range of data used for this language area was extremely diverse including the representation of male and female tennis players by online news organisations; the language used by sports commentaries when covering female boxing matches; and the language used by male and female quiz teams. Gender theory was, on the whole, sensibly used although some centres are still teaching some rather outdated theories. One of the most interesting developments in this language area concerns both gender fluidity and transgender issues. There were some fascinating and enlightening studies into the language of drag queens and how the gender they identify with at different times affects their language choices. There were some insightful studies into the well-publicised transition of Caitlin Jenner and how this has affected her identity through her choice of language.

## **3. Language and culture**

This area was also very popular with learners and, as with gender, the investigations were diverse and interesting. There was much evidence of real engagement, suggesting that learners had been allowed to choose an issue or concept that enthused them, for example an excellent study into migration, the importance of the LadsBible in popular culture, and WW2 propaganda, all linked closely to language and identity. Many of the studies in this area used terms such as stereotyping, ideology and representation to imply identity. The weaker studies didn't really show a grasp of concepts and issues related to their study and frequently did not discuss contextual factors in enough detail.

## **4. Language diversity**

This was the least popular area but those learners who opted for this language area frequently produced some fascinating studies linked closely to identity, for example, how a particular rap style has created its own identity through its lyrics to differentiate itself from other rap styles; the representation over time of Midlands dialect from Chaucer onwards; and the different language choices used by different generations within one family who settled in the UK from Poland some decades ago, and how this is linked to their respective identities. The weaker learners tended to either use quite a limited selection of song lyrics from gangsta rap, for example, or attempted unsuccessful often unrealistic studies into Ebonics without connecting their studies to language and identity.

### **Characteristics of successful responses**

- a clear focus on language and identity
- a range of sustained apt terminology
- a well organised study with topic sentences used throughout
- well-embedded 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 particularly so in language and self-representation
- the use of data that provides enough breadth and depth for an A level investigation
- for centres: the inclusion of the check list at the front of the sample.

## **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 not just outlined
- language and self-representation must be an investigation into the learner's own language choices
- investigations covering language acquisition or fictional genres can be successful but are often problematical.

## **Conclusion**

Finally my team of moderators and I would truly like to applaud centres for their professionalism and enthusiasm when dealing with the challenges of this new specification. We recognise the huge amount of effort that both centres and their candidates have put into making this such a successful first submission and we look forward to moderating next year's investigations.



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