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Examiners' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

H470
For first teaching in 2015

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Version 1

Contents

Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper H470/02 series overview

This is the second year of this specification and candidates and centres have once again shown a good grasp of the requirements of the paper. It is quite a long paper requiring the building of three analytical essays, which are focused on exploring the language use, and patterns of language use, within all three texts.

This paper features no optional questions and there were no examples of candidates misunderstanding the paper structure or questions. It was also very rare to see candidates who had not attempted all three questions showing that, whilst this paper makes demands on time-management skills, centres have prepared candidates well. One successful method of approaching the paper was to answer the questions in reverse order. The examiner favours no particular order and candidates who followed this structure and those who answered in paper order were equally capable of producing good responses. There were some instances of inconsistency seen across the paper where candidates were able to produce one or two higher ability responses followed by one that was considerably weaker. This did not seem to be linked to question order or timing.

In some instances, candidates appeared to run out of time but this was relatively rare. Some candidates wrote at great length, needing two or three additional answer booklets, and whilst many of these responses were successful, there were some instances of lengthy responses becoming self-penalising by virtue of a lack of structure, control and/or accuracy across the response as a whole. In particular, Question 1 appears to have been most frequently answered at greater length than is required. Centres should remind candidates that they should aim to spend about 40 minutes on this question and devoting additional time to their response at the expense of either of the other two questions is likely to be self-penalising as well as being unnecessary.

There was an appreciable reduction in the number of these very long responses, which would suggest candidates and centres are now focusing on precision and depth of analysis in preparation for the paper. This is to be encouraged as the strongest responses often create dense and well-integrated analyses that are systematically structured to allow for critical engagement with the texts.

Finally, one unusual orthographic convention seems to have swept through the candidature. There has been a huge increase in the number of candidates leaving between 4 and 8 lines blank at the bottom of a page in the middle of a response. Whilst this has no impact on the examiners' application of the mark scheme, it is a non-standard orthographic feature and should be avoided if only for reasons of common sense and frugality of paper-use.

Section A overview

The transcript for this question featured Rob (aged three) and his grandfather. Candidates from across the ability range were able to engage with the language use in the text and showed a range of conceptual understanding. The most successful approaches were systematic in considering different aspects of language use and drawing explicit and explorative links from precisely analysed language features to concepts.

Question 1

Read **Text A** in your **Resource Booklet** and answer the following question.

1   Using the appropriate terminology to explain your findings, examine the language development stage of the child-participant as evidenced in the transcript. You should identify and analyse the phonology, grammar and meaning of his utterances.

Use your knowledge of theories and concepts of child language acquisition to support your answer.

[20]

The question instructs candidates to examine the language development stage of the child and this section of the question is designed to ensure a clear focus on the child rather than any adult interlocutors present. The language of, in this case, the grandfather remains relevant to the response as discussion of his attempts to elicit responses from Rob are relevant to Rob's language production in the transcript. There were very few responses which focused too much on the grandfather at the expense of discussing Rob's language use.

The transcript allowed candidates to engage with a range of phonological, lexical/semantic and grammatical features. As with the previous series, the majority of candidates were able to fully address the requirements of the question. There was a broad and interesting range of concepts included this year.

Of the three stated areas, phonology remains the area that causes candidates the most difficulty. Centres would do well to remind candidates that they are not required to be expert phoneticians but can rely on identifying and explaining common patterns in phonological virtuous errors rather than attempting to engage with the minutiae of vocal mechanics. Responses of very high ability did engage with phonology in detail but many responses produced the highest number of inaccuracies during discussion of this level. Candidates should also be reminded to focus on sounds rather than transcribed spelling patterns when dealing with this area. A number of candidates pointed to a consonant cluster reduction in "balloons" and at the end of "playing" when, phonologically speaking, there is not one. This area also saw the greatest rise in use of concepts compared with last year. Grunwell's phonological sequence and Shriberg's late 8 were used often and used well and it is very pleasing to see candidates engaging with research into phonological acquisition in a way, which has not previously been seen.

Grammar and meaning were often well considered and the best responses integrated these two areas together in a critical manner to explore the inter-relation between grammar and meaning. This is by no means a requirement of a top band response but any candidate who is able to move around the three areas stated in the question whilst analysing the data is likely to achieve well.

In terms of theory, the range of theories considered has increased this year but that seems to have come at the expense of the 'big 4' of Chomsky, Skinner, Piaget and Bruner. These theories remain an excellent way of engaging with acquisition and whilst the examiner expresses no preference for a set number or group of theories, candidates would be well advised to make use of these theories in exploring the text. Grammatical stages, often attributed to Crystal, remain a popular area and were often well used. The best responses were tentative about whether Rob was telegraphic or post-telegraphic

and used the data to 'weigh up' which stage Rob's language production would best fit in. There remains amongst candidates, a tendency to conflate grammatical stages with phonology. This is an inaccurate way of approaching the data and centres would be well advised to counsel candidates against this approach.

Of all the theories used, innateness was the most frequently misused with candidates using any example of virtuous errors to 'disprove' the theory. Candidates would be well reminded that grammatical over-generalisations and examples of children making grammatical errors can often be cited in support of an LAD rather than 'proof' of otherwise.

Overall, many candidates were able to successfully engage with the data and showed a pleasing breadth and depth of conceptual knowledge relating to acquisition.

Most successful responses	*Least successful responses*
• Use precise and accurate terminology • Integrate links to theories • Often use theory names rather than theorist names • Use theories to explore the data • Are academically critical about the relevance of theory to the data.	• Rely on presenting 'learned knowledge' with limited reference to the data • Are overly assertive and descriptive • Conflate theories and theorists which are often linked only tangentially to the data • Seek to prove/disprove theories based on limited data • Are frequently vague and/or inaccurate in considering language use.

Exemplar 1

This short section demonstrates the precision and clear focus on the data that is indicative of a top band response and whilst there is only one reference to theory, the whole section is clearly focused on exploring the relevance of that theory through detailed reference to the data. The notion that the need for an auxiliary may not be definite is debatable but shows clear critical engagement with the data.

Section B overview

The question featured a section from the BBC website giving advice and information about spyware. Candidates from across the ability range engaged with this text in a productive manner with a high number of candidates able to explore patterns of language use in relation to concepts and contexts. Centres and candidates are advised to pay careful attention to the bullet points within the mark scheme for each AO for this question. Whilst AO1 is not explicitly assessed on this question, the main focus of analysis remains the language use of the text. The exploration of language features and, for top band responses, patterns of language use is explicitly stated in the second bullet point under AO2. Similarly, language is also referred to consistently in the first bullet point of AO3. Successful approaches to this question centre on patterns of language use and how they are relevant to concepts and the construction of meaning. Pleasingly, the number of candidates simply presenting theories without explicitly exploring the data has dropped significantly from the last series.

Question 2

> **2** Using your understanding of relevant ideas and concepts, investigate how language features and contextual factors construct meanings in this text. **[24]**

The most successful responses were able to engage with contextual factors that went beyond simply linking to GAP. There were a number of higher ability responses, which used the patterns in the language use as a starting point to consider potential audiences and the ways in which these differing audiences might construct meaning in varying ways. Less successful responses often presented context discreetly at the start of the response without linking this to language or specific aspects of the text. In some cases, lengthy opening paragraphs simply re-wrote information from the resource booklet and these were not deemed worthy of any credit.

Representations were dealt with well by most candidates with many responses covering the representation of the producer (often allied with some detailed understanding of the context of production) and were able to consider the BBC as the institutional producer and the "Webwise Team" as the stated producer. Types of power were also considered well with most being able to identify influential power and the vast majority able to discuss synthetic personalisation. Where this was done well, candidates went beyond simply linking to second person pronouns and engaged with the shifts in formality across the text.

As a multi-modal text, there is an expectation that candidates will engage with orthographic and graphological features but the strongest responses always root this discussion in other language levels. For example, discussion of the BBC logo creating institutional power was best when linked into discussion of formal sentence structures as a means of consolidating that power and creating a reliable representation.

There were fewer instances this year of candidates attempting to apply spoken language theories to this written text but there were still enough to warrant centres reminding their candidates to avoid this practice.

Mid-level and lower ability responses often focused too heavily on lexis to prove their understanding of a range of language features and whilst the lexis of this text is interesting, candidates must avoid focusing too narrowly on one language level if they are to reach the upper three bands of the mark scheme. These responses were also more likely to make vague, non-specific comments about reader's engagement or a desire to "read on" which border on being completely devoid of meaning.

Most successful responses	Least successful responses
• Use precise and accurate terminology • Identify and explore patterns before narrowly focusing on an example of the pattern in use • Explore context in depth/detail and make tentative suggestions based on language use • Consider both reception and production • Allow the data to lead them and draw from a secure knowledge of relevant theories which are seen as a tool to explore the data.	• Rely on presenting 'learned knowledge' with limited reference to the data • Are overly assertive and descriptive • Reduce context to GAP alone • Use vague, meaningless phrases like "engage the reader in continuing to read" • Fail to pick out relevant language features or fail to label them accurately when they do.

Exemplar 2

The article has a bar which says who it was written by and the date. Here, however, they have put 'WebWise Team' instead of the name of the writer. This is a form of metonomy, as the whole unit, the whole team has been used instead. This is done to increase the power status of the producer in the eyes of the receiver. In turn, that is important in order for them to listen to their advice. The writer then refers to a collective group, 'we'. The use specifically of the 1st person plural personal pronoun when giving a definition gives the body (the team) more instrumental power. This is because it assigns them expert power, according to Wareing, this is when someone has power derived from their superior knowledge on a topic. In this case, the writer has superior knowledge as they are able to define a term, 'spyware' is the name we give. Their labelling power elevates their apparent expert power.

> This extract clearly engages with representation of the producer and the reasons for this in terms of building a relationship with the receiver. It engages with both patterns across the text and specific examples which are drawn together to consider the ways in which power is created. The reference to instrumental power is less secure than other sections but, overall, does not harm the quality of the extract or the response as a whole.

Section C overview

Question 3

3 By detailed analysis of the writing in both passages, discuss and illustrate the variations in language between the 19th and 21st centuries. In your answer you should explore the ways language is used in each text, as well as how contextual factors influence the way meaning is constructed. **[36]**

This question featured two texts linked by subject matter. The first was a Treaty from the 19th century concerning Native Americans and the second was a piece of reportage focusing on an apology made to Native Americans. The two texts had different contexts of production and whilst this seemed to make explicit exploration of change challenging for some candidates, it did not prevent a full range of achievement across the mark range and Assessment Objectives.

As with Question 2, there were a number of responses which focus heavily of lexis at the expense of other levels. Centres would be well advised to remind candidates of the need to explore a range of language features and patterns across the two texts. The strongest responses were able to show a breadth of knowledge and often linked multiple examples together both within and across texts as a means of critically and persuasively exploring connections and language use. Precision and accuracy in using terminology were key markers of successful responses as was the ability to engage with pertinent contextual factors in exploring change and the texts. Whilst a focus on change is a requirement of the question – this response should never become simply a comparison in the style of Paper 1 Question 3 – candidates would do well to remember that this is still an analytical essay and not a discursive one. Analysis should be the focus of comments made about the language use of the texts.

As with the previous series, candidates across the ability range sought to include references to Lowth, Johnson and Caxton with limited relevance to the data. Such responses often showed a lack of understanding of the context of production or were overly definitive about the influences of these figures on language. References to standardisation as a process and to the impact of attitudes to written language changing were often more successful in engaging with the data.

As a final note – and as a kindness to Jean Aitchison – it is worth noting that a large number of candidates still feel that Aitchison is a prescriptivist who genuinely believes the metaphors she used to describe prescriptive views on language. Candidates discussing these metaphors as a means of exploring the text often lost sight of analysing the data and presented them with, at best, tangential relevance. For that reason, the candidates are probably better off avoiding mention of crumbling castles and the like; however, should candidates wish to mention the metaphors; it would be better if they remembered that Aitchison is very definitely a descriptivist.

Most successful responses	*Least successful responses*
• Use precise and accurate terminology • Identify and explore patterns before narrowly focusing on an example of the pattern in use • Explore context in depth/detail and make tentative suggestions based on language use • Consider both reception and production • Allow the data to lead them and draw from a secure knowledge of relevant theories which are seen as a tool to explore the data • Triangulate sections of the response to ensure consistent coverage of AO1, 3 and 4 • Make explicit reference to change and explore the extent to which the data is useful in exemplifying change	• Rely on presenting 'learned knowledge' with limited reference to the data • Are overly assertive and descriptive • Reduce context to GAP alone • Fail to pick out relevant language features or fail to label them accurately when they do • Ignore change completely or make points with little or no relevance to the actual data.

Exemplar 3

This extract shows the triangulated manner of a good response as it moves around the Assessment Objectives to build a sound and cogent response to grammar. Whilst it lacks some analytical depth, it does neatly exemplify the structure that better responses often have and shows the density of credit-worthy points that top band answers make. It is also worth noting that, as stated at the start of this section, the examiner was willing to accept the application of informalisation as a concept even though the nature of the two texts makes it difficult to be that definitive about it.

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