

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

H470

For first teaching in 2015

H470/01 Summer 2018 series

Version 1

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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 H470/01 series overview

H470/01 Exploring language is one of the two examined components for A Level English Language. This largely synoptic component requires candidates to apply their knowledge of linguistic terms, context and theory to unseen texts as well as use their knowledge to create a piece of writing in a given form. To do well on this paper, candidates need to be comfortable applying their knowledge and understanding to unseen texts as well as producing their own writing on a topical language issue.

In this second series of this A Level specification, it was pleasing to see that centres and candidates had used the feedback from the last series in order to develop their examination skill in readiness for this series. The paper was appropriate for the range of candidates' abilities and whilst question 2 appeared to be the most challenging question for some candidates, they did have the opportunity to succeed against each of the assessment objectives. On this paper, the marks credited ranged from the bottom of Level 2 right up to the top of Level 6.

There was no evidence of candidates running out of time on this paper. It may be more pertinent for some candidates to spend more time analysing the texts and planning their response rather than writing, in order to achieve more perceptive and analytical responses. This is particularly evident in question 3 where there were often responses which covered several additional booklets, but usually became self-penalising as they lost focus and precision.

Responses in this series for question 1 and question 3 were much more focused on the data presented, rather than attempting to fit the data into pre-learnt frameworks and candidates should continue to be led by the data in future series.

Candidates need to be further encouraged to use correct labelling of features across questions. Although candidates may use the term 'word' or 'lexeme' occasionally if they are unsure of the specific term, they should not be encouraged not to use this throughout a response. Any subject specialist terms should be glossed in question 2 so they are appropriate for a non-specialist audience. Candidates should ensure they use exemplification across all questions to avoid vague responses.

In order to achieve top levels, candidates should aim to achieve conceptual overviews of texts. This means not necessarily looking at language points in isolation but considering how combinations of language features create patterns, for example how contractions and colloquialisms leads to an informal register. This leads to more dense analysis and more perceptive discussion of context. Candidates should be wary of simply using the term 'pattern' without exemplification or analysis.

Key Points from the Paper

Candidates who generally did well on this paper:

- Used terminology accurately
- Analysed patterns within texts
- Made perceptive links to context

Candidates who did less well on this paper:

- Made general points not explicitly linked to linguistic evidence
- Did not support responses with examples from the text
- Were narrow in their consideration of features

Question 1

1 Giving careful consideration to the context of the text:

(a) Identify and analyse uses of lexis and semantics in this text. [10]

(b) Identify and analyse the way sentences are constructed in this text. [10]

As suggested by the demarcation of this question into two sections, the majority of candidates answered this question as two separate parts. Whilst those who answered as one block question were not penalised in the marking, they tended to become self-penalising as they did not offer the same breadth or specificity in analysing the different language levels in their responses. There is no expectation that theory will be used in this question and it is rarely credited.

The majority of candidates found this to be an accessible text and they generally understood the upbeat yet reflective tone that Moran was striving for in her eulogising of Bowie. Some candidates made overly general or incorrect assertions about the readership of *The Times* which led to some overly general or flawed contextual conclusions. There were fewer general introductory paragraphs in this series; candidates are not credited for reworking the contextual information at the beginning of a source and should instead use their time to begin analysis, linking relevant contextual information into their response where necessary.

There was a cluster of marks credited at the top of Level 3 for this question. In order for candidates to move into Level 4 of the mark scheme, it is important that they correctly identify the linguistic terms that they are commenting on, and that they exemplify these within their own responses. Examiners reported seeing a plethora of basic errors in the labelling of features both on a lexical and grammatical level, particularly around abstract nouns. It is also important for candidates to be specific in their analysis. Cogent discussion, which allows for a greater density of analytical points, is more successful than long explanations which make the same point.

Unlike last series, candidates tended to fair better on part a of this question, rather than part b. They were usually able to consider the semantic field of space deployed, as well as Moran's use of compound adjectives and comparatives to celebrate Bowie's life. More perceptive responses were able to link this to her portrayal of Bowie as an outsider who nevertheless captured the imagination of a nation. Candidates were also able to discuss pronouns effectively with the best using this as an opportunity to talk about the relationship between the producer and the receiver. Basic labelling occurred in part b, such as of declaratives and imperatives as well as minor, simple and complex sentences, though candidates were less convincing in their discussion of the contextual relevance. The most successful responses were able to carefully describe the dialogic qualities that Moran was attempting to replicate as well as discussing the patterns of sentence use and discussing the impact of such contextual cohesion.

Most successful candidates:

- Identified and exemplified patterns
- Were consistent and accurate when labelling linguistic points
- Were precise in identifying the contextual significance of a linguistic feature
- Had a conceptual overview of the text's purpose and a density of connected points which demonstrated this.

Less successful candidates:

- Wrote introductions reiterating contextual points provided at the beginning of the text
- Made sweeping comments about the readership
- Did not exemplify points made
- Labelled features incorrectly
- Wrote about theorists in their response
- Only discussed sentence forms, not sentence types.

Question 2

2 'All language is biased.'

Write an entertaining blog post which critically engages with the statement above. 'Biased' language is that which supports a particular point of view and aims to influence the receiver to agree with it. You do not need to use the statement as your title. [24]

This is a synoptic question where candidates are expected to be able to utilise their knowledge from across the whole A Level course to construct a response. The use of the term 'bias' within the question stem did seem to throw some candidates this series and there were responses where candidates did not really consider the issue of bias at all. Some candidates considered biased attitudes towards language, such as to specific accents or dialects or in terms of persuasive language and rhetoric, without considering bias in language itself. Some candidates wrote extensively about the idea of bias but did not bring it back to a linguistic level: it is fundamentally important that discussion of language underpins a response to this question.

The most successful responses tended to focus on language and gender, considering for example the use of marked terms, diminutive suffixes and semantic derogation/pejoration. Other effective responses considered the language of power and/or the media and some were able to develop an overarching response that considered a number of these aspects. Candidates were sometimes prevented from reaching the top levels because although they contained elements of these features they were not sustained throughout the writing. Some candidates writing about gender strayed into discussion of conversation, for example considering interruptions, which was not credited as it did not focus on bias.

Candidates generally scored higher marks for AO5 than for AO2. There seemed to be a widespread understanding of the form of a blog, with candidates generally adopting an appropriate tone and adding features such as an invitation to comment which is consistent with the approach of a blog. Moreover, candidates were often consciously utilising language features such as second person pronouns and rhetorical questions to engage their audience. The most successful candidates often adopted a persona or the use of extended metaphor to convey their opinion in an entertaining way, as well as creating textual cohesion, perhaps by linking their ending to their beginning with a repeated phrase.

Most successful candidates:

- Wrote a sustained commentary on bias in language which was suitably exemplified
- Consciously crafted language to achieve an entertaining read
- Were selective about the linguistic ideas they discussed
- Glossed for a non-specialist audience.

Less successful candidates:

- Did not engage with the specified language issue
- Did not write in a form that was recognisable as a blog
- Did not reference relevant linguistic examples in their writing
- Wrote extensively about prescriptivism and/or descriptivism without linking it to bias.

Question 3

3 Using appropriate linguistic concepts and methods, analyse the ways in which language is used in these two texts. In your answer you should:

- explore connections and variations between the texts
- consider how contextual factors contribute to the construction of meaning.

[36]

As with the last series, question 3 was often where candidates performed best owing to the comparative basis of the question. The majority of candidates were able to identify the similar subject matter yet differing tones and contexts of the two extracts, and were able to use language levels to exemplify these differences. Examiners do not expect to see a set formula to this comparison, and a range of approaches are successful, though there should be a balanced discussion of the two texts. The majority of candidates are still writing long introductory paragraphs comparing aspects of context, which are not successful as contextual factors have to be linked to language use to be valid. More successful candidates began with a language comparison and then explored how both texts used this feature differently/similarly to suit the needs of their specific genre, audience and purpose. This led to a more evaluative exploratory approach.

The majority of candidates were able to comment on relevant features in both texts, such as the semantic field of wealth though expressed using differing lexical frequencies. Candidates were confident in discussing the spoken language features of Text B and the multi modal features of Text C; with the best suggesting how each replicated what the other was unable to, owing to its mode. Discussions of interrogatives were often particularly effective when considering it as a common feature though deployed differently (IRF in Text B and hypophora in Text C) owing to the texts' respective contexts.

Although some lower ability candidates are still adopting a 'feature spotting' approach to this question, the majority of candidates were able to discuss the use of context effectively. Some candidates were able to pinpoint the primary and secondary audiences for Text B and suggest for example, why this may have caused David Starkey to use a false start. Candidates were also able to consider the difference between a conscripted primary audience of school children in Text B with a selective audience of enthusiasts in Text C.

The most successful responses showed evidence of planning – this led to a methodical approach which meant that language methods were being applied systematically. This prior planning seemed to provide candidates with an overview of their response before writing which allowed them to establish patterns and build on previous points in a cogent manner to produce cohesive evaluative responses. Candidates who did not plan often made weaker illogical comparisons and often wrote long, commentary style responses. It was pleasing to see fewer responses this summer comparing texts simply on mode features and stating that Text C didn't have a particular spoken feature because it was a written text.

There was a notable improvement in candidates' discussion of linguistic concepts with a range of appropriate discussions on power and accommodation, for example. Some candidates continue to use Grice's maxims, those these are often misapplied and rarely used perceptively. Some candidates also used the example of a female student being interrupted as 'evidence for' Zimmerman and West's theory on the subject. Examiners felt that this usually did not take into account the wider context of the extract being an excitable group of students discussing a new topic. Candidates are urged to be discerning in their application of such concepts.

<i>Most successful candidates:</i>	<i>Less successful candidates:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Planned their comparisons carefully, giving equal coverage to the two texts• Were highly selective in the examples cited• Used accurate linguistic terminology• Linked to context consistently.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wrote introductions reiterating contextual points• Did not exemplify points made• Did not consider linguistic concepts OR used them in a sweeping manner.

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