

## A LEVEL

*Examiners' report*

# **ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**H470**

For first teaching in 2015

## **H470/01 Summer 2019 series**

Version 1

# Contents

Introduction .....	3
Paper 1 series overview .....	4
Section A overview.....	5
Question 1 (a).....	5
Question 1 (b).....	5
Section B overview.....	7
Question 2 .....	7
Section C overview.....	9
Question 3 .....	9

## 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 1 series overview

H470/01 is one of two exam papers for the 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 third series of this A Level specification, it was once again pleasing to see that candidates and centres had used the feedback from previous series to develop their examination skills to make sure that responses met the specific needs of each question. The paper was appropriate for the range of candidates' abilities and the majority of candidates were able to access both the unseen texts and demands of Question 2 without any obvious difficulties. The marks given ranged from the bottom of Level 2 right up to the top of Level 6.

Candidates appeared to use their time effectively on this paper; there was little evidence of candidates running out of time. Responses are becoming more succinct, suggesting that candidates are spending more time analysing the texts and planning their response rather than writing, which generally leads to more analytical responses. There remains a surprising lack of planning evident for Question 3 however. Well planned and thought out responses to this question usually leads to more interesting and insightful comparison and contextual analysis.

Responses in this series for Question 1 and Question 3 were once again focused on the data presented, although it is important that candidates focus specifically on the language levels specified in the question. There was more discussion this year of aspects such as graphology and multimodality which were not relevant and could not be credited.

As an A Level exam for English Language, examiners do expect to see the correct labelling of language features across questions. There was an increase this year in candidates using the terms 'lexical field' and 'semantic field' often interchangeably or inaccurately. Candidates should be able to label features, even within a specified field, more precisely than this, by referring to the concrete nouns within a lexical field for example. Any subject specialist terms should be glossed in Question 2. Candidates should make sure 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.

## Section A

### Question 1 (a)

1 Giving careful consideration to the context of the text:

(a) Identify and analyse patterns of lexical and semantic use.

[10]

### Question 1 (b)

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

[10]

In this series, there was only a small number of candidates who did not answer this question as two separate sections. Centres are urged to continue to instil in candidates the need to respond to this question within its demarked sections. This ensures that candidates are able to consider each specific language level with the depth and breadth needed for successful analysis. It is important that analysis is focused on the specified language level as examiners reported that some candidates would label and exemplify a sentence feature in part b, but then analyse the lexical features within the sentence rather than the sentence feature itself. 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 friendly and conversational tone that the producers were striving for in order to encourage readers to try Veganuary. Some candidates are still trying to narrow down the potential audience too specifically and when trying to be specific about an age range, gender or social class inevitably make overly assertive statements. Better responses considered the broader potential readership of people looking to make New Year's resolutions, for example. It is pleasing to see that general introductory paragraphs have been seen far more infrequently and instead candidates are beginning their analysis straight away, linking relevant contextual information into their response where relevant.

As with the last series, there was a cluster of marks given 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 an increase in non-specific labelling, such as lexical and semantic fields with tenuous overarching labels, high frequency lexis or terms such as 'long' and 'short' sentences. It is also important for candidates to be specific in their analysis, expressing with clarity the purpose of such a choice from the perspective of the producer when considering the receiver. Cogent discussion, which allows for a greater density of analytical points, is more successful than long explanations which make the same point. Exemplar 1 below illustrates how density of analysis can be achieved.

#### ***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
- 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.

## Exemplar 1

2.1	b	<p>The use of the interrogative 'But where do you get your protein?' highlights the most common question posed to the vegan community. The first person pronoun 'you' perhaps seeks to include the reader in the address of the interrogative, appealing to those perhaps interested in veganism but uncertain about <del>certain</del> certain issues like protein. The following declarative mood, including simple sentences like 'This is simply not true', seeks to provide an informative answer to the previously posed question. The use of this simple sentence and the adverb 'simply', emphasise how easy the vegan diet is in comparison to popular belief, with the short sentence mimicking <sup>the diet's</sup> this simplicity.</p>
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The above extract shows how density of analysis can be achieved. However, it also illustrates a common issue with this question, where candidates identify a pattern and then offer only one example. In order for patterns to be credited, it is important that candidates exemplify from across the text. To achieve the highest marks, candidates should also comment on the impact of these patterns. There were a number of insightful comments on the use of compounding, punning and neology when discussing 'bite-sized' and 'Veganuary', although some candidates seemed unsure of whether or not the intended audience were Vegans. Better responses were able to identify the use of sarcasm to dispel common myths and build a relationship with the audience. Candidates were also able to comment effectively on the listing of animals and the way in which this created solidarity between humans and animals.

## Section B

### Question 2

2 *'The era of prescriptivism is dying.'*

Write a blog article for a website belonging to a recognised language expert which critically responds to this statement. You need to engage a reasonably well-educated audience with an interest in language change. [24]

This is a synoptic question where candidates are expected to be able to use their knowledge from across the whole A Level course to construct a response. Most candidates were familiar with prescriptivism as a concept, although examiners did see a small number of responses where the concept clearly hadn't been learned or revised. Some candidates did not write as the specified producer, which had an impact on the overall tone. Examiners did expect to see glossing of specialist terms unless it was made specifically clear that the audience of that particular blog were subject experts or had specific pre-existing knowledge.

The most successful responses adopted a critical view from the outset, with the majority agreeing with the statement, even though there were some interesting responses which took the opposite view. Candidates used a variety of examples to further their responses, considering among others issues of standardisation, immigration, migration, technology and social attitudes. David Crystal was often cited as a relevant theorist, as was Lindsay Johns and Jean Aitchison, but it was pleasing to see a number of less well-known linguists discussed by candidates. Some candidates misinterpreted Aitchison's metaphors as evidence that she is a prescriptivist herself. A breadth of discussion was rewarded; as a synoptic question the most successful candidates were able to consider aspects from across their programme of study. Candidates were sometimes prevented from reaching the top levels because they did not offer any exemplification for their views, resulting in a number of vague or overly assertive statements. Lower ability candidates typically stuck to one line of argument, with many considering language change generally rather than prescriptivism specifically and a small number being overly focused on gender.

Unlike in the previous series, there was more of a balance this year between the marks given for AO2 and AO5. There was widespread understanding of the blog form with candidates often consciously utilising language features such as second person pronouns and rhetorical questions to engage their audience. The most successful candidates often adopted a clear voice, often 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. Less successful candidates often misinterpreted the audience and wrote in an overly informal manner or without consciously utilising any features so that the response read more like an article.

Exemplar 2 is an excellent example of a candidate adopting the specified persona and using extended metaphor to illustrate the linguistic points made, while citing a relevant theorist.

#### **Most successful candidates:**

- Wrote a sustained commentary on prescriptivism which was suitably exemplified
- Consciously crafted language to achieve a convincing read for the specified audience
- Were selective about the linguistic ideas they discussed
- Glossed terms where appropriate.

#### **Less successful candidates:**

- Misunderstood prescriptivism
- Did not write in a form that was recognisable as a blog
- Did not reference relevant linguistic examples in their writing
- Wrote extensively about language change without linking it to prescriptivism.

## Exemplar 2

As some of my frequent readers may or may not know, growing up I had a severely embarrassing emo phase (much to my grand parents disgust). However, my overly thick, cyan blue eyeliner was simply an outward expression of my inner teenage angst. Likewise, the new words of the internet are simply just the modern medium of creativity and innovation. Although 'twerk', 'boogie' and 'reem' don't stick to the strict expectations of language, neither just as my black lipstick and ~~an~~ dramatically-teased hair defied my parents' expectations of their precious daughter, these <sup>new</sup> words are simply a way of self-expression.

Linguist David Crystal understands this innovation stating how 'if you go to a skatepark, you see kids whose expertise is making a skate board do wonderful things... online you show how brilliant you are by manipulating the language of the internet'. Blend words have popped up to describe new situations: we knew <sup>lying to</sup> ~~getting~~ Amazon you had never <sup>about</sup> ~~received~~ your parcel to get a refund was called 'scamazoning' and the new generation of politicians were 'Brexit' 'Brexshitters'. See, getting creative with language can be just as fun as those days of your youth hanging out ~~at the skatepark~~ ~~was you see~~ at the local skatepark.



## Section C

### 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]

Candidates generally performed well on this question, finding the topic of policing accessible with various points of linguistic comparison to make. It was pleasing to see a range of approaches taken to answering the question, although a consistently comparative approach should underpin any essay. Some responses were uneven in their treatment of the two sources, usually giving a more detailed commentary of Text B. When making comparative points, exemplification should be used from both texts. The use of introductory paragraphs is more prevalent in this question, with candidates often reworking the contextual information set out in the resource booklet into an opening. 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.

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 and showed a clear appreciation of the differing audiences, considering how each producer uses modal verbs for example. Some incisive comparisons were made between the listing of police competencies in Text C and how these were demonstrated in Text B. Some candidates were able to pinpoint the primary and secondary audiences for Text B and discuss the significance of the narrator, suggesting reasons for their language choices. There was some mislabelling of the accent features of the policeman as dialect at times, with sweeping or overly simplistic conclusions drawn.

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. There remain candidates who discuss particularly spoken language features in Text B, but make no comparison on the basis that Text C is 'in the written mode'.

There was again a discernible improvement in candidates' discussion of linguistic concepts with a range of appropriate discussions on power, accommodation, face and synthetic personalisation among others. These are used most effectively when they are specifically tied to linguistic points made. Overall, candidates should be striving to create comparative paragraphs which meet each of the assessment objectives, as seen in Exemplar 3 below.

#### ***Most successful candidates:***

- 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.

#### ***Less successful candidates:***

- Wrote introductions reiterating contextual points
- Did not exemplify points made
- Did not consider linguistic concepts OR used them in a sweeping manner.

## Exemplar 3

Furthermore, given that the texts have very <sup>very contrasting</sup> different audiences, the language used reflects this ~~very~~ difference. Text B employs a more informal register, with patterns of elision, such as 'gotcha' and 'wanna', alongside clipped ~~word~~ lexis for example 'gent's'. ~~Recent features are also present, such as~~ Non-standard forms, like omitting the auxiliary verb from the phrase 'I just been sat', further emphasise this informal register, with the cumulative effect of these techniques being to appeal to the mass audience. The wide reach of the BBC means that viewers will be of varying intellects, thus the less formal register seeks to converge (Giles) to at the common language of all viewers and avoid alienation of any audience members. Additionally, this informality makes the documentary appear more relatable and authentic.

Comparatively, text C is much more formal, using polysyllabic lexis like 'examination' and 'satisfactory' and a lexical field of application including 'assessment' and 'interview'. This is likely because text C has a niche audience of those interested in the police force, and therefore the more formal register assumes readers already have a degree of understanding regarding the application process. Interestingly, the patterns of abstract nouns like 'dignity', 'relationship' and 'respect' perhaps seek to appeal to a more female audience. This is also suggested by the focus on female officers in the images and could be as a result of the increased need for female representation in the police force. As a result, the formality contrasts text B, as the niche audience of text C does not require the informality needed to engage with the mass audience of ~~the~~ the transcript.

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