

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

H470

For first teaching in 2015

H470/02 Summer 2019 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 2 series overview

This has been another successful series and it is pleasing to see how well centres are preparing candidates for this paper. A range of conceptual knowledge was in evidence across the three questions on the paper and there were several interesting approaches to exploring language patterns and contexts.

As with previous series, candidates continue to answer the questions in every possible order with many electing to start with Section C as it carries the highest number of marks. The order in which candidates approach the paper is entirely their choice and has no impact on the examiners' application of the mark scheme. Interestingly, this year saw a rise in consistency across the paper. In previous years, there was often a 'weaker' response; however, candidates at all ability levels this series appeared better prepared to produce consistent responses.

Another trend this year has been for lengthy responses, especially in Section A. There was no correlation between overly long (four or five page) responses to this section and the mark given. Centres would be well advised to remind candidates that precision and succinctness are hallmarks of good essays and linguistic analyses. As noted in previous reports, overly long responses can often become self-penalising as the obscure good points and lose a sense of precision and discernment.

Finally, as with last year, candidates continue to leave huge gaps in the middle of essays (sometimes almost half a side in the middle of a response). This remains inconsequential to the examiners' application of the mark scheme but is still a feature which should be avoided. Candidates should seek to use the answer booklet appropriately. There were also instances of students missing out several pages in the main answer booklet and then using two (or in one case three) additional answer booklets. Again, this does not affect the mark given but is best avoided.

Section A overview

The transcript featured two child interlocutors, Beth and Tom, along with their mother. Candidates were able to approach this question successfully and showed a clear understanding of how language use in the transcript linked to or illuminated their understanding of theories. Several candidates noted that Tom speaks very little in the transcript and were able to show good conceptual knowledge by considering the limitations of the data itself.

As with all sections of this exam, depth, range and precision were the key indicators of very strong responses.

Question 1

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

Use your knowledge of theories and concepts of child language acquisition to support your answer. [20]

Almost all responses were able to maintain a focus on the language use of the child interlocutors rather than the adult caregiver. This shows how well centres and candidates have understood the requirements of the question and both should be commended for this. Across the three areas stated in the question, grammar and meaning remain the areas where students focus most and, given the data and the nature of child language acquisition itself, this is considered an appropriate approach to this question. Instances of candidates ignoring phonology entirely were incredibly rare and the majority of responses seen were able to engage with the phonological error in a meaningful manner.

In terms of phonology, this remains an area in which candidates attempt to do more than is necessary and often sacrifice accuracy as a result. With the substitution seen in the consonant cluster at the start of the concrete noun 'tractor', several candidates attempted to discuss manner and place of articulation and often, incorrectly, labelled the substituted phonemes as plosives. There is little purpose to attempting this labelling unless absolutely certain. Reference to the simplification strategy and related theory (such as the fis-phenomenon) would suffice. Beth's use of the short vowel in the noun 'bath' was often highlighted as a feature of accent and linked well to imitation theory. In some cases, students misinterpreted this as a phonological error, but the examiner did not feel this would unduly alter the mark given if the rest of the response were strong. In addition to over-reaching in terms of phonetic labelling, this part of the question also caused a number of candidates to conflate accent with dialect and even sociolect. There were also several instances of candidates labelling these phonological errors as 'virtuous errors' and candidates continue to attempt to 'prove' grammatical stages by discussing phonology. Grammatical stages should only be evidenced through grammatical usage. These kinds of issues are best avoided.

As previously stated, grammar and meaning were both areas that candidates applied well and with some assurance. The best responses linked the two together and discussed, for example, the pragmatics behind Tom's imperative utterance or the lexical links between the concrete nouns Beth uses across her imaginative play. Candidates were better able than in previous series to apply innateness with far fewer claiming virtuous errors as evidence against the theory. The range of theories applied continues to impress but, unlike last series, candidates also made frequent and productive use of the 'big 4' (Chomsky, Skinner, Piaget and Bruner) alongside Halliday's functions, Gruwell's phonological sequence, Brown's inflection sequence and Bellugi and McNeil's work on question and negative formation.

Most successful responses	Least successful responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show precision, accuracy, range and depth • Integrate links to theories and draw on patterns of language use (this is not explicitly required in the mark scheme for this question, but strong candidates tend to do this anyway). • 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • Are overly definitive in their assertions (e.g., Tom hardly speaks and so is in the holophrastic stage)

Exemplar 1

	<p>Beth displays many signs that she is in the post-telegraphic stage of language through her use of complete utterances and all of the word classes e.g. "Tom do you want to eat the hamburger". This shows how Beth understands how to form questions as she correctly uses the "do" auxiliary and puts the main verb into an infinitive "eat". The use of a vocative with "Tom" also reinforces how she has grasped conversational skills and how to engage other interlocutors. This skill comes from social interactions like this</p>
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This section shows a density of credit-worthy points and is also clearly written in an essay style as it builds a case for the opening assertion that Beth is post-telegraphic. It draws on a single quotation but unpicks the multiple ways in which it is able to support the statement. This suggests a secure and assured understanding of both the theory stated and the language use shown in the data.

Section B overview

The data was taken from the lifestyle section of The Independent newspaper online. There were a number of interesting patterns across the text and a range of features which candidates of all abilities were able to pick up on. Generic conventions (including those related to the online mode) were present and offered a straightforward, context-led starting point for candidates across the ability range.

As with previous series, candidates must maintain a focus on language and patterns of language in order to address the needs of the question and the mark scheme. There were still instances of candidates opting for a concept-led discursive style of answer and, in doing so, missing the focus on language that is required. Such responses were not able to achieve as highly in spite of, in some cases, showing a sound understanding of concepts. Candidates should also be wary of over-stating the importance of conversational and spoken theories in addressing written texts.

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 strongest responses were able to identify the satirical and entertaining elements of the text and built a response around unpicking the language levels in which the satire resided. These responses were also aware of the intended audience and considered the importance of the text's placement in a lifestyle section. They also showed understanding of the fact that the satire was at least in part a means to mitigate the importance of a sensitive issue. Concepts related to power were more frequently used successfully even though the subject matter perhaps guided students towards a gender approach.

Less successful responses missed the satire and read the text in a literal way. This resulted in responses that built a case explaining the sexism of the producers and showed a fairly shallow understanding of how audiences may react. The examiner was accepting of this interpretation as one that could potentially occur in a real reader; however, while possible it was not the most successful approach and doesn't represent an accurate understanding of the text producers' actual aims. These responses were also the most likely ones to attempt to explain the sexism as resulting from The Independent's "right wing" political bias. As with previous series, candidates are better off using the language to explore potential contextual factors rather than making broad assertions about political bias.

Most responses were able to engage well with a range of representations in the text. These included how the producers represented themselves, the BBC, MasterChef and the implied audience. As with previous series, this was viewed by the examiner as an appropriate way to address the first bullet point of AO2 in terms of conceptual understanding. Other candidates chose to go down the route of applying power theory with Fairclough dominating discussion again. There remain examples of students trying to make Grice or Goffman fit with the written text when they would be better advised to consider register, tenor and distance between producer and receiver. Often, the points were founded on a reasonable understanding of the data but were then linked to theories of limited relevance in this mode.

Most successful responses	Least successful responses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. Apply conversational theories to written mode texts.

Exemplar 2

2	<p>Text B is a multi-modal article from a fairly impartial but less arguably slightly left of centre newspaper, The Independent. The article comes from a 'lifestyle section' which is a typical convention of online websites which have a navigation bar to locate different areas of the website. The topic of the text is gender and specifically female chefs, and the article addresses some of the arguments for why there are so few professional female chefs, particularly on shows like MasterChef. It can therefore be argued that a somewhat gender bias in the media is being addressed in the article, such as with "judges have their selection on the plate of food in front of them, not the sex of</p>
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the person who cooked it".

The multimodality of the text is evident through the use of an image which denotes the three finalists in MasterChef. They are all represented as professionals due to their chef attire/outfit along with the kitchen environment in the background. The fact that the image is at the top of the article foregrounds the issue being discussed, which is whether or not the cooking industry and the media industry such as with shows like MasterChef are still biased against women. The multimodality of the text is still also reinforced through the inclusion of social media links to 'Facebook' and 'Twitter', anchored by the imperative sentence "click to follow". This helps to support David Gauntlett's theory about Web 2.0 and how it

The section shown is early on in the response and is a strong example of how to discuss modality of online texts without being overly reliant on lengthy descriptions of pictures. While it begins with discussion of the image, this is quickly linked to the use of social media icons which are, in turn, linked to imperative use. This is then briefly linked to Gauntlett. While this is not the strongest part of the response, it is a good example of discussing the online mode well which is something a number of candidates struggle with.

Section C overview

This question featured two texts on the management of bees. The texts were closely linked in terms of both topic and genre and this allowed the vast majority of candidates to access the question well and demonstrate their ability to explore the two texts and what they suggested about language change.

As with every other section of the exam, the focus of this question is on exploring and analysing language and patterns of language. This analysis should then be used to explore language change in contexts. Most candidates clearly understood the needs of the question and were able to demonstrate that understanding appropriately.

Question 3

3 By detailed analysis of the writing in both passages, discuss and illustrate the variations in language between the 18th and 20th 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]

The most successful responses were able to identify patterns across both texts that exhibited language change, and some were able to identify similarities across the texts which suggested that the generic conventions had remained relatively static over time. Some strong responses also weighed up the extent to which the texts provide evidence in support of informalisation. There were strong responses that drew on the use of contractions, first person and the more anecdotal tone in the text D to suggest that informalisation was in evidence. While some other strong responses looked at lexical and etymological complexity alongside syntax to suggest the opposite. Both approaches, when securely linked to language use, were considered both interesting and valid by the examiner.

The majority of candidates from across the ability range were able to identify the shared lexical fields in the two texts along with similarities in discourse structure and orthography. Almost every candidate referred to the long 's' grapheme present in C but absent in D. In the vast majority of cases, this resulted in little more than feature spotting, but some students were able to link it to the fact that the popularity of long 's' was beginning to wane by the late 18th century and may contribute to a more formal style in C. This is a debatable point but one which shows critical engagement with the use in text C and, as such, was viewed as credit-worthy by the examiner.

As with previous series, less successful responses tended to feature-spot at a lexical level in both texts to the detriment of their ability (or time) to discuss other language levels. Such approaches struggled to prove 'range' as stated in the mark scheme.

In keeping with previous series, candidates have, at times, struggled to explore contexts. There have been several examples of candidates over-stating the importance of Caxton on the production of both texts or suggesting the Second World War as a major factor in why people needed to keep bees in 1946. Rather than attempting to apply any and all historical knowledge that candidates have, they would be better to allow the language of the text to guide them towards tentative conclusions about production and reception.

Exemplar 3

In Text C the sentences are generally complex. Sentences such as "THE proprietor having

provided for his bees [...] seen to prey upon them". This links to the formal and informative nature of the text as it has an academic and formal register which requires multi-clause sentences. Likewise in Text D, similarly long multi-clause complex sentences are being utilised such as with "There are two species [...] they are more". This again, links to the formal academic register of the text and can be linked to the wider context around the time the text was written. In both the 18th and 20th centuries, society was largely formal and heavily dependent on social class structures, which lead to more formal language use.

In today's society ~~as~~ deformatisation has taken place which has lead to language being less complex and formal.

This section of the response deals with patterns of syntax. This is often a difficult pattern to exemplify but this response handles it well and draws clear and succinct links to register, purpose and contexts which contributes to a response which, overall was densely packed with credit-worthy points.

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