

AS LEVEL

Examiners' report

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

H070

For first teaching in 2015

H070/02 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 exam paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper 2 series overview

This series saw another drop in the number of entries but still generated a range of responses which showed the quality and breadth of learning undertaken by a range of candidates. As with previous series, candidates are required to answer one compulsory question in Section A: Topical Issues. Section B features a choice of questions focusing on either power or gender. Most candidates were able to differentiate between the journalistic and persuasive style required for Question 1 and the analytical style required for Question 2 or 3.

This series saw a marked increase in the number of candidates attempting the power question (2) instead of the gender question (3). For the first series since this exam began, more candidates attempted Question 2. This may be due to the similarities between the two texts which shared a few genre features and had a similar purpose.

There continue to be candidates who incorrectly label which question they are answering and, while this had no impact on the mark given, it is best avoided. There were no issues with timing on the paper and all candidates were able to answer questions in the given time.

Section A overview

This question has traditionally been a strength of the majority of responses in previous series; however, while the majority of candidates were able to meet the needs of AO5 in using elements of the form and addressing the non-specialist audience, this question seems to have stretched candidates' ability to discuss the issue itself. Some candidates struggled to maintain focus on advertising and seemed to understand the issue as being about wider society becoming less sexist. These responses didn't successfully engage with the issue.

Question 1

'The language of advertising is becoming less sexist.'

- 1 Write an online magazine article that critically engages with the statement above and persuades readers of a particular point of view. Your article should be aimed at a non-specialist, reasonably well-educated audience. You should write about 500 words. **[24]**

This task specified an online magazine article and most candidates were able to meet the needs of the form with many employing a mixed register and some more obvious features like headlines, standfirsts, and overt references to the interactivity of an online mode. As in previous series, many candidates chose to use the issue title itself as the headline and this was deemed appropriate by the examiner. It is worth highlighting for candidates that a headline can be an opportunity to be more creative in matching the form and presenting the issue. Some candidates ignored the online nature of the text and produced magazine articles which were not obviously situated online. Examiners did not feel this was detrimental to the candidates' ability to achieve fully under AO5. As a final note, some candidates decided to include pictures or boxes referring to pictures and, while not harmful to a candidate's ability to achieve fully, it is perhaps not the best use of time.

The specified purpose was persuasion and most candidates were able to clearly express a view and build a sequence of points related to their argument. Some struggled to persuade and presented a mini-essay or a more informative article style which did not fully meet the needs of the form. In many cases, humour was well-judged and added to the candidates' ability to meet the needs of form, purpose and audience. In some rare cases, candidates employed an inappropriate register either by not glossing or explaining specialist terminology or through ill-judged attempts at taboo lexis. Glossing is an important part of meeting the needs of audience and can be done through exemplification or simple explanation; taboo lexis, while not always inappropriate to the form or audience, needs to be very carefully judged and, as such, can often be a risky way to try and engage the audience.

The issue stated allowed candidates to consider a range of concepts with socialisation, representations and the four gender models (deficit, dominance difference and diversity) the most popular. Interestingly, candidates made frequent reference to ethos, pathos and logos in their responses and, when done with clear links to language, this was successful.

More so than in previous series, candidates seemed to find it difficult to use their conceptual understanding to discuss language. Candidates were often able to produce strong responses under AO5 but often left their responses conceptually thin. Centres would do well to remind their candidates that they must clearly focus on the issue stated. While it is often possible to shift the terms of an issue to an area of conceptual comfort, the issue stated must remain clear in the response.

Relevant theories used by candidates in this series

Dominance, deficit, difference and diversity
 Socialisation
 Linguistic relativity, determinism or reflectionism
 Interpellation
 Hegemonic Masculinity
 Media Representations
 Language change

Exemplar 1

linguist Peter Trudgill discovered that in Norwich, men used non-standard English - including contractions, colloquial expressions and erroneous grammar - far more than women, who adopted the more formally polite tone. With men associating with this newer, rebellious tone, known as: Covert prestige. In deviating from the norm, advertisers have flocked to this ideology to increase sales. The new 'Snickers' advertisement exploits the ^{male-orientated field} ~~semantic field~~ of rap using 'cut language', colloquial expressions and almost taboo lexical expressions to appeal to the predominantly male buyers of the Chocolate bar, emphasising the sexism in the advert as 'Snickers'!

This section of a Level 6 response begins with spoken language theory, which is presented clearly for the well-educated audience specified, before shaping this theory to an example of language use from an advert. The point is well-constructed and, while not offering an example of the language use referred to, makes it clear that the focus is on the issue stated. Had the candidate quoted or invented an example, the point could potentially have developed further but this is not detrimental to its achievement under AO2 and, arguably, allowed the candidate to continue building a persuasive case with other examples later.

Section B overview

Both texts in this section were taken from online sources and both offered advice. In both cases, the audience was either professional or those aspiring to a professional position, meaning that both texts were closely linked in terms of tenor and representations of producers. There was little to no evidence of candidates infringing the rubric by comparing the two texts in this section or by answering both questions and centres should be praised for helping their candidates navigate the optionality of this section.

There was a marked increase, on both questions, in candidates who produced largely narrative responses which engaged with the content of the text rather than the ways in which language was used to represent either power or gender. This was by no means the majority but was significantly more common than previously seen. In addition to this, there was also a marked increase in the number of candidates who struggled to produce coherent essays. Several responses featured disjointed references to unexplained or unlabelled quotations. Centres and candidates may benefit from a greater focus on how to construct an academic essay.

Centres would do well to remind their candidates that this is a language-focused question.

The demands of the question

- Candidates and centres should pay careful attention to the level descriptors which all explicitly refer to either language or patterns of language. As such, language must be the focus when exploring concepts and contexts.
- Concepts should only be presented as and when they are of interpretive value in analysing the texts. Candidates should also be wary of over-emphasising the relevance of conversational theories when analysing written, non-interactive texts such those in this series.
- Contexts are vital in analysing the language use and candidates should aim to be specific in their discussion of contexts. This can often be data-led rather than attempting to label broad socio-economic groups that they feel a text is targeting.
- The bullet points provided on the exam paper are a useful guide for how candidates might structure sections of their response to make sure they cover all relevant aspects during their analysis.

Most successful responses

- Focused on language use and engaged with both patterns and examples which were analysed in depth
- Used precise terminology
- Engaged in detail with contexts (going beyond simply identifying GAP) consistently throughout
- Offered alternative interpretation of patterns and features
- Were selective in the use of relevant theories
- Used knowledge of language, concepts and contexts in an integrated manner to explore power/gender in the relevant texts.

Least successful responses

- Focused on presenting 'learned knowledge' of theory without linking to the data
- Ignored or did not engage with patterns of language use and examples of language use
- Presented a discursive response focused on links between content and theory
- Used little terminology
- Relied on spoken or conversational theories to explore written aspects of the texts
- Adopted an indignant or polemical tone when analysing
- Were reductive or vague about contexts
- Focused on content at the expense of a focus on language.

Question 2

2 Language and Power

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

Using appropriate terminology, examine **Text A** in the light of the ways in which power is represented. In your answer you should:

- analyse the relevant language features of the text
- explore how contextual factors and language features construct meanings
- consider the ways in which your understanding of concepts and issues relating to power in language use illuminates the representation of power within the text. [36]

This question featured an edited page from an advice website called “CV Library”. While not explicitly part of the text, some candidates mentioned the noun ‘library’ as a source of credibility for the website which contributed to the representation of power in the text. While examiners would counsel against focusing analysis on the contextual information provided as an introduction to the text, this point was considered valid and quite perceptive.

There were no responses that sought to use gender concepts to discuss this text which, given the topic and nature of the text, is entirely understandable. Despite this, it remains pleasing to see candidates matching the conceptual focus of the question with such regularity.

There were successful responses that were able to engage well with the discourse structure of the text and its use of pseudo-adjacency pairs to mimic the structure of an interview. Higher-level responses would often draw links between this, the sentence functions and tone of the text to create strong, pattern-focused analyses of a range of interlinked linguistic features which contribute to the representation of power.

Less successful responses struggled to go beyond discussing content and feature spotting with little sense of the producer’s aim or the audience’s needs. In some rare cases, candidates interpreted the data as a spoken transcript between two interlocutors. This was not considered to be a valid approach by the examiner for obvious reasons. Another feature of less successful responses was to attempt to apply conversational theories to the text without clearly considering the contexts of reception and production. Face theory was commonly misapplied to the texts and while there could be some credit if candidates applied this back to the relationship between producer and receiver, often responses simply labelled features as “Face-threatening” with little or no attempt to explore any potential relevance to the mode or other contextual factors.

A range of theories were used and used well by many candidates. The ever-popular synthetic personalisation was seen numerous times and higher-level responses went beyond simply linking this to the use of the second person. These responses were able to draw links to the use of, among other things, humour, sentence function, shifts in formality signalled lexically and idiomatic language use.

Overall, candidates from across the ability range were able to produce sound and appropriate responses to this question.

Exemplar 2

Finally, under 'Final Thoughts', the phrase
 'our hop tips' is alliterative, containing
 short vowel sounds and plosives, which
 is a rhetorical device to make the summing
 up of this text a light-hearted tone,
 using catchy high-frequency phrases.
 The last sentence of the text uses the
 conjunction 'and' to link the two
 phrases 'doing that interview' which is the
 shared aim of the text, and 'landing your
 dream job'. 'Dream' is a hyperbolic lexical
 choice which gives a strong incentive to
 respond to the ~~text's~~ advice in the text.

This section of a Level 6 response clearly illustrates how candidates can link separate language features into a pattern of language use and use it to explore contexts. The extract doesn't explicitly reference concepts but is clearly pattern-focused and thus credit-worthy under AO2 as well as AO1 and AO3. The reference to short vowels and plosives doesn't necessarily add to the point being made but, as it is accurate, doesn't detract from the response at all. In fact, it creates an impression of a candidate who is comfortable with the language levels.

Question 3

3 Language and Gender

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

Using appropriate terminology, examine **Text B** in the light of the ways in which gender is represented. In your answer you should:

- analyse the relevant language features of the text
- explore how contextual factors and language features construct meanings
- consider the ways in which your understanding of concepts and issues relating to gender in language use illuminates the representation of gender within the text. **[36]**

This question featured an edited guest blog from a marketing website. The text itself focused on gender differences in public speaking and the female producers focused the text more on women's language. Successful responses were able to engage with the ways in which gender, both male and female, was represented by the language of the text. These responses drew links between a range of language features which sought to challenge or confirm traditional gender stereotypes and candidates often related these to dominance and difference models.

There were several responses which applied power concepts to the text and, while appropriate to the context of production, the focus of this response needs to remain on the representations of gender. Candidates discussing synthetic personalisation, for example, could make relevant points about the representation of the producers and their attempts to lower the distance between themselves and the primarily female receivers.

A more pronounced issue with responses to this question was the tendency to engage almost solely with the content of the text rather than its language use. These responses became largely discursive rather than analytical and, in ignoring the language or patterns of language use in the text, limited the examiner's ability to credit responses under AO1, AO3 and the bottom two bullet points of AO2. This is potentially the result of the text's topic and centres should remind candidates that the focus of this question, regardless of text, is analysing how language creates representations of gender.

As a result of the above-mentioned issues, there was greater variation in candidates' performance on this question than in previous series but there were still responses that were able to fully engage with the language use in the text and its patterns of use. For example, there were examples of candidates clearly linking pronoun use and discourse structure to identify a shift in the text's implied audience in the third section. Examiners considered this both perceptive and a very skilled observation for candidates to make at this level.

Exemplar 3

The tone of Text B is made relatively informal by the use of pronouns, which is typical of a blog-style format, but the producers also maintain an academic register to suggest their expertise, ~~and~~ thereby promoting their company, and also fulfilling the text's informative purpose. The producers use the first person collective pronoun 'we' throughout the text, and its use suggests ~~that it~~ makes the tone more personal, suggesting that they have also experienced the issues in public speaking that are outlined. The

This section of a Level 6 response shows a well-integrated approach which is focused on language patterns and exemplification. These are clearly linked to contexts and to representations of the producer. This response continued in this manner throughout and made potentially stronger points than those shown but it is the integration of the three assessment objectives that is its real strength. Candidates would be well advised to aim for a similar density of credit-worthy points.

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