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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel IAL

In English Language (WEN01)

Unit 1: Language: Context and Identity

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Introduction

This unit introduces students to how language is used in data from a range of sources. Students explore how the contexts of production and reception affect language choices in spoken and written texts. Students also explore how language reflects and constructs the identity or identities of the user and varies depending on the contexts of production and reception. Students apply appropriate methods of language analysis to a range of written, spoken or multimodal data taken from 20th and 21st century sources using the key language frameworks and levels. They also demonstrate their understanding through the creation of a new text for a specified audience, purpose and context.

Unit 1 is assessed by examination of 1 hour 45 minute's duration. Candidates answer two questions: one question from Section A and one question from Section B. The paper is marked out of a total of 50 marks with 35 allocated to Section A and 15 to Section B.

Section A: Context and Identity

Question 1 (35 marks)

Candidates answer one question on two unseen extracts selected from 20th and 21st century sources. They are required to produce an extended comparative response showing how the presentation of identity is shaped by language and contextual factors in both unseen texts.

The task is assessed across AO1, 2, 3 and 4:

- AO1: Apply appropriate methods of language analysis, using associated terminology and coherent written expression.
- AO2: Demonstrate critical understanding of concepts and issues relevant to language use.
- AO3: Analyse and evaluate how contextual factors and language features are associated with the construction of meaning.
- AO4: Explore connections across texts, informed by linguistic concepts and methods.

In the June 2019 examination Text A was an extract from an article written by Tim Wigmore and published in the 'New Statesman' in September 2016. Wigmore provides information and statistics to support his premise regarding falling levels of educational achievement in white, working class boys in the England. His is a formal and professional identity but the slant he places on this article develops his stance on the educational issue he is investigating. Principal Carl Roberts, and his school in Kent exemplify the problem. Roberts is cited directly by Wigmore, and the views and experiences voiced by this head teacher shape the article as a whole. Roberts is presented as a concerned professional whose background, in some ways, mirrors and, in others, offers a direct contrast to the boys he seeks to help. His reflection on the social, domestic and economic deprivation of

his students, and on the shortcomings of the education system in closing the resultant gap in achievement, inform his 'voice' throughout.

Text B was an extract from a speech delivered by Michelle Obama in Madrid as part of an international tour to promote her 'Let Girls Learn' initiative. Obama presents herself as a passionate and humorous individual, committed to improving access to education for girls in countries that impose barriers to their potential. She also places herself with her Western (European) audience in terms of privilege and 'voice' and urges her young audience to join with her to advocate change. She also develops her identity as a mother of two young girls and thus creates a link with her young female audience. Her reference to her husband places her in a position of power, and, potentially, global influence, and further informs her identity.

The question asked candidates to analyse and compare how the language of both texts conveys personal identity. Three bullet points offered additional prompts and guidance directly linked to the Assessment Objectives (and the mark scheme) for this component and reminding candidates of the specific areas of study they should apply to the task:

- relevant language frameworks and levels
- concepts and issues such as social, cultural and gender factors
- contextual factors such as mode, field, function and audience.

Centres are advised that the format and focus of the question will be consistent across the lifetime of the specification. Actual wording may, inevitably, change depending on the nature and content of the two unseen texts presented. However, the focus of assessment is clearly stated in the question stem with its prompt to consider and compare how personal identity is constructed and presented in the source materials. The bullet points remind candidates of the areas of study they should apply to this comparative exploration and are linked directly to the Assessment Objectives applied by examiners to their responses. **The mark scheme contains indicative content and may well provide centres with a useful resource when preparing their students for subsequent examinations.**

The texts were clearly linked by the issues of the education and gender. Given the differing contexts of each, there was much opportunity for candidates to explore the links and contrasts between them. The focus of the question was the construction and presentation of **personal identity**, and the ability of candidates to incorporate this into their analysis proved something of a discriminator, with a significant minority struggling with this concept. Those that framed their analysis through this central focus were rewarded.

In June 2019 responses to Section A covered a full range of achievement. Most candidates offered consideration of the genre and context of both texts and were able to draw links between them based on their central focus on the issue of the education. They were also able to offer comparative consideration of the differing audience and context of each text and shape these – with varying success – through the differing perspectives and

circumstances of Wigmore (and of those of Carl Roberts) and the global reach of Obama as wife the former President of the U.S.A.

The source texts proved to be accessible to most candidates and the majority offered a balanced consideration of both and the theme that linked them. Most candidates could differentiate context well and most responses across the range could point to more complex aspects of each such as the multiple functions of the Obama text or the presentation of Roberts in the Wigmore text. These often developed insightful contrast between the experiences of both writers and how these influenced their personal perspectives on education. There were also some very competent explorations of the cultural and societal attitudes towards gender and education.

It was pleasing to see that many centres had made use of the support afforded by the Examiner Report and the indicative content in the mark scheme produced in previous series. This enabled many to meet more of the specific requirements of the Assessment Objectives. Some used these documents as a framework for their responses which ensured coverage and structure in the mid bands of achievement, but which sometimes led to repetition at the lower levels and, in some, less frequent, cases, restricted responses at the mid to upper levels. In these instances, candidates sometimes looked for direct points of comparison across frameworks that were not really evident in the texts themselves, and the subsequent analysis was, somewhat strained/forced as a result. Those that used the marks scheme framework to provide 'subheadings' sometimes generated repetitive and or/undeveloped responses. Centres are advised that the mark scheme offers indicative content – it is **not** prescriptive, and given the nature of the specific frameworks considered, there is considerable overlap. Candidates need to be selective and only apply framework that relate directly to the task and which can be exemplified directly from the source materials.

Most were able to describe method and effect but many at the mid-lower levels of achievement struggled to apply specific language terms to their consideration of how – and why – these effects were produced. A more systematic approach, whereby comments are supported by evidence drawn directly from the source materials would have provided candidates with the opportunity to explore the language from which this evidence was comprised (applying concepts, terms and frameworks) and would have enabled them to reach the requirement for higher levels of achievement provided in the mark scheme. Some responses used a range of impressive language terms to describe language features but did not go beyond a descriptive approach and marks had to be restricted because of failure to link to context/purposes. A list-like approach/feature spotting is not a successful way to tackle this question.

Some offered generalised comment on context whilst those that developed comment not only on the background context of the texts but also on key aspects of production and reception of each (including key generic conventions) were rewarded accordingly. A significant minority did not address AO4 and the requirement to comment on the links between the two texts and this made an upward movement through the levels difficult.

Successful responses to Text A looked the conventions of the article itself and how its structure fulfilled both its informative/persuasive function and enabled the development and presentation of both voices (Wigmore/Roberts) through reflection, information and observation. The best differentiated the voices of Wigmore and Roberts, whose personal experiences were incorporated into the article to develop and support the argument presented by Wigmore and to offer comment on the changing educational dynamic in England. These successful responses picked up on the shared values and concerns of both.

Responses that were placed in the highest bands of achievement supported comment and assertion with evidence directly drawn from the text which was used to explore the specific language choices made, applying terminology in good range at word, sentence and whole - text level. These linked comment to the concept of 'voice'/persona as constructed Wigmore as writer through consideration of his presentation of Roberts to supplement the information presented and to support the conclusions he draws. It is this link between form and function/effect that signals a successful response.

Less successful were those responses that offered generalised comment on the context of the article and issues upon which it was based. These often adopted a very descriptive approach to its content. Some misread the prompts in the question and produced a discursive essay of the issue of education and gender citing the experiences of Roberts here but often misunderstanding that although there were some similarities there were also significant differences between his upbringing and that of many of his students. Those that offered limited exemplification and limited specific analysis of technique were anchored in the mid/lower bands of achievement.

Successful responses to Text B took cues from Obama's presentation of herself a woman and a mother of girls and therefore in touch with the attitudes of the young women she addresses. They were able to comment on her crafting of her speech to develop a relationship with her audience and thus further its rhetorical and promotional function.

As with Text A, less successful responses offered generalised comment on the context of the speech and adopted a very descriptive approach to its content. Those that offered limited exemplification and limited specific analysis of the language used were anchored in the mid/ lower bands of achievement. Limited consideration the personal identity of Obama and how this was constructed and presented also negatively impacted on the success of the response.

AO4 requires candidates to explore connections and contrasts between the source texts. Comparative work was usually helpful in lifting responses into Level 4 enabling candidates to demonstrate a more discriminating approach to the data. However, many lacked confidence to deal with the texts in an integrated comparative approach and dealt with them in separate sections. The most successful responses seized the many opportunities for comparison and contrast – many adopting an integrated approach to this aspect of the task. Many explored the purpose of the texts and developed links through the persuasive function of each. Most picked up on the fact that both texts were

clearly linked by the issue of the education but were differentiated by gender and socio-geographical focus. Many also picked up that both were initially received in Europe but that the article was of primary interest to a British readership whilst the Obama speech, given the nationality and status of the speaker and the nature of her initiative, had global appeal. The best were able to explore the interesting inversion of those that achieve across gender and ethnic lines.

Less successful responses outlined the links and contrasts between the two texts but failed to develop any but the more obvious or to explore the language which evidenced these. Such responses were characterised by an essentially descriptive approach. A significant number of candidates took a summary approach to the content of the texts which is not a useful approach to achieve marks. This proves reading ability but not 'analysis' of language features in use.

Section B: The Creation of Voice **Question 2 (15 marks)**

Section B of the examination is assessed against AO5: 'Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English to communicate in different ways' with a total of 15 marks allocated for this component. As such the task assesses both the fluency and accuracy of written expression and the ability to generate an original and (hopefully) engaging text.

Candidates are expected to demonstrate their own expertise and creativity in the use of English. They are encouraged to incorporate personal and local references. Candidates were expected to draw upon the at least one of the source materials provided in Section A but reshape them to meet the requirements of the context.

In June 2019 candidates were asked to produce the text for a blog, aimed at young people, that encouraged participation in programmes to raise awareness of the importance of education for disadvantaged groups. The question stem was carefully worded to provide candidates with a clear indication of expectation of context, function and audience. The second part of the question:

In addition to your own ideas you must refer to material from at least one of the texts in the Source Booklet

highlighted a key requirement of the task, that is the need to incorporate some material from one (or both) of the source texts into the report. This proved problematic to a significant minority of candidates but is a key requirement which must be taken into account. It is NOT necessary to incorporate every detail from the source; indeed, many that did produced lengthy and essentially pedestrian paraphrases that failed to engage. More successful were those that took only relevant information from the source

materials and reworked this to a lively and engaging agenda better fitted to the prescribed context of delivery.

The format of the question will be relatively constant, but wording will, inevitably, change according to the nature of the creative task set. As this is a creative response, examiners will accept any approach that concedes to the prompts provided.

There was some improvement at the upper bands of achievement in Section B responses this series with many achieving marks in Level 4 and Level 5. This is very pleasing as the 15 marks available for this component can make a huge difference to the final grade awarded. Unfortunately, this improvement was not fully evident in the mid and lower Levels. Here responses were often very brief which severely restricted links to the source materials or failed to fully engage the reader. Others appeared to be very rushed and undeveloped, indicating that candidates did not manage their time effectively, A significant minority failed to even attempt Q2.

Successful responses effectively applied the interactive/ongoing conventions of a blog and showed awareness of the youth audience. These produced clear, well-structured responses and demonstrated an understanding of writing for an audience, experimenting with register. They demonstrated clear awareness of audience and function, conceding clearly to the context and the persuasive/informative function of the blog. There were some very fluently written and convincing new texts. The best adapted the source material fluidly – for example, drawing upon the rhetorical ‘voice’ of Obama to target their audience.

Many, in the mid-range of achievement could adopt a tone or ‘voice’ which was convincing even if the technical accuracy in written English was lacking.

Less successful responses struggled with the precise purpose of the task or with maintaining the generic form and appeared to lack the vocabulary and control of syntax to fulfil the requirements of the task; these proved essentially self-penalising. Some struggled to sustain a consistent tone/register given the nature of the task and the tone and content of the source materials. A key discriminator was the incorporation on the source data; at the mid/low bands of achievement many made no concession to the source and all, others simply quoted directly from the texts, struggling to integrate the material and therefore disrupting the fluency of their response.

Timing appeared to be something of an issue with some short or incomplete responses although performance improved considerably this series. Centres are advised that although the paper is weighted across the two tasks (with 35 marks allocated for Q1) the 15 marks available for Q2 can be the difference between several final grades. Candidates are urged to set aside sufficient time to understand the specific requirements of the task in terms of genre, context, audience and purpose and to produce a meaningful and, hopefully, engaging response. They are also reminded that they **MUST** draw on the

material from at least one of the source texts – there were some very engaging responses that failed to do this and were essentially self-penalising.

