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Pearson Edexcel International Advanced
Level

In English Language (WEN04)

Unit 4: Investigating Language

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide centres with an overview of the performance of the January 2021 paper. This paper offers a choice of four topic areas focusing on global language, child language, language and power and language and technology. The pre-release material was available to centres via the Pearson website in August 2020, enabling candidates time to research their chosen subtopic in preparation for the exam on 25th January.

The sub-topics for the June series were:

1. Hawaiian Pidgin
2. Writing Development
3. Language of Travel
4. Interaction with Technology

This series was the first opportunity for candidates to take the exam after the June 2020 exam series was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The cohort was small with 50 entries and it is highly likely that candidates had experienced disruption to their learning due to the impact of the pandemic enforcing school closures and a move to distance learning.

Candidates should read through both questions, as well as the source material for Section A, before beginning their written response. This will allow them to gain an understanding of the focus of the task and with regards Section B, the perspective for discussion. Considering the circumstances, candidates performed well, engaged positively with the data and demonstrated their subject knowledge in their responses.

Section A (questions 1 – 4) is marked out of 20 and Section B (questions 5 – 8) is marked out of 30. The time spent and length of response for Section B should be longer than Section A as reflected in a higher number of marks and the requirement to include research completed by the candidate within their response. All candidates answered the corresponding questions for Sections A and B this series.

The most popular choice was Question 1 and its corresponding question in Section B, Question 5 – Global English (Hawaiian Pidgin).

The remaining questions were as follows:

Second popular – Q2/6. Child language development (writing development)

Third popular – Q3/7. Language of Power (language of travel)

Least popular – Q4/8. Language and Technology (interaction with technology)

Section A.

Question 1.

For Question 1, candidates were asked to analyse a transcript of a conversation between Leila and members of her family about Leila's recent fall and visit to the doctor. Candidates were required to focus on the language frameworks, the context behind the transcript and to introduce relevant theories and concepts to explore the language of Hawaiian Pidgin. Candidates awarded in the higher levels of the mark scheme used the language framework to analyse the transcripts and the way the speaker demonstrated features of Hawaiian Pidgin. Top level responses had covered a range of features including grammatical, phonological and lexical features using sophisticated terminology as well as explanations of non-standard features linking to the contextual factors and their research.

Many candidates referenced theories of language change, accommodation theory, prescriptivism and were able to identify specific features associated with Hawaiian Pidgin and discuss their development. There was an awareness of history and development of Hawaiian Pidgin and knowledge of the specific phonetic features and articulation demonstrating confidence in their analysis and allowing for relevant and discriminating selection of source material.

At the lower end of the mark range for Question 1, candidates generally resorted to a descriptive approach when exploring what the data provided and any examples selected were unassimilated and at times paraphrased. Weaker candidates tended to feature spot and describe what was there particularly with phonology and lexis. Candidates would mention some terminology such as word class or phonology and be able to link one or two features to language development. However, the majority of candidates showed confidence with the topic and demonstrated strong linguistic analysis of Global English building on their skill set from studying varieties of English at AS level for the Unit WEN02-Language in Transition.

Question 2.

For Question 2, candidates were asked to analyse three examples of written work completed by a primary school student between the ages of 6 and 8 years old. The written work provided data which covered a range of features associated with different stages of writing development. Candidates were required to discuss to what extent do the texts present the stages of writing development.

Higher level candidates produced a clear, controlled response and demonstrated their knowledge of writing development with close relation to the different stages. Candidates were systematic in their approach, commenting on a range of features across the levels and were able link features to theories of language development. The progression of orthographical, lexical and grammatical development was discussed using examples from the texts such as use of plurals and verb tenses. Spelling was linked to phonetics and candidates identified patterns where the child was using letters to represent similar sounds e.g. fer/fur, plases/places and omitting syllables linking to their progression in later extracts. Specific word classes were also identified to demonstrate vocabulary progression,

acquiring lexis to form more complex sentences such as interrogatives e.g. how long did dinosaurs live? Some made reference to theories of language acquisition linking the acquisition of grammar to Berko's Wugs experiment and Chomsky's language acquisition device.

Responses at the lower end of the mark range tended to describe the features and make statements regarding what the child could do without linking it to the stages of development or described theories with limited reference to the data. There was a lack of links made to the language framework and minimal use of terminology to explore the data.

Question 3.

For Question 3, candidates were asked to analyse the language used in two government web pages offering advice when travelling abroad. One was Canadian offering advice to Canadian nationals when travelling abroad and one was from the UK advising British citizens what to do if they experience a crisis overseas. Candidates were asked to what extent do the texts present the language of travel advice.

There were 7 entries for this question with candidates scoring across level 3-4 demonstrating clear and discriminate understanding of the data. Level 4 responses identified a range of features used to advise the traveller and linked to theories of power and pragmatics consistently throughout the response. This was the discriminator between the level 4 and level 3 candidates as those in level 3 lacked theoretical application linking mainly to synthetic personalisation and rhetorical techniques to persuade.

Question 4.

For Question 4, candidates were asked to analyse the transcript of an interview with Pepper, a robot as well as an edited transcript of an interview with Erica, an android receptionist at Osaka University. Candidates were asked to discuss to what extent does the data demonstrate the language of robots?

This question had only four entries with wide ranging marks awarded in top of level 2, low level 3 and top of level 4. Candidates in the lower levels demonstrated general understanding and were able to identify the use of simple language, sentences and interrogatives used to communicate with brief mentions to Grice's maxims. Their analysis was brief and underdeveloped and overall lacked the range of features and discussion required to more marks. The higher level candidate explored the interaction with technology in more depth identifying transactional and interactional language features relating to functions and made reference to deixis and presupposition when analysing the communication.

Section B

Questions 5, 6, 7 and 8 required the candidates to use their wider research to discuss the statements given in the question. Each question enabled the candidates to build an argument for or against the statement and to support their ideas with evidence and concepts from their wider research.

Question 5

The question posed the statement: 'Although the users of Pidgin are often criticised, it could be argued that Pidgin is superior because it incorporates many strands of language.' Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

Responses ranged between level 2 and level 5 with some candidates providing well researched and detailed answers. The best responses were those candidates who were able to tailor their knowledge and research to form an argumentative response to the question. Mid-level responses tended to focus on the school emphasis on teaching Standard American English, the stigma of using Hawaiian Pidgin and made links to identity. Lower levels demonstrated knowledge of the history of Hawaiian Pidgin and its development but were unable to develop their answer beyond that and make reference to the debate posed within the question. Higher level responses covered a range of features present within Hawaiian Pidgin, made links to theorists, code switching, syntactical structure of Pidgin, phonology, similarities with other varieties and attitudes towards the language.

Question 6.

The question posed the statement: 'For effective development of writing, a stimulating language environment is more important than the teaching of the mechanical skills.' Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

Candidates scored across level 2 to level 4 producing some interesting responses. Those within level 2 and low level 3 made some good points regarding writing development but were largely under-developed responses. The weakest responses focused on the development of skills through practice and repetition and made general points that did not agree or disagree with the question posed. Mid-level responses went beyond this and made reference to personal experiences and case studies they had researched with varying degrees of relevance. Strong candidates presented knowledge and understanding of writing development and the different factors which can impact ability. Some made links to the benefits of stimulating environments, the behaviourist theory and positive reinforcement as well as the impact to social and interactive skills. Evidence that was collected was well integrated within responses and used to establish an argument.

Question 7.

The question posed the statement 'The language of travel should empower the traveller by being clearly informative rather than mostly persuasive.' Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

There were only a few entries for this topic, but the most successful provided examples of both informational and promotional language used within travel materials supported by theories. Candidates were awarded across level 2 to 4 focusing largely on the data presented and their research. Higher level responses discussed the balance of being informative and persuasive making links to social group power, politeness, face needs and accommodation theory. Some mid-level responses focused on techniques used to market travel such as social media campaigns and how they targeted audiences referencing synthetic personalisation. Low level responses were unable to form a structured argument and produced undeveloped response which just focused on a few features or techniques used within travel to persuade audiences to purchase a trip.

Question 8.

The question posed the statement: 'The linguistic interaction with an android will never equal the interaction between humans.' Candidates needed to consider relevant language frameworks and levels and any relevant social, historical and cultural factors when answering this question.

There were only 4 responses to this question three of which all scored within level 1 and level 2 due to their answer being brief and undeveloped. There was evidence of some research, but discussion was very general making reference to human emotions and feelings impacting how they communicate. One response scored within the high levels demonstrating wide breadth of research which looked at the functioning of assistant devices such Microsoft Cortana and Amazon Echo. They discussed programming, transactional language features and reinforcement of learning demonstrating an understanding of how technology can imitate interactions via programmed responses.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, I would like to offer the following advice to candidates:

- ensure you employ effective time management in the examination to ensure that appropriate time is spent on Section A and B in relation to the number of marks awarded
- read all the source data carefully before attempting the questions in Section A
- support each point you make with evidence from the source material in Section A and your wider research in Section B
- make sure you cover the language framework when analysing the data in both Section A and B
- support your discussion with appropriate theories, concepts and contextual features
- create a discussion/debate for Section B, tailoring your research to the question and form an argument responding to the statement
- use theoretical discussion to explore and challenge/support your findings rather than including everything you can remember about a particular theory/theorist or the main body of your research.

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