



General Certificate of Education

English Language 5706 *Specification B*

ENB2 Language and Social Contexts

Report on the Examination *2007 examination - June series*

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General Introduction

The entry figures this summer were slightly higher than previous years at 18478. This paper was well-received by candidates, and examiners were impressed by the general quality of the responses they read. This summer Language and Technology proved to be the most popular topic with candidates. There was a fairly even split between Occupation and Gender for the second response. By way of a reminder the topics for January 2008 will be

- Language and Technology (**re-sit only**)
- Language and Occupation
- Language and Gender
- Language and Power

Examiners were very pleased to see that the majority of candidates produced relevant and sensible responses for all three questions this series. However, as always there were some areas of concern and it is worth considering these in detail.

Examiners commented that once again there were many students who are overly reliant on large amounts of 'learned' AO4 knowledge in their responses. At best this knowledge was manipulated to fit the data/question, but at worst it was unhelpful, distracting and often of little relevance. Whilst AO4 remains a key discriminator for ENB2, it is only one of three higher weighted Assessment Objectives and therefore should be used accordingly. Analytical skills (AO3) and contextual features (AO5) are equally balanced with AO4 and should therefore be a central aspect of any response. For further clarification it is worth consulting past papers and their accompanying mark schemes, and the Examiners' Report June 2006 (www.aqa.org.uk).

Worryingly, several examiners noted that in some centres there were 'groups' of candidates who committed rubric infringements, usually by attempting all three questions. Clearly this is an unhelpful approach and does not allow the candidate to perform to the best of their abilities. Centres are therefore reminded that they should impress upon their candidates the importance of attempting the correct number of questions and of reading the paper very carefully. In addition this year several examiners expressed concern about the number of centres where candidates had only been prepared for two topics. Examiners felt that candidates in these centres may have been disadvantaged by this approach.

Examiners also commented that this summer there was a marked difference in the approaches taken by candidates to the questions. It is worth noting that examiners are not looking for a particular kind of response or approach – any candidate who addresses the question and produces an engaged and pertinent response will have access to the full range of marks. In addition the mark schemes are deliberately written to allow examiners to credit a wide range of points and approaches. Examiners felt that in general it was clear that many centres had prepared their candidates fully, using a range of techniques, and it is worth highlighting some of these successful approaches here. (For general points about strengths and weaknesses in responses please see the Examiners' Report January 2006. www.aqa.org.uk)

- **Use of the question** – reading and interpreting the question obviously remains the starting point for successful responses. Examiners commented that those candidates who did this were also able to identify the data type and unpick the significant surrounding contextual factors, leading to a convincing analysis of the data. The questions are not designed to limit a candidate's approach, but rather to deliver all the salient contextual details, and to provide some useful starting points for discussion.

- **Clearly structured responses** – candidates who read the questions carefully were also able to use the bullet points to scaffold their responses. This technique avoids repetition and description (both features of less successful responses). However, successful responses were also structured by considering one framework at a time across the body of the data. This has the advantage of engaging with the data as a whole rather than a line-by-line analysis approach. Examiners noted that candidates taking either of these approaches performed at a high standard this summer.
- **Timing** – examiners were very encouraged to see that very few candidates were unable to complete their paper because of timing issues this series. However, it is clear that for many candidates their second response tends to be less convincing, regardless of the order in which they attempted their questions. This is something which centres may wish to focus on in the preparation for the examination.
- **Use of past papers and markschemes** – it is clear that many centres prepare their candidates rigorously using previous papers and the accompanying mark schemes, and this is reflected in the quality of their candidates' responses. Use of these resources demonstrates to candidates the variety of successful starting points for data analysis, and offers support in terms of the level of analysis required and the quantity of AO4 needed to support that analysis. This also allows candidates to feel confident with the variety of different data types they might expect in this module (written, spoken, data focusing on attitudes and data dealing with representation). These resources can be found at www.aqa.org.uk.

1. Language and Technology

This proved to be the most popular question this summer, and examiners were very impressed by the quality of the responses which they read. The data offered candidates plenty of scope to reveal their knowledge and the question provided very helpful scaffolding for many candidates.

Successful responses tended to include:

- a range of frameworks for analysis – pragmatics was particularly helpful, as was graphology linked to subtextual features
- discussion of how Josh manipulated the page to reflect his own personality, including analytical discussion of pronoun choices, humour and personal anecdotes
- analysis of Josh's language choices – considering aspects of youth sociolect, Josh's idiolect and use of covert prestige to gain 'kudos'
- a subtle awareness of the inconsistencies within and across the blog entries and an understanding of the fact that much of the language was surprisingly standard
- salient discussion of the interactive features linked to the genre and technology generally
- Integrated AO4 – often linked to discussion of the nature of identity, the maintenance of on-line communities and compressed English
- helpful discussion of the private / public context of weblogs and of the contrasts between traditional written diaries and mixed mode of on-line writing.

Less successful responses tended to include:

- over reliance on one framework (usually graphology) to the exclusion of other salient frameworks
- very limited focus on the blog entries and the writing of Josh and greater focus on the banner and the adverts on the webpage
- lengthy unhelpful discussion of Josh's personality, including criticism of his musical tastes
- a deficit approach to the standard and quality of Josh's writing, focusing on his inability to spell, punctuate and generally use Standard English, without reference to the context or exemplification from the data
- little awareness that the language choices were affected by anything other than speed and carelessness – often leading to repetitive AO4 comment
- a lack of awareness of personal webpages or sometimes webpages generally, often treating them as written data.

2. Language and Occupation

This was a popular question with many candidates. Many were well prepared for this topic and responded very well to the data set. The question and the bullet points allowed candidates to take a variety of approaches to their analysis. For some representation was the starting point for their analysis, leading to extremely sophisticated contextual comment. However, examiners found that those candidates who focused in more detail on the occupational context also produced very strong responses.

Successful responses tended to include:

- a detailed analysis of the power struggle between the speakers, closely linked to their occupational roles
- a sensitive awareness of the different types of occupational language found in the data (jargon, different semantic fields, specialised forms, context sensitive language choices etc)
- a clear understanding of the reasons why specialised language forms are required in occupational contexts and particularly in this data (efficiency, realism, habitual use etc)
- a subtle awareness of the role of representation and an understanding of the external contextual pressures on the data (entertainment, story-lines, medical stereotypes, shared audience awareness, visual support)
- a perceptive understanding of the mixed register used by the Surgeon linked to occupational context and/or dramatic context
- relevant AO4 to support the analysis, eg Grice's maxims broken to add weight to the verbal conflict.

Less successful responses tended to include:

- paraphrasing of the transcript with little or no attempt to analyse the language or contextual features
- an overly detailed discussion about the gender of the two speakers with little attempt to link to the topic of Occupation
- speculative comment about the nature of the personal relationship between the two speakers and of why they were unable to work together
- little awareness of the scope of the topic area, treating the data simply as a transcript of a conversation
- limited application of the frameworks (AO3) – usually focused on lexis, often identifying the semantic field of medicine and little else
- a worrying preoccupation with the patient and what s/he thought of the argument between the speakers
- generalised comment about the roles of doctors, nurses and other medical staff – sometimes accompanied by personal anecdotes.

3. Language and Gender

This was a returning topic for this summer's paper. Examiners reported that this question produced the greatest range in terms of quality of responses. Many candidates were thoroughly prepared for both the topic and the data type (focused on attitudes) and, as the question indicated, used the data as a springboard into further discussion. Several examiners reported that this was a very interesting question to mark.

Successful responses tended to include:

- salient AO4 knowledge related to marked and unmarked terms, address forms, gender disparity in occupational labels
- a strong focus on the key issues raised in the data, linked to further salient examples from own studies
- perceptive understanding of the unintentional bias in the data and/or the prevalent attitudes in the Police Force which prompting the writing
- strong understanding of the target audience and of their potential need for reassurance about equal opportunities at work, sometimes progressed to an understanding of why gender had been placed alongside other 'minorities'
- detailed analysis of the negative connotations attached to the lexical examples in the data often accompanied by further relevant exemplification
- helpful discussion of centre-based studies linked to the data/question, and of relevant AO4 (derogatory terms, stereotypes, deficit & dominance theories etc)
- discussion of the Political Correctness debate and its place in gender studies, eg employers' roles in promotion of all aspects of Equality and Diversity.

Less successful responses tended to include:

- paraphrasing of the data, often demonstrating a lack of understanding of how to use the data and of the topic area
- large amounts of unhelpful or biased personal opinion – some responses claimed that the data was 'making a big deal out of nothing' without demonstrating any further reference to gender debates
- large quantities of 'learned' AO4 material with little or no relevance to the question or data
- detailed debate about the gender of the writer behind the data – often assuming that it was a female, sometimes leading to further discussion about female writing styles
- little understanding of the scope of the topic as a whole, often revealing an assumption that the study of gender is entirely focused on speech styles and the accompanying research
- little use of the question, often leading to a stylist approach to the data.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.