



# **Examiners' Report**

## **June 2023**

**GCE English Language 9EN0 01**

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## Introduction

The purpose of this report is to give an overview of the performance of candidates in this examination series. This year, the texts clearly provided some enjoyable opportunities for candidates' investigation of mode and context. Candidates moving towards the higher levels of analysis took a very discriminative approach to selecting quotations that aptly demonstrated their understanding. Both pairings provided ample opportunity for the integration of linguistic theory and while the majority of weaker responses made references to relevant theorists, it was characteristic of the higher levels to develop those references and use theory as a means of analytical exploration across the data set.

Comparison was a strong feature of many essays in this series, candidates were obviously well prepared to explore ideas in the given data and make relevant connections to their respective functions. Students are now clearly more confident with the requirements of each section, and the importance that is placed on the ways in which the data can be connected. Often this was a way for candidates to move through the levels with confidence, using frameworks to expand on key ideas. There is still a tendency in the lower levels to treat Section B as an extension of Section A, focusing on the representation of identity, rather than looking for issues relating to language change. In this series there were a large number of candidates who wrote responses in the wrong section. It is good practice for centres to remind students that they should read the instructions in the answer booklet carefully.

Candidates who were prepared to apply the full range of linguistic terminology were able to interrogate the data critically and found many illuminating ways in which the texts could demonstrate the intentions of their producers and the contexts in which they were produced. A limiting feature of some promising essays was the lack of range in linguistic terminology and framework analysis. At times, candidates were hindered by an approach that saw them looking for features within a formula or mnemonic which often resulted in comments about what wasn't there, rather than what could be explored in further detail. Introductions were a consistent feature of all responses and used to varying degrees of success. The best examples used this part of their essay to foreground key contextual ideas for further investigation. Others were rather lengthy and formulaic, relying on a pattern of comments relating to mode, field, function and tenor. The most engaging introductions were the ones that could capture the essence of the sections, Identity and Change respectively, and the issues presented by each of the texts in relation to these themes.

### Section A: Individual Variation

Candidates were given two texts in order to compare the representation of personal and social identity between two women presenting conflict in their professions. Text A was a blog by Debbie Ridpath Ohi, in which she related feeling personal and professional pressures during the pandemic. Text B was a transcript of Karen Brady delivering a speech at Land Rover's 'Can and Will' speaker series, wherein she relayed an anecdote from the start of her career.

## Section B: Variation over Time

This year, candidates were given an older text at the top end of the time frame outlined in the specification. Text C was a personal appeal, via letter, to a member of the nobility requesting donations for a refuge in 1896. Text D was also an example of an appeal, however, it was taken from the online crowdfunding website GoFundMe. In this text, the writer was more informally appealing to a wider audience showing how the language of charitable donations had changed over time.

## Question 1

It was very encouraging to see students respond assuredly to A04 in this question, where there was a consistent ability to create and explore connections between the texts. There were many points relating to Ohi feeling unproductive and Brady's frustration towards the gender limitations placed on her. Students who moved beyond a summative approach to these scenarios, were able to develop their application of frameworks to assess how both Brady and Ohi presented themselves in overcoming their struggles in a coherent, organised and purposeful way. Mostly, comparisons focused on gender, which allowed candidates to access a fundamental comparison between the data. The best responses were able to reflect on the subtle expression of the ways in which both producers were presenting an experience in which their profession became intertwined with their own personal values. Those who teased out details relating to this idea embarked on a range of interesting discussions regarding the expression of emotions involving personal turmoil for Ohi and frustrated humour for Brady. In the higher levels, candidates were able to show nuanced appreciation for the ways in which both created a personable, informal tenor for their respective purposes, in order to manipulate the presentation of a specific identity.

Candidates familiar with Karen Brady applied some interesting contextual information relating to her credibility as a business speaker, which was a fruitful discussion in most cases. Few, but successful students explored the notion of 'Can and Will' as a motivational phrase, linking to the purpose of the speech. Many students interrogated the idea of motivation and analysed the ways in which her language was providing inspiration to both the immediate audience, and the secondary audience who might be watching the speech via YouTube. Less successful responses drew too much attention to the features of motivation which linked to ways in which she was attempting to exert power over the audience. Students studying power for the language investigation may have depended too much on this information at the expense of interrogating aspects of personal and social identity.

Phonology was a feature of discussion for most candidates with this data set. Ohi's use of capitalisation, mimetic of placing phonological emphasis in speech, was often linked to an exploration of the rhetorical features of emphasis used by Brady. Whilst it is commendable that students do tackle the phonological elements of the transcript, candidates should be careful with interpretations relating to accent. There were several misconceptions of Brady's accent, one of which was the inference that she displayed features common to northern speech patterns. Often, this point was made by those who misunderstood the anecdote, as she was paraphrasing a journalist. The parodic representation of the journalists' speech was comedically essential to her anecdote. Students should be reminded to read the data set carefully, perhaps multiple times, to ensure they fully understand the discourse, especially regarding transcripts.

Gender theorists were applied in the majority of responses and in some cases, it was used purposefully, not simply just in passing reference. Tannen continued to open up interpretative possibilities as students explored how the six contrasts might illuminate issues emerging from the texts. Again, this was rendered most effective when ideas were anchored firmly in linguistic detail and led to evaluation. A wider application of theorists was often the feature of more critical responses, especially those using theory as a way to connect observations about language to the context of each text. Interesting links between modes were often made by students who noticed the familial way in which Ohi attempted to relate to her readers, often using colloquial features to reinforce her desire to create connection. Frequently, students placed too much significance on the use of personal and direct pronouns, inferring that the simple use of the pronoun justified the application of Fairclough's synthetic personalisation. Accommodation theory was commonly applied in a similar measure. Those candidates with a working understanding of levels of accommodation and footing were able to use them more assuredly than those who simply made a reference to levels of formality and relatability.

## Question 2

Candidates explored the idea of language change, largely with a confidence acquired through the application of their own knowledge of online communication. The most successful responses were those that focused on the recipients of each piece of communication, using context to help them interrogate how language change has completely affected the means with which a person can request a donation.

There were many effective approaches taken by students who took a consistently critical approach to this data set. Whilst there was a relatively short span of time between the texts, the most successful candidates were able to productively apply concepts and methods relating to diachronic change as a result of events within the 20th century. Those who really focused on the question used the question prompt to their advantage by exploring the ways in which these two modes demonstrated the ways in which the internet has influenced the nature of charitable donation. It was interesting to read responses that interrogated the flexibility of the digital mode and the ways in which the text producer's language was indicative of increasingly acceptable levels of informality as opposed to the more formal nature of the personal appeal.

Other successful discussions included the different representations of value and significance in society. Many relevant points were made regarding the different social expectations of poverty. Comparisons were made regarding the appeal for shelter and sustenance in response to 'glazed donuts' and home ownership. The exploration of connotation and semantic field in this respect was often coupled with interesting applications of context to develop an explanation of language change alongside a shifting set of cultural values.

It was rare to come across a response where a student had not referred to Aitchison and at least one of her metaphors, although many students mistook them for her ideas, as opposed to appreciating her concern to categorise prescriptivist ideas. Furthermore, those candidates taking a reductionist approach to Aitchison's metaphors, found that it was self-limiting as they were only able to make superficial comments regarding their existence, rather than selecting features of the texts that were representative of the concerns raised by the metaphors.

Despite Text C being published in 1896, there was still a large majority of candidates who incorporated superficial context points relating to the printing press and the publication dictionaries and grammar guides. More effective responses were able to select from contextual points salient to the 19th century, and apply those in a more controlled way to explore the differences in syntax and grammar. Students should be reminded that historical information should be selected carefully to ensure that contextual discussion is always made applicable to the data set. Generic discussions of Caxton and Swift often led to students simply explaining the absence of characteristic features of EME, instead of focusing on the presence of features in Text C. Those students who took a critical approach to the ways in which appealing to a member of the nobility versus a general unknown audience, were able to access stronger connections relating to the means by which both writers were able to make their appeals.

## Paper Summary

While there were many positive features of the responses in this series, centres are encouraged to consider the following:

- Allow students time to familiarise themselves with the structure and timing of the exam so that they can manage the division of time correctly and ensure they respond in the correct location.
- Reinforce the importance of using a full range of framework terminology to strengthen an analysis of the given texts.
- Ensure candidates are prepared to explore any given data set, not rely too heavily on their expectations.
- When analysing features of a text, make sure that the quotations selected always illustrate the point effectively.
- Theory is always a good consideration with language, but be mindful of superficial references that only lead to surface level observations.

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