Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel GCE

In English Language (9EN0)

Paper 2: Child Language

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide centres with an insight into the assessment process and give an overview of how candidates approached the question for Component 2. This was an unusual series owing to the small number of candidates entered and the disruption these candidates had experienced in the latter part of their course. It was clear that centres had worked hard preparing candidates for Component 2 in the time they had available. Many candidates showed clear linguistic knowledge and all were able to identify at least some issues associated with child language development in the data provided.

This paper focuses on child language development in specific contexts with candidates assessed on their knowledge of spoken or written language development in these contexts. This year's paper was spoken language with the data exemplifying a family interaction between two children who engaged in a variety of games and their parents. The question focussed the candidates on the family interaction with the intention of them relating features of the children's language to their ability to communicate and respond to each other and their parents about the events taking place.

Despite the circumstances which these candidates had faced, the vast majority approached this question with confidence and were able to demonstrate some clear application of language features to the data but, as in previous sittings, candidates should be reminded of the necessity to consider the specific context in which the language is taking place throughout their response. That said, there were very few that just listed features without at least some clear links to the source material and the events that were taking place.

Responses in level 2 and at the level 2/3 border, while showing some knowledge, were characterised by varying levels of terminology errors, overlong examples and explanations (e.g. a whole side to illustrate pronoun use), and tended to characterise aspects of the children's language in terms of correctness (rather than standard/non-standard). Although there was a lack of development at this level, very few just outlined the non-standard speech patterns found in the text without some attempt to link to theories and concepts they had studied. All candidates were aware of at least some of the common developmental and/or instrumental theories but they were either discussed without clear links to the data or candidates over-wrote on less productive areas, such as Belugi's pronoun stages or Grice. Candidates often followed the basic approach of quoting an example and relating it to research but there was a marked lack of consistency in whether they explained the developmental/contextual significance of the feature under consideration, often stating, 'this proves the theory of…'.

As in previous series, there was some uncertainty regarding the analysis of phonology evident in the responses of less successful candidates. In some responses at level 2, it was ignored completely and, with candidates on the level 2/3 border, there was a tendency to identify the differences between the form produced by the child and the target form without considering the effect, if any, on the child's ability to participate successfully. Additionally, candidates in lower levels did not tend to distinguish effectively between developmental and other phonological issues such as casual and regional forms. Where such regional forms were observed, many candidates in very low level 3 and below were often concerned these could negatively affect the child's progress and didn't consider the informal context of the speech event.

Exploration of syntax did not always go beyond identifying the standard form and tended to stay at the level of identifying more accessible areas such as pronoun use, tense, interrogatives, and auxiliary verbs with some producing vague comments about the complexity of utterances that were often unsubstantiated or inaccurately labelled.

Responses scoring in the upper areas of level 3 and above tended to show a more assured approach and there was clear evidence they had considered the structure of their responses. Context and an overview of the children's stage of development tended to be outlined at the start and, while this is not essential, it seemed to help the candidate maintain focus on the question. The focus on context was much more secure at these levels with candidates using their knowledge of syntax to consider how the children's development facilitated the purpose of the conversation. Terminology and skills associated with syntax and morphology were more assured, with these candidates successfully describing a range of forms and functions, such as phrase clause structure. For many at the level 4 border, the two notions of context and development were often intertwined, for example modifiers (such as 'purple' and 'tiny) were related not only to the child's development of a range of adjectives and understanding that the meaning of nouns could be altered but also that these descriptions supported a more precise conversation. Comments on issues associated with telegraphic speech, such as missing auxiliaries, went further by considering patterns of use to give a more precise stage of development and also by discussing what information had been lost and whether it affected the success of the language event. Standard utterances were often neglected at lower levels, but candidates moving towards level 4 often considered these, contrasting them with utterances where the adult may have to infer meaning.

Phonology showed a much more confident focus with candidates using the IPA effectively to identify differences/similarities and a range of terminology relevant to the point being made, rather than listing place and manner of articulation without discussing the relevance. At this level, candidates had a more assured focus on identifying the differences between casual, regional and developmental

phonology and avoided some of the more judgemental comments seen in the lower levels.

More successful candidates also employed a larger range of developmental and functional theory, although in this sitting they did not often stray from the more common theories/concepts. These candidates had a more systematic approach with consideration of grey areas and aspects of theories that could be dismissed, for instance, separating the imitation aspect of behaviourism from operant conditioning. Such candidates were often careful to link each relevant point in their exploration to both a theory/aspect that could be dismissed and one that could be supported.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, future candidates are offered the following advice:

- make sure you read the question carefully and follow its demands
- avoid aspects of a deficit approach by avoiding terms like correct/incorrect
- keep your focus firmly on the data and consider the how the child's language development makes it successful/less successful using precise links to context
- avoid feature spotting by always relating your example/language feature to a developmental and/or contextual feature
- introduce specific child language development theories only when they are relevant to the discussion of a specific example within the data. If possible, you should consider introducing more than one theory and should use the data to refute any of the theories you have studied to show a more critical approach
- ensure any terminology you use is relevant to the point you are making
- think carefully about your examples and ensure that they illustrate as precisely as possible the point you are making.