

Generic Feedback on Summative Examination
English Language & Linguistics 1B: Language,
Society & Change [ENGLANG1003]
2018-2019

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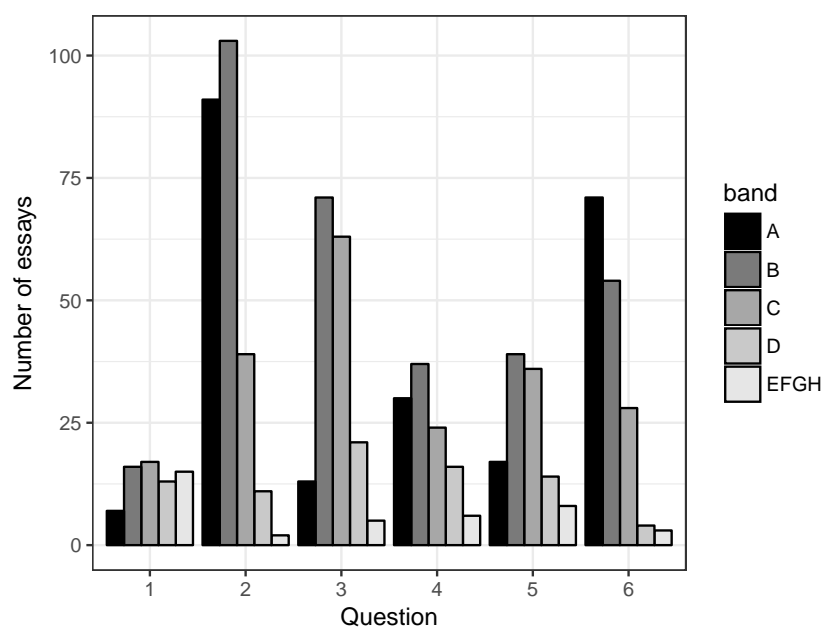
This feedback is designed to enable you to contextualise your grade for the summative examination in question, and to help you to understand in what respects you have achieved the Intended Learning Outcomes of the course. The course ILOs and marking criteria can be accessed in the course handbook, on Moodle.

A key pattern of results that is not visible in these summary statistics is that students who answered only two exam questions earned substantially lower exam grades than those who made an attempt at all three. We *strongly* encourage you to make even a cursory attempt at a third question. Graders are eager to award credit for any evidence of learning that you can offer. There is no circumstance in which it is better to leave a question blank than to have a go at it.

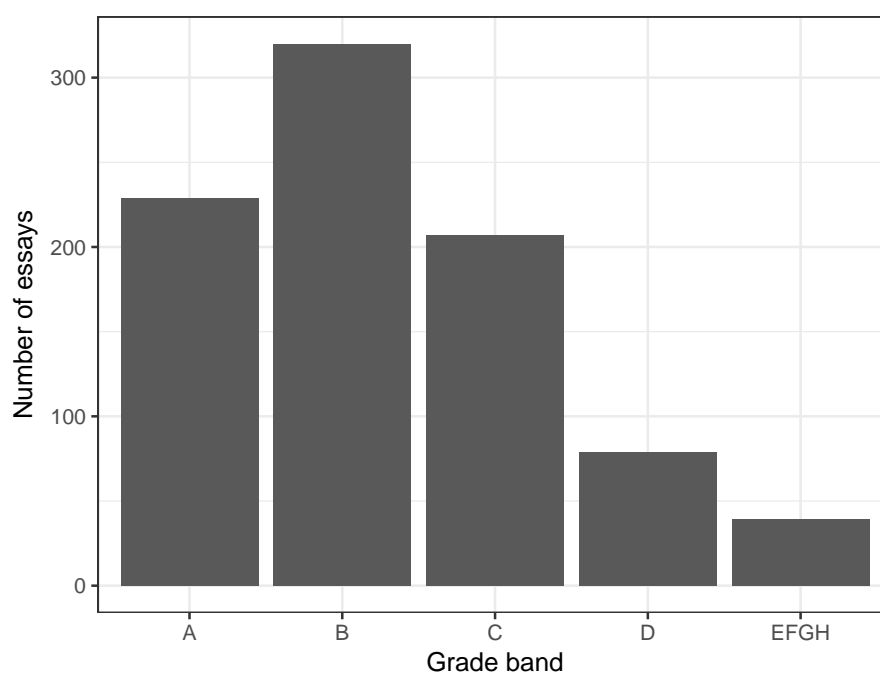
Grade distribution:

296 students sat the 1B exam on 2 May 2019, answering a total of 874 essays. The breakdown of essay grades by question number is as follows in the table, and illustrated in the chart below:

| | A | B | C | D | EFG | Sum |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|
| 1 | 7 | 16 | 17 | 13 | 15 | 68 |
| 2 | 91 | 103 | 39 | 11 | 2 | 246 |
| 3 | 7 | 71 | 63 | 21 | 5 | 173 |
| 4 | 30 | 37 | 24 | 16 | 6 | 113 |
| 5 | 17 | 39 | 36 | 14 | 8 | 114 |
| 6 | 71 | 54 | 28 | 4 | 3 | 160 |
| Sum | 229 | 320 | 207 | 79 | 39 | 874 |



The summary plot below, collapsed across essay topics, shows a majority of Bs, with slightly more As than Cs, fewer Ds, and a very small number of failing grades. This distribution is higher than last year's grade distribution after the May exam diet, but overall consistent with the expected pattern of results.



Comments on student responses to essay questions:

(1) **Phonetics**

EITHER

- a. What are consonant sounds? Describe and give examples of English consonants from at least 3 different manners of articulation and explain these manners of articulation.

OR

- b. Outline the actions of the articulators in pronouncing the word trees in any accent of English with which you are familiar. (Be sure to specify what that accent is.)

On the whole Question 1A question was tackled well. The best answers explained what consonants are in terms of obstruction or near-obstruction of airflow in the vocal tract and picked three or more manners of articulations, and used examples of the consonant sounds of English to illustrate these manners of articulation, while using the correct phonetic terminology. The mid-range grades were awarded to those who were able to explain what consonants are and give slightly less comprehensive descriptions of manners of articulation or confused them slightly with other aspects of articulation. Lower grades were given to those who showed some very limited understanding of what consonants and manners of articulation are, and sometimes confused them with each other. The lowest grades were awarded to those who did not tackle the actual question and/or used non-phonetic terminology.

Question 1B was tackled less well. The highest mark achieved here was a C1. Generally the responses did not use phonetic terminology and attempted explanations of their articulations of the word “tree” using lay terms. The lowest marks were given to those who both used lay terminology and also were wrong in their assessment of the articulation of the word.

(2) **Varieties of English**

EITHER

- a. Describe Kachru’s ‘Circles of English’ model, including discussion of at least one potential difficulty with the model. Illustrate your answer with reference to appropriate countries.

OR

- b. Is there a strict dividing line between the features of language in the spoken vs. written modality?

For Question 2A, most people answered every part of the question, and the lecture content was generally well-remembered. Most people also stayed on topic, and those who veered off topic usually did so after getting the main points in. Those who did go off topic often spent a lot of time discussing the difference between a language and a dialect, without relating this discussion back to Kachru’s circles of English. The best answers

used concrete examples of situations in specific countries to illustrate their points. Weaker answers showed evidence of misunderstanding the purpose of the model. Some people, for example, seemed to believe that the model is intended to be used prescriptively, rather than descriptively—that is, some suggested that the model dictates that outer circle countries *should* use English for education and administration. This is incorrect. In fact, model simply describes that this is the case—that these countries *do* use English in these ways—without suggesting that this is right or wrong

Question 2B was answered in quite a variety of ways, with people bringing in ideas from a number of different topics. This was sometimes successful and sometimes less so. The most successful essays brought in key ideas from the lecture on register to talk about a whole range of features that are differently distributed according to the situation, and went on to show how in certain types of spoken and written situations the two modalities may converge and the dividing line become blurred. Good examples given were in texting, in prepared speeches and in literature. Some successful essays also included ideas about how the physical form of speaking and writing made them different as means of using language, but here the discussion was mainly in terms of contrasts with little room for overlap.

Many of the less successful essays tended to concentrate only on such physical differences and so only answered a part of the question. In other less successful answers, the discussion was nearly entirely in terms of contrast rather than convergence. The less successful answers in general missed the concept of registers and some were more or less a catalogue of vaguely relevant points without any attempt to create a single coherent argument.

- (3) **Modern Scots** Describe a number of linguistic forms which are shared across most dialects of Scots. Then choose one dialect and describe the distinctive forms found in this dialect.

Some attempt was made to discuss the lexical, morphosyntactic and phonetic features that are shared across Scotland, although often there was little beyond that found in the lecture slides. For the description of a particular area, the question was answered less successfully, with very anecdotal content in many cases.

- (4) **Historical Scots**
EITHER

- a. “Older Scots is a dialect of English”. Address this statement critically, paying attention to the definition of dialect’ and analysing the family tree of Scots.

OR

- b. Give an overview of literary and non-literary genres produced in Older Scots, with appropriate examples.

The challenging part of Question 4a was the juxtaposition of Older Scots and English—notice that the latter is not qualified in any way, which should have been addressed in

the answer. The best answers clearly laid out the problematic distinction between a language and a dialect, and showed that English and Scots developed in parallel from the same Germanic roots, making specific comments on the differences between the respective branches of the family tree. These answers also argued for a separate status of Older Scots as a fully functional and prestigious language, distinct in several linguistic features from its close relative down south. Some answers took a different route and argued that the term 'English' covers all varieties stemming from Old English roots, which would make Older Scots count as such a variety. However, these answers didn't pay enough attention to the status of Older Scots in terms of prestige and functionality, which makes it more than a dialect. Less successful answers recounted the history of Scots without relating it to the question, talked about developments post-1700 (remember that Older Scots goes up to 1700), or presented a confused analysis of the relationship between Scots and English.

Question 4b was generally answered well. The best answers presented a range of literary and non-literary genres produced in Older Scots and backed up the discussion with interesting socio-cultural detail. The names of authors and their works were given correctly. Less successful answers listed fewer genres with less rich commentary, or concentrated on literature only. The lowest grades were awarded to students who didn't give any examples, misspelled names and confused dates or even centuries, or talked about post-1700 literature.

(5) **Middle English****EITHER**

- a. Chaucer's decision to write in English in the fourteenth century was significant. Why?

OR

- b. Write a commentary on the following passage from *The Miller's Tale* (you might want to mention the place and function of the passage in the tale, its style, narration, choice of vocabulary, linguistic features of Middle English and/or other features of the language):

She was a prymerole, a piggesnye –
 For any lord to leggen in his bedde,
 Or yet for any good yeman to wedde!
 Now, sire, and eft, sire, so bifel the cas,
 That on a day this hende Nicholas 5
 Fil with this yonge wyf to rage and pleye,
 Whil that hir housbonde was at Oseneye –
 As clerkes ben ful subtil and ful queynte –
 And prively he caughte hire by the queynte
 And seyde, "Ywis, but if ich have my wille, 10
 For deerne love of thee, lemman, I spille."
 And heeld hire harde by the haunchebones
 And seyde, "Lemman, love me al atones,
 Or I wol dyen, also God me save!"
 And she sproong as a colt dooth in the trave, 15
 And with hir heed she wryed faste away,
 And seyde, "I wol nat kisse thee, by my fey!
 Why, lat be," quod she, "lat be, Nicholas,
 Or I wol crie 'out harrow' and 'allas!'
 Do wey youre handes, for youre curteisye!" 20
 This Nicholas gan mercy for to crye,
 And spak so faire, and profred him so faste,
 That she hir love hym graunted atte laste,
 And swoor hir ooth, by Seint Thomas of Kent,
 That she wol been at his comandement, 25
 Whan that she may hir leyser wel espie.
 "Myn housbonde is so ful of jalousie
 That but ye wayte wel and been privee,
 I woot right wel I nam but deed," quod she.
 "Ye moste been ful deerne, as in this cas." 30

There were a number of students who did very well with Question 5a and demonstrated a sound knowledge of the history of English (from the Old English period to the Middle English period) and of Chaucer's specific life and times. Good answers discussed Chaucer's decision to write in English in relation to the complex sociolinguistic context of fourteenth century England. Some also mentioned Chaucer's potential exposure to

Italian vernacular literature as a motivation, as well as considering how his own shifting social status shaped his writing. Weaker answers provided a very vague overview of the linguistic situation of the ME period and tended to portray Chaucer's decision as a rather dramatic act of resistance against the prevailing linguistic and political context.

Students who answered Question 5b generally did quite well. Most responses began by stating where the passage was in the poem and what was happening and why this was important. Good answers stayed focused on the extract and pulled out a number of examples and explained what/why was significant in terms of the features of Middle English. The best answers then discussed some of these features in relation to the development of English; some then noted the links to Old English and/or pointed forward towards Early Modern features. Some students chose to focus more on the literary features than the linguistic and this was equally valid. These responses discussed features such as metre, rhyme scheme and dialogue. The best literary-focused responses expanded on the significance of word choice and style, and discussed it in relation to the poem as a whole. Some students picked up on the pronoun switching between you/thee and this was done well from both a linguistic and literary perspective. The strongest answers considered how the linguistic features could inform our literary interpretation and vice versa.

(6) Early Modern English to Present-Day English

The vocabulary of English expanded markedly during the Early Modern English period. Giving specific examples of lexical items introduced to English, describe and explain the routes by which English added to its vocabulary during the Early Modern period.

Students approached the Early Modern English question in a positive way showing strong understanding of the routes by which English expanded its vocabulary in this period. Overall, students showed evidence of their understanding of key routes: how colonialism and trade brought new lexical items to English; how the Renaissance fuelled new vocabulary in science, medicine and technology; how English adapted words it already used (via prefixes, compounds, semantic and grammatical shifts); and how English looked back to 'old' vocabulary to expand (both borrowing from Latin/Greek and reviving 'Old' English items). Those students who gained the highest grades made sure to demonstrate their knowledge of these multiple avenues of expansion and gave detailed and specific examples of lexical items introduced in the period. Many students gaining grade A for this question also showed evidence of their own reading beyond the lecture series, giving fantastic examples of secondary sources, or primary sources for vocabulary realised through their own research. Where students focussed only on one route of expansion the grades given were lower since the examples offered were too vague or general. Some students attempted to overview the whole process of standardisation and while many showed clear understanding of the process (and the historical context of the period) this was not the focus of the question and more attention to vocabulary would have meant a higher grade. Overall, the students did really well and responded to the question in a clear and detailed way.