

**GCE**

**English Language**

Advanced GCE **A2 H469**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H069**

**OCR Report to Centres June 2015**

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

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## F651 The Dynamics of Speech

### General Comments:

Centres and candidates, as for last session, were generally well-prepared for the demands of this paper, which requires clear knowledge of concepts and theories of spoken language and an ability to apply this knowledge carefully to the transcription data offered in all of the questions.

Candidates displayed knowledge and understanding, but often the approach was rather list-like, and involved a series of fairly brief points about a range of features with not enough detailed discussion. As examiners have noted for the past two years, there is an increasing tendency for candidates to apply a very similar (or often identical) approach in both Sections of the paper, working systematically through a prepared list of categories. This is often apparent in the structure of an answer, where each paragraph will announce its agenda: “Lexically, this interaction ... In terms of grammar, the participants ... The pragmatics ...” Such an approach may become comfortable for candidates through their preparation for the examination, providing a workable structure and a mental ‘check-list’. This did lead, however, in many responses, to a repetition of points and ideas from the transcript which may have fitted more than one category. It also meant that many candidates wrote a very long introductory paragraph which outlined what they were going to discuss within each of these categories and then repeated these points in a conclusion.

As ever, the best answers were those which worked from the text outwards, rather than seeking to apply what had been learnt whether it was relevant or not. These responses did not stick slavishly to the learned ‘approach’ but changed their mind on closer investigation of the details in the transcript. Such a response might have begun with categorical assertions that a particular interaction was clearly competitive because the participants overlapped each other. The examiner was then able to reward the ways in which the candidate subsequently worked her/his way to a more flexible understanding as she/he analysed specific examples of language use and realised that the data suggested a more complex and shifting reality. There seemed an increase this year in candidates just citing line numbers rather than the exact words or phrases that would clearly support the points made. A flexibility of approach in responding to the data presented is crucial in improving performance. Similarly, the two different Sections of the paper require a more precise focus than some candidates applied. The title of the Unit is of course “the dynamics of speech”, and careful informed attention to these dynamics will always be the touchstone for successful performance.

Further guidance is given by the titles of the Sections – Speech and Children, and Speech Varieties and Social Groups – and more direction still is indicated by the individual question wordings. The detailed published mark-scheme indicates a range of potentially fruitful approaches for each question. No mark-scheme can ever anticipate the entire range of response, and candidates were of course rewarded for any informed application of relevant skills and knowledge.

### Comments on Individual Questions:

#### Question No. 1

Many more candidates answered Question 2, which was based on an interaction between a mother and her son Reece aged 3 years playing with his train set. Question 1, was a transcription of a conversation in a classroom with 9-10 year old pupils and their teacher and teaching assistant discussing their painting activity.

The most successful answers revealed:

- an appreciation that the focus of the question was how the speakers use language to interact with each other and respond to the activities set by the teacher
- understanding of the use of Child-Directed Speech – and in particular the use of rising and falling intonation, raised volume and markers with regards to the teacher’s authority and dominance within the group
- ability to refer with accuracy and in relevance to traditional theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsy, Chomsky, Skinner and Bruner
- the ability to start with the evidence and build up a reading, rather than distorting the evidence to fit a prepared theory.

Most candidates immediately noticed that the teacher’s approach was largely directive with the use of a form of ‘open’ questioning. The use of repetition ( ‘the fire’, ‘THE FIRE’) and therefore encouragement were linked particularly to child language theorists here. Some candidates tried to apply concepts and issues of language acquisition which were clearly not relevant here (for example, referring to the post telegraphic stage with 9-10 year olds). Others either restricted themselves to the adult speakers only, or failed to discuss the interaction between the teacher and Mrs Higgins. Some, however, did note the difference in the way the teacher spoke to the children and the way she spoke to Mrs Higgins. Many identified that Jack pronounced ‘smoke and logs’ differently and some generalised as to the geographical location of his accent or whether he hadn’t mastered some basic sounds yet. There was not very much detail in the responses to this question. Many candidates were able to understand what was happening but very few actually discussed the ‘why’ or the ‘how’. The mark scheme guided examiners to look for examples of ‘lexical or grammatical nuances like the politeness strategy adopted by Ursula’ when she (and both the teacher and Mrs Higgins) use the modal verb ‘could’. Some tried to bring in genderlect in a way which was clearly unhelpful given the classroom context-and, in a couple of cases, showed a failure to read the question carefully by building long speculative arguments about why the teacher might be male.

## Question No. 2

As stated above, this was the more popular question in Section A.

It may be helpful for centres to remember that the F651 Unit content specifies “spoken language generated by and for children and young people up to the age of 14” and includes “the social contexts of talk and children, children’s language in use (child-child and child-adult) and children’s language in the media and in the wider community”.

The most successful answers revealed:

- understanding of a wide range of features of Child-Directed Speech – often referred to as caretaker or caregiver speech.
- ability to refer with accuracy and relevance to traditional theorists such as Skinner, Vygotsy, Chomsky and Piaget
- informed understanding of Aitchison’s Labelling/Packaging/Network-Building theories, of Halliday’s theory of Language Functions, and productive application of these
- the ability to start with the evidence and build up a reading, rather than distorting the evidence to fit a prepared theory.

Reece’s uncooperative nature at the beginning of the transcript led some candidates to a discussion of his character. An unhelpful approach here was in seeing Reece’s lack of cooperation as somehow typical of adult male language, triggering again the rehearsal of learnt material which simply was not relevant. Many decided therefore that he was still in the two - word utterance stage and did not change this stance as the transcript progressed. The better responses reviewed their opinion and were able to look in detail at various phrases disputing the

two word stage, particularly, 'wanna make a tunnel now'. Many also realised the significance of other phrases being interrogative without using rising intonation or by omitting a pronoun. Similarly, the fact that Reece omits the modal verb from 'where I put the tunnel' offered a chance to discuss the order in which elements of language are acquired by children. The better answers realised the significance of Reece at first being unable to 'pretend there's two' and then with mother's guidance he was able to co-operate and understand that he could use 'two like that'. Since the transcription showed the mother actually joining in with the play as opposed to simply observing and commenting, candidates were able to discuss the 'caretaker' role and to cite Halliday's imaginative function. Chomsky and the LAD were often mentioned here too but often unsuccessfully in terms of the exemplification given to support the reference. Too often, theorists and models had obviously been pre-learnt with the intention of using them whatever the data. Sometimes names and models were used rather interchangeably.

### Question No. 3

The 'Social Group' here was defined as 'three generations of a family from the North of England' with Sasha being the youngest of the family at 15 years old with her father and grandfather. There were many more responses to this question than to Question 4.

The most successful answers revealed:

- good understanding of topic management, co-operative overlaps and back-channelling behaviour
- appreciation that not all interruptions flout the politeness principle– for example, Alan is deliberately interrupting Roy in line 6 and again in line 10 as he seeks to include Sasha in the discussion
- thoughtful understanding of features of specific lexis covering work and the northern accent.

The responses ranged from detailed discussions and analysis of the accentual features of the transcript to an attempt to impose being genderlect material, usually unsuccessfully and in a way which suggested a basic misreading or misunderstanding of the family and inter-generational dynamic. Some candidates also seemed to suggest that the false starts and pauses in Roy's memories of the past were a clear indicator of old age and senility! Some candidates virtually ignored the reason for the specific lexis used by Roy or made ill-informed comments regarding the archaic use of the words 'pit' and 'blacksmiths'. Some understood why Roy takes and holds the floor in two separate areas of the transcript (lines 1-5 and 17-20) for extended anecdotes but some insisted that he was flouting a number of Grice's maxims. Better answers responded to the shifts in turn-taking and to Sasha's response with her being keen to show her knowledge regarding Leonardo di Vinci. Many commented accurately on the phonetic representation of speech, keeping it closely linked to the context of both the conversation and the family unit.

### Question No. 4

The scenario here was defined as being part of a conversation, obvious from the transcript that is an interview, recorded in front of an audience at an international book festival. Many candidates immediately became concerned as to the gender of the interviewer, which was not stated, and all the gender-related theories and theorists that would accompany such an assumption. Better answers responded to the shifts in turn-taking and overlapping, realising the significance of such changes as it is an interview.

The most successful answers revealed:

- good understanding of topic management, co-operative overlaps and back-channelling within the context of an interview
- appreciation of the fact that interruptions are not flouting politeness principles

- thoughtful understanding of features of ‘novelist-speak’ and the comparison to writing a symphony
- detailed understanding of the humour displayed by the novelist.

There was a much wider range of responses to this question than to any other on this paper. Many candidates clearly identified and discussed the context of a live interview at a festival. Some, however, became embroiled in a debate regarding the audience’s inability to understand English very well as it was an international festival and/or the fact that it was being recorded meant that it was on television and they would be nervous in front of the cameras. A few seemed determined to view the interview as some kind of power struggle. Grice was often quoted, but very rarely with any detailed textual illustration or understanding. Some candidates were insistent that FN was flouting the maxim of quantity despite the obvious context. Assertions were made that the novelist was making irrelevant topic shifts regarding the subject of his family and holidays. The weakest responses merely paraphrased the interview and many misread ‘disparate people’ for ‘desperate people’ and this skewed their understanding of what the novelist was trying to explain.

## **F652: Texts and Audiences**

Most centres are now very experienced in the delivery of this AS unit and in the supervision and assessment of the coursework tasks, with the result that a great deal of excellent work is now produced for both the analytical study and the adaptive writing.

### Task 1: Text Study

Candidates are now drawing on an ever widening range of written and multimodal texts for analysis in this unit, with some text choices enabling richer investigative possibilities than others. Where there was an obvious element of choice in the selection of texts candidates were clearly engaged and committed to the work. In these cases texts were explored in a detailed and accurate way and candidates were able to demonstrate their secure knowledge of the key constituents of language (AO3).

Less success was achieved when all candidates from one centre compared the same two text types or, in some cases, the exact same texts. As stated in previous reports, this approach limits the candidates' opportunities to explore their own ideas, often producing a batch of very similar responses. The candidates who achieve the highest marks are invariably those who have worked independently, analysing texts in which they have a strong personal interest.

A great variety of texts were analysed including literary extracts, newspaper and magazine articles, comic strips, advertisements, reviews, children's stories and clips from film and television.

The best analyses, of both written and multimodal texts, focussed on the contrasting purposes and audiences for which the texts were created (AO2) combined with exploration of the language choices behind the texts. Candidates demonstrated a sound understanding of linguistic methods and a broad knowledge of appropriate linguistic terminology (AO1). In terms of AO2 a clear distinction was made between the construction of meaning in written texts (single mode) and in multimodal texts which obviously have the advantage of communicating simultaneously in more than one mode. Weaker analyses tended to ignore this crucial distinction.

Although there were many examples of close analysis of multimodal features, moderators commented that candidates sometimes focussed more on spoken language features whilst neglecting the visual elements. It is important to show how the two work together to create meaning.

Discussion of the influence of contextual factors (AO3) was sometimes under-developed, with candidates offering only an isolated description of historical context, without linking this information to the text itself. More successful analyses were able to integrate contextual comment with close linguistic and stylistic analysis.

### Task 2: Adaptive Writing and Commentary

The adaptive writing was approached with creativity and expertise with candidates demonstrating a competent understanding of genre conventions (AO4). In the best cases the work produced was genuinely 'adaptive' in nature. Candidates were able to successfully balance material from the original text with their own original material, adapting the language to suit the new audience and/or purpose within the conventions of the chosen genre. Successful adaptations included web-based articles, interviews, tabloid and broadsheet articles, prose and drama extracts and poems.



Some tasks were insufficiently challenging and failed to stretch candidates, limiting their performance in both the adaptive writing and the commentary. This can happen where the purpose and audience of the adapted text are too close to those of the original or where candidates have chosen a very generic text type such as a recipe or leaflet. In other cases the chosen form of the adaptive writing can lead candidates quite a long way from the source text to a new text which contains very little of the original. A small number of candidates are still submitting pieces which are not actual adaptations but are in fact completely independent texts following the same theme as the original. These do not satisfy the rubric of the unit. Such submissions usually contain very little of the original text and this makes the commentary writing very difficult. In these cases the commentary usually takes the form of a comparison of two independent texts rather than a reflection on the process of adaptation.

The best commentaries were informative in approach, being closely focussed on the language choices made in the process of adaptation and the precise effects achieved. Weaker commentaries, lacked AO4 comment being limited to discussion of intentions and simple description of the text produced.

### Marking and Administration

The administration of the unit was generally well executed. Most Centres are now very efficient in submitting marks and samples on time. Care should be taken when recording marks as there is sometimes a discrepancy between the mark on the work itself and the mark on the coversheet or the mark transferred to the MS1 form. Rectifying these errors is time consuming and can cause delays to the moderation process.

The majority of Centres now have a strong working knowledge of the assessment criteria and are able to apply the mark scheme with great accuracy. Teacher annotation and summative comments are detailed and informative and helpful in justifying the marks awarded. Some Centres are in the habit of identifying only strengths in the work, whilst ignoring weaknesses; both should be highlighted. Similarly when there are errors of punctuation or expression these should be corrected. Some Centres undervalue the importance of accuracy of written expression (AO1) when applying the markscheme. Where there are technical errors then the final mark needs to be adjusted to reflect this.

Where moderator adjustments needed to be made it was usually the case that Centres were over-rewarding work at the top end of the scale, perhaps awarding full marks, in Band 5, where a mark of seventeen or eighteen would have been more appropriate.

## F653 Culture, Language and Identity

### General Comments:

Markers were pleased to report upon evidence of significant improvement in performance on some questions. This manifested itself in more expansive commentaries, which possessed a greater analytical linguistic appraisal of the specific passages. Candidates showed a more developed understanding of lexical, syntactical and phonological features and were able to illustrate such with more academic precision. Some of the problems which have affected the quality of some answers to Question 1 remain. The following features, noted in previous reports, are still present. These can be summarised as either answering the question by making summaries of the contents of the passages, or engaging in lengthy and not very accurate histories of RP, the BBC and the sociological issues linked to such. Neither of these features is of significant importance in what is, to some degree, a technical phonological question. A question which requires some kind of formal illustration and commentary upon speech features, which will be resident in the contents of the stimulus passages.

### Comments on individual Questions

#### Question No.1 Section A Language and Speech

The stimulus passages set in the paper were meant to allow candidates to work through speech variations from the Queen and RP to at least six named modern accentual variants, including Estuary. There were also key features in the passages concerning personal prejudices and attitudes to particular speech sounds. These included terms like 'impure', 'hybrid' and 'chav-talk'. A number of candidate responses were able to explore some of these features and illustrate their work with basic phonemic exemplification(s). There was some very good supportive commentary in these answers. Candidates were able to cite recent press articles about the status of modern RP and the possible directions that Estuarine speech sounds might be taking. This secondary preparation allowed the candidates to offer some quite impressive illustration and analysis.

Apart from the regional speech sounds, listed in the set passages, some candidates were able to offer examples from their own localities. An area which produced some interesting commentary was the East Midlands. It was clear that the regional prompts in the stimulus passages had given candidates an opportunity to show a wider knowledge of geographical variations and support this with some clear illustration. Apart from the use of the vowel quadrilateral, there was some effective illustration of glottalisation; upspeak; rhoticity and yod coalescence. This more phonemic work shows that candidates are quite capable of moving beyond simple prescriptive/descriptive commentaries into a much richer field of basic speech analysis. It should be noted that a few candidates were able to show evidence of having listened to some helpful recent recordings of modern English speech variations; and could talk about and exemplify such features as intonation and stress. An interesting outcome of these more advanced approaches, listed above, was a decrease in candidates simply listing text book 'authorities' in an unfocused manner. There were still a few lingering problems with answers which were driven by simplified sociological attitudes to class and speech. There remain, also, a few candidates who still treat the very specific aims of the stimulus materials as the opportunity to transgress into historical linguistics, which is not the focus of this question.

### **Question No.2. Section B The Language of Popular Written Texts**

This proved to be an extremely popular question and elicited some very good responses. Candidates showed not only some familiarity with recent media productions but also with the original text(s). Many answers dealt well with the grammatical and lexical features in both passages. This was facilitated by recourse to identifying the considerable range of linguistic differences between the two passages. Contextual referencing was also abundant. This included such features as Victorian London; the semantic fields of the detective genre; the positioning of women in novels; the semiotics of the image.

A number of responses dealt with some of the archaisms in the lexis of the original, commenting on such nouns as metropolis; mantelpiece and pledge. There was comment on the discourse features common to the detective genre. There were also some interesting points about gender raised. These can be summarised as examples of 'the damsel in distress'; and the need for strong males to 'resolve this trying situation'. A few very incisive answers expounded upon the introductory narrative strategies in the original, pointing out how these constructed very effectively the particularly unique characteristics of Holmes and Watson.

What was particularly noteworthy about many of the answers was not only the closely analytical approach to the linguistic features; but also the expansive and very accurately written quality of the candidates' work. It would seem that Centres have enhanced the study of this particular Topic by encouraging the application of basic stylistic analysis. This has raised candidates' abilities to meet the assessment objectives in a more critically focused manner.

### **Question 3 Language and Cultural Production**

There was only a limited response to this question. Candidates who attempted the question appeared to have a very limited comprehension of the material in the extracts. Yet the very wide range of lexical fields and the prominent discourse features, especially in the headlines, would appear to have made the passages quite approachable. Answers tended to slide rapidly into sociological observations about tabloid and broadsheet readerships. There was very little attempt made to analyse the syntactic organisation of the writing, which gave very clear signals about the production of language in the press. There was almost no discussion of the semanticity and cultural implications of such well-known features of technology as YouTube and Facebook. Nor was there much focused analytical response to the use of initialisms; proper nouns; or cross-cultural referencing. All of these clearly identifiable features were central to the title of this section of the examination paper. The broad contents of this kind of news took the reader into not only styles of print production but also digital influences upon citizens' lives. The material seemed to expose a lacuna in candidates' knowledge, concerning contemporary issues which have a direct effect upon the whole population.

### **Question 4 Language, Power and Identity**

There were some excellent responses to this question. Many answers adopted a modified gender approach. This could be summarised as women writing for other women, all having some clear relationship with fashions and appearances. This gave a number of candidates the chance to explore the connotations of 'looking good'. Perceptive answers drew attention to the constant mediation which surrounds the concepts of fashion and youthful beauty. This approach was supported by some very apposite references to R.Barthes. The linguistics of appearances was linked to the language of empowerment and objectification. The following lexical items attracted some particularly interesting comments: icon; moral; elderly; glossy; slutty; celebrity; vain; stick-thin; nondescript. The aim was to show very effectively how the discriminatory identity factors separating youth from age, were embedded in specific nouns and adjectives. Some candidates used Fairclough's synthetic personalisation as a base for this analysis. Several

responses dealt with the power of the media to promote artifice in passage (j). The comments suggesting that what the mother was clearly responding to was the inevitable objectification of her daughters, who were particularly susceptible to advertising and celebrity role models. Similar to Q.2 answers, a number of candidates showed quite impressive linguistic depth in their answers. This was supported by very coherent contextual comment and evaluation. This made the cohesion between AO2 and A03 almost seamless.

## F654: Media Language

A great deal of high quality work was produced for this unit, reflecting great commitment on the part of the candidates and excellent professional guidance from the supporting teachers. Centres are now very experienced in directing candidates to explore and compare language use in a wide variety of texts and to develop their own writing expertise through a range of original writing tasks.

### Task 1: Independent Investigation: Comparison and Analysis

This unit builds on the analytical skills acquired at AS level, enabling candidates to develop their ability to use linguistic frameworks in order to analyse how language is used to create meaning in spoken, written and multimodal texts (AO2).

Candidates had clearly been guided well to select a wide range of engaging texts to compare. As has been stated in previous reports, the greatest success was achieved where there was a clear element of candidate choice in the text selection. It is generally the case that the more challenging texts and topics produce more sophisticated analyses with very generic text types, for example recipes, tending to lead to very predictable analyses.

There is still a problem with a minority of candidates using multimodal texts in place of written ones; where images accompany written text then the text *must* be classified as multimodal. It is the responsibility of supporting staff to ensure that the distinction is clearly made and that candidates select appropriate source material. It would greatly assist the moderation if candidates would label their texts (spoken, written, multimodal). Some centres are still not doing this with the result that it is often difficult to establish which text is which.

Candidates elected to write on a wide range of themes ranging from Disney to Nazism and from comedy to alcoholism and terrorism. Slavery, political division, mental health and gender equality in the workplace were other interesting themes adopted. In a small number of cases candidates failed to state their linking theme which made the moderation difficult, as it is not always possible to decipher what the theme is.

In many cases analysis was detailed and specific. Appropriate linguistic frameworks were adopted and relevant terminology was precisely and accurately applied. Close attention was paid to phonological, lexical, morphological and grammatical features with detailed exploration of how language is affected by social, cultural and historical elements (AO3). Relevant theoretical knowledge was applied critically and concisely (AO1).

The best analyses were strongly comparative in nature, giving equal treatment to all three texts. A small number of candidates presented their analysis as three separate tasks, rather than as a single, integrated, cohesive essay. This approach was problematic as it did not enable them to fully address the 'comparative' requirement of the task.

Less successful analyses were often limited by poor text choice. Some extracts from television or film, and extracts from graphic novels, for example, were insufficiently challenging for A2 level often yielding only superficial analysis.

Some candidates focussed closely on the theme but paid insufficient attention to the specific linguistic features of the texts. Other submissions failed to focus on the importance of the mode (spoken, written or multi-modal) in directing language use. Some made the mistake of analysing multimodal texts as though they were written texts with only a short paragraph added to describe the accompanying visual images. Candidates need to explore the contribution of the various

differing modes explaining how adopting a multimodal approach has enabled the writer to achieve his/her purposes.

### Task 2: Original Writing and Commentary

This task enables candidates to build on the writing skills developed at AS level, in writing accurately and creatively for a chosen audience and purpose (AO4). The task allows for flexibility of choice with a vast array of writing being produced in all three modes. Successful pieces included reviews, articles, short stories, interviews and speeches.

The most successful submissions showed competent understanding of genre conventions, having a clear sense of audience and purpose throughout. Commentaries were informative and language focussed, again making good use of pertinent linguistic terminology. Comments focussed on the construction of meaning (AO2) with a strong consideration of audience and purpose. Some commentaries were too short to incorporate the level of detail required at A2. These tended to include rather superficial discussion of intentions and style models but failed to include detailed comment on the linguistic elements used in the construction of meaning.

### Marking and Administration

Summative comments from teachers were helpful in pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of the submissions, directing attention to the relevant assessment objectives and giving clear reasons for the marks awarded.

The marking was generally accurate as Centres are now very experienced in the application of the markscheme. A small number of Centres need to be reminded of the need for coherent and accurate written expression which is a requirement of AO1. It is important for Centres to highlight errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar and to reflect these errors in the final marks awarded.

**OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)**  
1 Hills Road  
Cambridge  
CB1 2EU

**OCR Customer Contact Centre**

**Education and Learning**

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: [general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk](mailto:general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk)

[www.ocr.org.uk](http://www.ocr.org.uk)

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**OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)**  
Head office  
Telephone: 01223 552552  
Facsimile: 01223 552553

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