

GCE

English Language

Advanced GCE **A2 H469**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H069**

OCR Report to Centres June 2016

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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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OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

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F651 The Dynamics of Speech

General Comments:

Centres and candidates in this last session were 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 in the weaker responses the approach was rather list-like, and involved a series of fairly brief points about a range of features with not enough detailed discussion. There was still some 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. Some 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 the suggestion that a particular interaction may appear 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. 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 father and his five year old son who are discussing superheroes. 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 adults and children use language to interact with each other
- understanding of the use of Child-Directed Speech – and in particular the use of rising and falling intonation, raised volume and stressed speech

- 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 noticed how the differences in ages between the two children influenced the way they interacted with the adults, in particular that Antony is only actively involved at the start. Whilst some candidates tried to impose a typical Child-Directed Speech interpretation on Becca and Caitlin, more observant noticed that the adults are more inclined to talk to each other about the children than directly to them. Some identified the mother-daughter conflict between Chloe and Caitlin.

Question No. 2

As stated above, this was the more popular question in Section A and candidates enjoyed the exchange on the subject of super-heroes between father and son.

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

The responses identified the success of this interaction based on what was seen as a stereotypically male topic, with the majority appreciating the skill of the father in drawing out knowledge from his son. They recognised the use of raised volume and tag questions to provide positive reinforcement and to show his enthusiasm. More developed answers identified how the son is able to use language in ways that reflect conceptual ideas based around a “goodie” and a “baddie” and how the father’s use of intonation guides him. They saw how the father allows the son to take over gradually as topic manager and some identified the use physical demonstration referenced at the end of the interaction relating to the “headless spectre.”

Question No. 3

The ‘Social Group’ here was a researcher and a group of 15-year-old boys who attend the same school engaging in a conversation about a recent interview. There were fewer 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, Aidy’s overlaps are supportive and indicate the boys’ pre-existing relationship
- thoughtful understanding of features of specific lexis covering school and the shared idiolect of the boys.

The responses generally avoided generalisations about dominance or power struggles, although some sought to show that Aidy was more dominant because of the interruptions. Some candidates immediately became concerned as to the gender of the interviewer, which was not stated and assumed in such cases to be female, 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 significant of such changes. They explored how the interaction reveals the opposition between what the boys had expected from the original

interview and the reality, using carefully chosen examples of lexis to support this. Some also developed well the way shared idiolect/sociolect revealed the boys' attitudes and established their group identity, with commentary on the humour of their attitude to girls. As the boys are fifteen, some candidates initially spent time discussing material more suited to Section A in terms of development of language which was not generally profitable in Section B.

Question No. 4

The interaction here was defined as being part of a conversation between two people who share a flat.

The most successful answers revealed:

- good understanding of topic management, co-operative overlaps and back-channelling
- appreciation of the fact that interruptions are not flouting politeness principles but in this interaction are a sign of their shared experience and knowledge of mutual friends
- thoughtful understanding of features of a shared idiolect/sociolect
- detailed understanding of the humour displayed by both speakers

Many candidates focussed on the mixed gender nature of this interaction, and all the gender-related theories and theorists that would accompany such an exchange. Better answers responded to the shifts in turn-taking and overlapping, realising the significance of such changes and did not simply assert that Jacob is dominant throughout or that Millie flouts gender expectations by displaying a sense of humour. As a result, some responses spent a considerable portion of their answer arguing that overlaps were competitive whilst the better ones focussed on the way shared language revealed shared attitudes and experiences, citing their sharing of a flat and knowledge of mutual friends. There were a number of different accents/dialects cited, with some reference to the phonemic alphabet, but more focus on their shared sociolect.

F653 Culture, Language and Identity

General Comments

Many centres had given considerable attention to preparing candidates for this paper. Candidates' responses were often analytically detailed, investigating phonological, lexical and syntactic features in relevant passages. In Section A there was some division on the quality of work submitted. Well-prepared responses paid detailed attention to the set data and focused upon a clear basic phonological appraisal of passage details. A minority of answers appeared to have an insecure understanding of how to respond to phonological features, which were the focus of the question. Such responses were largely summative and lacked relevant basic technical illustration. In Section B the quality of the candidates' answers was rather more secure, with most answers showing a sound understanding of the linguistic and contextual aspects of the passages.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1 Section A Language and Speech

Stronger answers saw clear links between the contents of the stimulus passages and features and issues relating to Estuary English. This produced a range of interesting associative responses. Many answers pointed out the features of 'downward convergence' of modern younger RP speakers, who appeared to be adapting their speech to fashionable metropolitan sounds generated by media personalities. There was some clear discussion about how far Cockney speech was replicated in contemporary Mockney sounds. A few candidates seemed to find the orthographics in Passage (b) difficult to decipher. Such responses drifting away from essential focus on phonology into more general sociological assertions about class. In Passage (c) some answers appeared not to understand the basic phonological terminology used by the author. However, there were many good and incisive technical comments made about this passage. Candidates, who in the past might have struggled with basic phonic illustration, were able to illustrate a wide range of features. Such work showed confidence in presenting clear vowel quadrilaterals, demonstrating diphthongal differentiation. There were also some excellent comments and illustrations concerning yod dropping/yod coalescence. This was work rather more advanced than experienced in past papers, indicating good preparation by respective centres. There were minor problems in assessing candidates who raised the recent debates about **MLE**. Such speech being seen as a recent youthful dynamic in London and the south east regions. Whilst answers could illustrate a few dialect words and phrases used in this specific form of English, they did not give any basic phonological exemplification of the sounds. Thereby not meeting the particular demands of this question.

The following secondary sources were effectively used in a number of answers: Crystal, Giles, Rosewarne and Wells.

Question 2 Section B The Language of Popular Written Texts

Most candidates who responded to this question engaged effectively with the concept of 'popular'. Answers often gave detailed comment of how the fictional language reflected teenage lifestyles. This work often included thoughtful comments on how the linguistic features were effective in constructing a younger person's thought. A number of answers engaged in some depth with specific syntactic features, commenting on the range of dynamic verbs, especially the heading verb **Splash**. This was seen as symbolic and resonating through the whole opening paragraph of Passage (d). Most answers were able to grasp the temporal change in the narrative and how this was exemplified by the language of internal thought. The tripling of the possessive noun phrases and the variations of sentence structure, from the complex for

description to the simple for dramatic effect, were picked up as key features of the writer's linguistic style. There were similar detailed and thoughtful reactions to the language generated in Passage(e). Many answers pointed out how the medium of the passage allowed idiosyncratic use of language, which reflected the conventions of popular spoken discourse as used by teenage speakers. The exaggeration in the speech and the use of intensifiers was seen as a popular form of communication when talking to one's friends. Some outstanding analyses discussed broader issues connected with fictional writing for teenagers. This work pointed out how the zeitgeist of teenage angst and the effects of gender status, which were present in the passages, were a quite common feature in the work of several authors, writing within the boundaries of the lifestyles of modern youth. As was noted on this section of last year's paper, centres appear to have assisted candidates in achieving a far more analytically focused approach in covering both important assessment objectives in this question.

Question 3. Language and Cultural Production

There were very few responses to this question. Those answers received were able to identify the rather different generic characteristics in historical reportage. This was usually supported by some basic contextual points about the passage contents. The actual language of the two passages, which showed radical differences in lexical syntactical and visual features, attracted little detailed analysis.

This despite the passages being both embedded with a wide range of nominal signifiers, clearly linked to culture. As has been noted in some past papers, this question appears to present difficulties in candidates defining *cultural* and then being able to see how the language used by the authors articulates very different attitudes to the cultural theme(s) of the chosen passages.

Question 4. Language, Power and Identity

This proved to be a popular question. The more developed answers showing a commanding understanding of both the linguistic features and applying some very sound theoretical analysis to the empowerment of the reader. Both passages (h) and (i) allowed many answers to discuss the direct address of the writers and the evidence of much synthetic personalisation. The lexical fields of medical jargon/medical terminology were competently explored in passage (h). The greater use of imperatives and the lower level frequency of lexicality were specifically noted as features in passage (i). Analytical comment was made on the use of asyndetic listing, the presence of rhetorical questions and the chiming effect of phrases like 'butter is better'. The colour schemes in (i) were subjected to discussion of the possible connotations connected with blue, green and red. Some responses argued that the authoritative voice in this passage was stronger in the presentation of statistics than was the case in passage (h). A number of answers noted the greater range of modality in passage (i). This allowed candidates to argue that in this passage there was a greater likelihood of consensual agreement likely to be formed between the reader and the author. It would appear that many centres had given candidates a stronger background in preparation for the grammatical and syntactic demands of Section B than had been experienced in past papers. This was supported by frequently strong cohesion between A02 and A03 in the answers; and the more confident appraisal of the writing in the respective passages, to include the ability to analyse different forms of sentences.

In sections B, C & D of the paper the following secondary sources were effectively used in a number of answers: Barthes, Fairclough, Nash and Tannen

F654 Media Language

The high quality of work produced for this unit reflected the expertise of supporting teachers and the dedication and hard work of the candidates. There was clear evidence of progression from AS level, in both the Independent Investigation (Task 1) and the Original Writing (Task 2).

Task 1: Independent Investigation: Comparison and Analysis

A diverse range of spoken, written and multimodal texts were selected for analysis. Linking themes included gender equality, gender roles in comedy and women in sport. Black independence, UK politics and the Syrian refugee crisis were covered alongside time travel, propaganda and the origins of criminality. Other topics included fairy tales, lifestyle, success and horror.

The range of text types was equally varied with spoken texts including political speeches, song lyrics, online interviews and transcripts of radio broadcasts and podcasts. Written pieces included extracts from novels, letters, reviews and online articles and multimodal texts included advertising flyers, leaflets and posters, newspaper articles and clips from television and radio.

High levels of investigation were demonstrated with all candidates using appropriate frameworks of analysis to explore language use (AO1). The most successful analyses paid close attention to lexical, syntactical and semantic features and were able to explore how these were used to determine meaning (AO2). They made use of relevant linguistic terminology and considered social, cultural and historical influences on language use (AO3). The comparative element of the task was generally strong with the visual features of multimodal texts being explored alongside spoken and written features. In many cases there was clear evidence of wider reading and theoretical knowledge was used to enhance interpretation (AO1).

Task 2: Original Writing and Commentary

There were some excellent pieces of well-crafted original writing submitted in the spoken, written and multimodal modes. Travel literature, leaflets and advertisements appeared alongside articles, reviews, poems and prose extracts.

This task was approached with creativity (AO4) and language choices were underpinned by a clear understanding of audience, purpose and genre, as demonstrated in the accompanying commentaries. The best commentaries were detailed and illuminating, commenting on language choices made and relating these to the intended purpose.

Marking and Administration

Most Centres are now very proficient in applying the mark scheme with accuracy. Teacher annotation and summative comments generally showed appropriate consideration of the Assessment Objectives. There are still a minority of Centres who are failing to highlight errors of punctuation or expression. AO1 refers to the accuracy of written expression so errors need to be taken into consideration when awarding marks.

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