

English Language

Advanced GCE A2 H469

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H069

Reports on the Units

January 2010

HX69/R/10J

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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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CONTENTS

Advanced GCE English Language H469

Advanced Subsidiary GCE English Language H069

REPORTS ON THE UNITS

Unit/Content	Page
F651 The Dynamics of Speech	1
F652 Text and Audiences	4
F653 Culture, Language and Identity	5
F654 Media Language	7
Grade Thresholds	8

F651 The Dynamics of Speech

General Comments

Centres and candidates generally coped well with the demands of this paper. There were encouraging signs of an improvement on last summer's session in terms of greater familiarity with the requirements of the new specification. Levels of performance suggested careful and thorough preparation, informed by relevant theoretical knowledge.

Candidates are now accustomed to the structure of the paper, in which each Section provides a choice of two questions. Significantly more candidates answered Question 1, which was based on a 'conventional' transcription of classroom interaction, than Question 2, an extract from a novel.

Centres who were surprised to find a passage of fictional speech are reminded that the initial description of the Unit states that the focus is the analysis of speech, both scripted and unscripted. The recommended range of transcripts with which candidates should be familiar comprises transcripts from scripted, partly scripted or spontaneous speech, from fictional texts such as plays, novels and poems and from representations in non-fiction formats such as magazine interviews.

Answers in Section B were more evenly split between the alternatives, with a few more candidates opting for Question 4. It would not be helpful to look for differences in performance between the two Sections, given the relatively small number of candidates, some re-taking and others taking the Unit for the first time after only one term's study,

Stronger candidates adopt a specifically linguistic method. It is possible to trace The Dynamics of Speech in the passages in 'common-sense' (generally descriptive) terms, without using an approach which is explicitly linguistic. But candidates who did this gained, at best, Band 3 marks. Linguistic (AO1) approaches, terminology and methods are essential in order to succeed at higher levels in this paper.

As one aid to this, a table of phonemic symbols is printed on the last page of the question paper. Except where specifically prompted by phonemic representation in the transcribed material, these were little used; and phonology was a significant weakness in the work of many candidates, who struggled to differentiate between accent and dialect. Only regular practice will make students more comfortable with representations of speech sounds.

Examiners were encouraged by the levels of theoretical knowledge which some candidates displayed. Sometimes this was superficial, as Chomsky (or Labov, or Lakoff, or Grice or Giles) was referred to as 'proof' of some assertion. But an increasing number of candidates moved more confidently between theory and practical illustration. A signal exception was Bernstein. Candidates referred to restricted or elaborated code, with very little real understanding.

It is worth remembering the Assessment Objective weightings for this Unit. AO2 is dominant in Section A, AO3 in Section B. However, there will always be significant overlap between the AOs, and a competent linguistic approach is likely to integrate aspects of AO1, AO2 and AO3 into virtually every relevant comment.

The following comments on responses in this session should provide helpful guidance to those entering in subsequent sessions. In addition, the published mark-scheme offers indications of appropriate response in terms of the Assessment Objectives.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A: Speech and Children

Centres need to keep in mind the Unit Content in the specification. Child Language Acquisition is amongst the topics, but it is by no means the only required subject for study. Some knowledge of the theories of child language is required, but knowledge of how to use theoretical ideas in practice is more important.

Other topics include 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.

Question 1

The transcription was of part of a Maths lesson in an American school, involving children (aged 9-10) thinking of ways to work out the answer to the following question:

Joshua ate 16 peas on Monday and 32 peas on Tuesday. How many more peas did he eat on Tuesday than he did on Monday?

The task-wording provided an open-ended question: *How do the children and the teacher use language here to work together on a Maths question?*

Candidates engaged readily with the dynamics of speech here, recognising that the teacher's role was to encourage, and identifying a number of details which showed the variety of ways in which this encouragement was provided. The speakers' genders had not been identified in the transcription (other than by the reference halfway through to Shea's answer as "his") and some candidates made assertions about 'typically' male or female speech based on assumptions about gender. In this question and others, this was more often than not an unhelpful approach.

Common (non-fluency) features of spoken language were identified and discussed in terms of the dynamics of interaction. Candidates noticed false starts/corrections/repairs in Shea's speech as he re-cast utterances to provide a more detailed response. There was useful discussion of non-fluency as evidence of a child 'thinking aloud' in order to work towards a clearer understanding of the mathematical concepts. Forms of child-directed talk were referred to, and there was also useful reference to theories of Child Language Acquisition. Only in the weakest responses was this reference perfunctory: many competent candidates supported their discussion with specific examples of language use, informed by the theory.

The mark-scheme indicates other avenues of discussion which proved fruitful.

Question 2

The transcription was of a passage from the novel *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* by Roddy Doyle, set in Ireland in the 1960s. In the passage, Paddy, who is ten years old, and his younger brother Francis (nicknamed 'Sinbad') have just heard their mother ('ma') scream as she has found a mouse in the toilet bowl. His father ('da') is trying to flush the mouse down the toilet.

The task-wording was again an open-ended prompt: *Write about the ways children use language when speaking to other children and to adults.*

The question was attempted by only a very few candidates, and of these most struggled to comprehend the dynamics. The better answers were characterised by careful reading of the transcription evidence and analysis of utterance types. Weaker answers were limited by a

tendency to make assumptions about speakers on the basis of age, developmental stage and gender rather than responding to what the speakers actually said.

There was a tendency – here and in answer to all the other questions too – to describe all interrogatives as *tag questions*, and to employ terminology in a haphazard way. Interrogatives were confused with imperatives; utterances were called ‘sentences’; *phrase* and *clause* were used interchangeably; anything short was called *simple*, anything long *complex*. But it is always more important to be able to develop relevant analysis/evaluation from the initial identification of a significant feature of language, so that terminology of itself is not what earns credit

Again, the mark-scheme contains further indications of material and issues for discussion.

Section B: Speech Varieties and Social Groups

Centres need to keep in mind the Unit Content in the specification. Amongst the topics for study are the subjects of group identities created through specific features of language, the use of language to exclude and include, slang and jargon, social class, regional variation, occupation / age / power, and how language can demonstrate attitudes and values.

In terms of response to phonological features, it is worth remembering that discussion of *accent* usually becomes unprofitable when it moves into assertions about *class*. Similarly, comment on *accent* is often conflated with notions of *dialect*. Most often, weaker candidates equate Received Pronunciation with Standard English. However, sometimes candidates are able to write themselves out of such confusion as easily as they wrote themselves into it. Certainly they should not be discouraged from exploring phonological features, but they do need to be as exact as possible in looking at the transcript evidence.

Question 3

The transcription was of part of a conversation in which Simon is telling Martin about his experiences at an independent school for boys.

The task-wording reflected the content of the transcription: *How do the speakers use language here to reflect particular attitudes and values?*

Although this question-focus is taken explicitly from the Unit Content, candidates seemed to find it hard to focus on *attitudes and values*. However, it was interesting to see how alternative interpretations of the dynamics emerged, any of which were fine as long as they were supported by *reference to specific examples from the transcription*. So some candidates saw Simon as dominant, since he held then power of having the information which Martin wanted. Others argued that Martin was the dominant speaker because he controlled the dynamics through asking questions and setting the agenda.

Approaches which made assumptions about the social class and/or levels of education or income of the speakers were less productive, and are generally ill-advised. Reference may be made to the mark-scheme for further examples of relevant issues for discussion.

Question 4

This was the more popular question in Section B. The transcription was of part of an interview, broadcast on local radio in Cornwall, involving three young women who work together.

Reports on the Units taken in January 2010

The task-wording was closely matched to the content of the transcription: *How do the women use language here to reinforce their group identity?*

Candidates engaged readily with the speakers and had little difficulty in tracing the dynamics of interaction, exploring the ways in which the interviewer (who might have been expected to dominate in agenda-setting) has to bow to the pressure of group identity. And whereas in Question 3 the question-focus had been rather ignored in favour of sequential reading of the transcription, here in Question 4 candidates concentrated impressively on features which reinforced group identity

Better answers managed to analyse these features in linguistic terms. Weaker answers tended to be *descriptive* of language rather than analytical.

The mark-scheme offers some further ideas of what might have proved helpful lines of exploration.

F652 Text and Audiences

With only 20 entries this series, there were too few to comment on.

F653 Culture, Language and Identity

Markers noted some variability in standards, particularly in addressing the rubric specific requirements of the questions. This will be considered in comments upon individual questions. There were also varying standards in A01, indicating that some candidates lacked experience in formulating responses in the style of a discursive essay. Markers also noted some uneven qualities in applying relevant and detailed linguistic constituents to specific issues in questions. This will also be commented upon in individual questions.

The fifteen minutes reading time allowed in the examination is to help candidates refine their responses. This should encourage candidates to be selective in choice of linguistic analysis and exegesis. It is not necessary to spend too much time in simply summarising the contents of the stimulus passages. The fact that the relevant A0's are built into the question appeared to cause some candidates difficulty in focusing upon linguistic specificity. The broad contexts of passages were stated on the question paper and the basic issues seemed quite clearly embedded in the introduction to each question. The major aims of the paper seem clearly identified under the following in the rubric: 'specific linguistic details'. It was pleasing to note the efforts made by a number of candidates to invoke their wider reading in the particular subject. This often added a valuable dimension to responses covering A03.

Section A Language and Speech

The primary focus of this question/this section of the examination paper is upon speech *sounds*. It was not necessary for candidates to spend time trying to analyse the syntax of the quoted passages. The clear directive was towards basic phonological and prosodic issues (as clearly stated in introduction to Unit in Specification) raised by respective authors. This should have been apparent since the question clearly directed candidates towards *pronunciation*. Passage (c) particularly was meant to push candidates in this direction. It should have given focus to both issues and *sounds*. In a similar vein passage (a) raised these points in a more humorous fashion. Passage (d) was not very effectively treated. This gave a clear indication that changes were occurring in pronunciation and begged further illustration from candidates. Those few who did respond to phonemic points showed a most encouraging understanding of the issues and had clearly developed beyond the levels expected in F651. Markers expressed some concern about broad sociological generalising which appeared in a number of answers.

This included rather assertive generalities about dates of RP and rather spurious comments about supposed levels of education in the late C19th. At A2 levels candidates should be showing basic objectivity in their answers and not engaging in unsupported narration about social class. In some answers candidates still seemed to think that Received Pronunciation is synonymous with Standard English. There were also references to the theories of Basil Bernstein appearing in answers - rather erroneously linked with ideas about RP. It was encouraging to see authorities like John Honey and Professor Crystal being cited frequently. It is important that if such cross-referencing is applied it is clearly linked to something they have actually said and not just dropped in to an answer as a general comment en passant.

Section B The Language of Popular Written Texts

There were few responses to this Topic. The answers tended to concentrate upon passages (e) and (f) with limited address to passage (g). The register of (e) with its intrusive 'interviewer' and spoken discourse was not explicitly analysed. This phoneticity, however, is clearly a stylistic aspect of the text. The narrative structure reflecting life like a walk into my house was the

important cohesive device. Also the syntactic and lexical concentration upon domesticity were certainly contextual aspects of 'creating' a life.

Passage (f) attracted the expected comments upon the simple taboo lexis but missed the endless popular cultural collocations, relayed intertextually throughout the passage. There was a clear contextualisation of media personalities throughout the passage, affecting the way the writer outlined his earlier life. Musical and television lexemes permeated the passage and invited analytical commentary. Passage (g) was a more traditional autobiography. However, the lexical density proved to be a barrier to the candidates and there was little said about its structure. Despite its popularity in terms of book sales, candidates appeared to have little grasp of the medium of writing about the self.

Though two of the passages clearly chose a mode of contemporary syntactical presentation, markers expressed surprise that those who answered this Topic did not show detailed knowledge of the key constituents of language as outlined in the Specification. This meant that the lexis, grammar, morphology, phonology (passage e) and features of discourse were not given sufficient analytical attention. It is important that candidates are made aware that structure is the most important element of any text in sections B, C and D of the examination paper.

Section C Language and Cultural Production

There were few responses to this Topic. The theme was clearly diversification, with sub-texts about the challenges of new media opposing the authority of the traditional reading of books. The problem markers faced was the general enthusiasm candidates showed for the newer media and lack of interest in the traditional, rather than in the language in which each was presented. (See the final comments on Section B, above). Webspeak did produce some thoughtful answers, about how far it is possible to have a new language and what lexicographical issues this involved. The intrusive imperative structure of chat room, plus its rather uneven cohesiveness, did not attract detailed comment. The inclusive 'we' approach, masking a popular psychological view about 'definition', and assertions about the 'imagination', written with declarative certainty, but insecure real evidence in support was not addressed. The words and pictures of the illustrated novel did not provoke comments about what links can be made between written syntax and the 'grammar' of images. For centres considering this as a future Topic it is important that candidates can see culture, in its various manifestations, as a product/construction of language.

Section D Language, Power and Identity.

This proved to be a popular question, eliciting a range of candidate responses. Few candidates seemed to realise that the language of the passages was that of adults busily constructing identities/power structures for the younger generations. This was clearly an important contextual issue about sub-cultures and media identities, which tends to permeate the way in which young people are linguistically constructed. Whilst there needs to be a caveat, again, about treating passages as material for a sociology essay, a number of responses were able to mine away at the cultural nominalising, especially in passages (m) and (n). There were some interesting semantic observations upon a range of lexical items used by the writers, especially the now common 'chav' and the equally media-derived 'yoof'. There were good analytical responses to the various cultural implications of 'celebrity' as it was manifested in passage (n). In fact some good work invested the whole of this passage with a range of connotative possibilities. The weakest responses were to passage (l) where sub-culture was very much identified by the writer using a range of lexical/sociolectic items. However, these proved to be too difficult for candidates to investigate and there was a distinct tendency to try and read the passage with too much emphasis on some rather dated feminist commentary. This was also apparent in some answers

Reports on the Units taken in January 2010

to passages (m) and (n). Candidates should recall that the noun 'stereotypes' covers all gender possibilities.

The lack of reference to wider reading, beyond that cited above, suggests that centres considering this Topic need to invest time in considering power and identity outside of the domain of gender.

F654 Media Language

There were no entries for this unit in this series.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE English Language (H069)
January 2010 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
F651	Raw	60	49	43	37	31	25	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
F652	Raw	40	32	27	22	17	13	0
	UMS	80	64	56	48	40	32	0
F653	Raw	60	43	37	32	27	22	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
F654	Raw	40	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	UMS	80	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
H069	200	160	140	120	100	80	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
H069	26.9	50	69.2	96.2	100	100	26

26 candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:
<http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums/index.html>

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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