

English Language

Advanced GCE A2 H469

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H069

OCR Report to Centres

January 2013

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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

The entry numbers were smaller than usual for this final January session. It is difficult to offer any very conclusive judgements on the basis of a small candidature, but it was encouraging to examiners to see that almost all answers revealed an appreciation of what was required in this paper. Less successful candidates concentrated on the factual or emotional content of the transcript evidence rather than maintaining a consistently linguistic/analytical method.

Features of performance on each question are listed below. As usual, reference may be made to the published mark-scheme for further indications of appropriate response in terms of the Assessment Objectives.

Section A: Speech and Children

Question 1

Significantly fewer candidates answered Question 1, which was based on an interaction at play-school involving a group of boys aged three to four. Many candidates correctly identified the non-fluency features along with use of concrete nouns and volume/stress for attention. Halliday was commonly cited (Imaginative Function) in many answers. Some candidates struggled to 'get' the aggressive/competitive aspect and tried to talk about turn-taking and co-operative play. The best answers concentrated on the lexical/grammatical features of the transcript rather than over-emphasising the paralinguistic features.

Question 2

Question 2 was a transcription of a conversation between a mother and her five-year-old daughter. Candidates who attempted this question generally did better than those who attempted question 1, giving well-developed answers which made excellent use of the transcript evidence. Many answers discussed the range of lexis and grammar (eg plurals and possessives) used by Ellie, who was correctly identified as being at the post-telegraphic stage. Candidates also successfully noted that the Mother uses a range of features of Child-directed Speech—intonation, interrogatives and pauses. It was pleasing to see that candidates referred to their wider reading when responding to the transcripts:

- imitation/reinforcement theory (Skinner) was used helpfully
- Halliday's functions were understood and exemplified
- other references included Petyt and Chomsky, plus Vygotsy and Bruner (LASS)
- Grice's Maxims were often referred to, but not as usefully as other references.

Section B: Speech Varieties and Social Groups

Question 3

Question 3 was a transcription of part of a conversation involving three young (17–25) people—Jonathan, Coral and Becky—talking about Sharon, Becky's sister. Candidates engaged well with this transcript, perhaps owing to the ages of the speakers and the subject content. The context, the tensions involved in talking about someone else behind their back, was well understood. Candidates successfully discussed a number of features of the transcript and supported their analysis well with reference to wider reading. Answers included: thoughtful application of ideas of gendered speech: Deborah Jones's study of women's oral culture (*Gossip*) was referred to, and "Bitching" was discussed in formal academic terms.

- useful and well-informed references were made to Zimmerman and West, Lakoff, Goffman, Cameron and Tannen
- some candidates thought Coral was male, and this produced interesting discussion. Many candidates have progressed beyond assuming that the stereotypical features of male/female speech will actually appear and are looking at feature in the transcript in detail to support their arguments
- Coral's non-standard usages—*havent she* and *sharon do*—along with her double negative were all noted, as was Jon's humour, sometimes seen as his only way in to the conversation
- most candidates noted that the co-operative overlaps between the two women went along with an apparent competition between them over the discussion of Sharon, and Becky growing more reticent as the talk goes on
- Jon's idioms—*pinch of salt, like a house on fire*—were noted, as was the pronunciation generally, though there was some tendency to assume the speakers were all of a lower socio-economic order because they drop g's and h's and use elision.

Question 4

Question 4 was a transcription of part of a conversation between two men about photography. Many candidates successfully applied theories of male speech. The largely co-operative nature of the exchange was noted, and candidates avoided the assumption that all-male interactions had to be competitive. There was also an appreciation that the dominance shifted half-way through. The best answers concentrated on the lexical/grammatical features of the transcript, including:

- field/mode/tenor identified successfully, and field-specific lexis was noted and (to some extent) explored
- aspects of accent/dialect were also explored, principally the schwa vowel and g- and h-dropping
- non-standard morphological features such as the clipping of brother to *bro* and moment to *mo* were well explained.

F653 Culture, Language and Identity

General Comments

The general performance of candidates was consistent with that of the June 2012 paper. There was evidence that issues raised in previous reports had been picked up and candidates have gained from such. In a number of answers there was more evidence of addressing contextual features, generated both by the medium of production and by the language within the passages. It was encouraging to see more candidates introducing wider reading references in Section B. The use of a slightly wider range of technical terminology was helpful to candidates' theoretical approach to AO2. An important feature, raised in several past reports, is the quality of written communication in some candidates' work. Answers which contain spelling errors, even though they appear in the passages, do have a detrimental effect. Punctuation in response to an English Language examination should be rigorous. The style of written responses should be appropriate to the academic level of A2. It would be helpful if candidates were encouraged to give line references when quoting from passages.

Section A

Language and Speech

Markers noted that many candidates, were not reading the material in passage (a) carefully, possibly due to their anxiety to embark upon the social history of the BBC; or thinking that 'correct pronunciation' needed a social history of RP. The primary phonological feature of the critic's views was that of prosodics. How does a speaker deal with syllabic stress in modern speech? Stress and intonation are part of the whole subject of Language and Speech. A few candidates did correctly identify this as a crucial feature for comment, giving sound illustration by mentioning how some towns and some surnames raise issues of contention in how they are pronounced. Some candidates neatly embedded conservative RP sounds with issues of how a word is pronounced. Other responses illustrated the phenomenon of the rising stress on end syllables, now quite common across a range of speaking voices.

Passage (b) was more accessible for most candidates. There was adequate general illustration; but a weakness in the very limited exemplification of the real sounds of regional speech. The importance of raising this with candidates, and giving them listening experience, has been noted in past reports. Passage (c) saw some answers critical of the lecturer in his professional role. The more detailed responses fell back on Estuarine/Cockney, producing some interesting vowel quadrilaterals. The topic of triphthongs placed most candidates on less familiar territory. Though some further words with central *i* sounds can be pronounced as triphthongs and do occur in some forms of RP.

Section B

The Language of Popular Written Texts

A number of responses picked up on the over-arching theme of retailing. This helped to create a bond with a female rather than male audience. Further contextual issues surrounding the medium of publication (d) was seen as popular journalism, using the conventions familiar in secondary articles of topical interest to create a personal interest story with a concluding moral warning. There was less agreement about the web page. Some candidates mentioned its lexical and historical density and were uncertain about its potential audience. Other candidates stated that (d) was written in first person, failing to note that there was clearly an embedded reported speech structure in part of the article. Candidates should remember to consider the varieties of speech, and how it is represented. There were some good responses to the adjectivals in this

passage; candidates argued that this was a feature of popular journalism. Most answers suggested a gender bias in the NP 'bankrupt women' and 'shopaholics'. This was conflated with the relative clause 'who know...their vice is bad for them' leading to the discourse shift of the moralising conclusion. In the Portas article only a few candidates picked up the retro language which was the dominant feature of much of the discourse. Her proper nouns like Liberty and Arts & Crafts, Heritage and others were contextual features of retrogressive discourse. Little was said about the heading visual which seemed, with its subject in written form, supported with an opening dynamic VP, to set the style of much of the following discourse matter. Evidence suggests it is helpful if candidates do try and see the whole narrative purpose of the passage before they attempt to itemise some of its structural properties. A brief overview of contents can help develop the contextual features; further it will allow the writer time to discriminate specific stylistic aspects within the discourse features.

Language and Cultural Production

These passages encouraged some lively and thoughtful comments. Not least because those addressing them were familiar with the generic gothic conventions of the articles. In the case of *Twilight*, to include mention of the literary original. A few more perceptive answers picked up the merchandising in (f), which was as structurally dominant as the outline of plot and authorial background. 'Chaste', 'melancholic', 'paramour' and 'Twihards' evoked some good connotative and lexical discussion; as did the omniscient Facebook and online *Twilight dictionary*. The actual gender views about the audience did not provoke much analysis.

The web review was not as formally analysed. The alert responses picked up the fact that this was an excellent example of Cultural Production, not least in the fact that it carried a cult status. The updated web review marking its on-going stature as a key generic text. The focus on formal structure remarked upon the telegraphic style, which seemed to be familiar to candidates from other web-based sources. The first ten lines were cited as an example of this type of discourse. Several answers suggested there was some grammatical incoherence in lines 20-22. Answers also suggested that the form chosen by the writer was predisposed to be accessible to those familiar with both the filmic conventions used and the main generic qualities inherent the plot. Several answers suggested the contents of (i) would have more 'reader appeal' to devotees than the contents of (f). This seemed an interesting contextual and stylistic point.

Language, Power and Identity

Candidates responded favourably and in some depth to the passages. Many argued for an ideological message in the contents. This helped broaden the AO3 potential. In technical terms, many picked up the imperatives in (h), with some candidates stating that these orders could be off-putting to the busy working mother. The noun 'superwoman' was popular in stimulating some interesting connotative discussion and comparison with her comic book masculine peer. More detailed answers were able to find a range of interesting collocations in the various sub passages. They also suggested that the power of fitness and well movements could disguise pseudo scientific jargon.

Candidates picked up the useful phrase *synthetic personalisation*, noting this was a feature of some forms of journalism common in a number of magazines. One or two remarked upon the subtle market qualities in the writing, arguing that the pre-modified Nicki Waterman was another journalistic ruse to create identity and also to help sell Bosch tools and skipping ropes. This was sound interpretative reading; using the textuality to tease out the potential for different ideological purposes. Good points were raised about (i) in terms of the connotations of a 'lifestyle' magazine, 'target markets' and 'enhance your potential'. Some of the discourse was seen, as in (h), as pseudo science coupled with jargon. Some answers pointed out that the links between side by side passages in (i) were rather tenuous and pointed out that such www references as *performanceandfunction* and *m10fitness* had the same language of selling which was found in (h) so turning the supposed objectivity of the journalism into creating a 'target market'. It was encouraging to find candidates able to tease out 'hidden discourses' and to employ the noun ideological with some effect to both passages.

General Comments

It was pleasing to see that more candidates have been encouraged in preparatory wider reading for Section B. Listed below are the authors who appear to have been the most used:

D Crystal, N Fairclough
D Freeborn
M Halliday
G Leech

This might be a starting point for centres considering broadening candidates' approach to this section of the A2 paper.

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