



GCE

English Language

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H070**

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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H070/01 Exploring language

General Comments:

The exam paper seems to have been accessible to candidates of all abilities and overall examiners were impressed with the levels of linguistic knowledge and understanding on display. The two tasks offer different opportunities for the candidates to show their skills. They are similar in terms of requiring linguistic analysis, but different in that Q1 is based on a single text and Q2 is a comparison of two texts.

The best answers were highly impressive for both AO1 and AO3 (and AO4 in Q2), especially considering they were written, in the most part, by 17 year olds at the end of one year of studying the subject. They ranged effortlessly around the language levels, highlighting relevant patterns, and made insightful comments on complex contextual factors- Grace Dent's ironic use of teenage language alongside the deliberately clichéd language of parents, the self-referential nature of text C, which was as much for adults reading the comic to children as the children themselves.

In such short exams it can be difficult for those with most knowledge because choosing what to put in and what to leave out, given the time constraints, requires both skill and confidence. Time obviously goes very fast for the candidate and there is limited opportunity to annotate and make planning notes. Many candidates structured answers by going through one language level at a time. This did sometimes work well, with candidates covering a lot of ground effectively. However, many less successful answers would have been improved by sticking less rigidly to this structure, which sometimes prevented the identification of patterns and restricted the comments on context. It also meant that, at times, they spent a paragraph explaining that certain features in a language level were not present in the text, which was not a useful approach.

All of the examiners were surprised to notice that in general task 1 proved more challenging than task 2. This is possibly because the areas of comparison in terms of mode, structure, audience and purpose seemed to give candidates a contextual focus around which to explain the features across linguistic levels, which was sometimes lacking in task 1. A handful of candidates, however, severely underperformed on task 2 because of a simple misreading of the question, and compared text A from task 1 with text B from task 2. In such cases they could only be rewarded for their comments about text B.

In summary, the very best candidates were those who started with the text before moving outwards, and who avoided the 'checklist approach' to the linguistic features, concepts or theories which they have been taught. At the same time, they were well equipped to discuss, analyse and evaluate lexis, grammar, syntax, phonology and discourse, reading the questions and the passages carefully for important contextual cues.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No. 1

Only a few candidates seemed to struggle with timing. Considering the short time students have to form answers, particularly for Q1, this was particularly impressive. However, some candidates found it quite hard to find a foothold in task 1 and sometimes analysed the text in the style of literary criticism, interpreting what the writer 'was saying' rather than discussing the use of language according to the levels specified for this subject. Others simply went for a "scattergun" approach of linguistic terms, firing a volley of them at the text and hoping to hit something. Many introductions effectively covered the main contextual factors, but candidates should be aware

that context needs to be discussed throughout answers, and related to specifics of language, rather than discussed in general terms before spotting features.

Graphology was generally discussed in a useful way, further informing comments on language use. However, answers which spent a long time discussing features related to the appearance of the text alone tended to restrict themselves. Similarly, several candidates discussed the definitions provided to students in text A and B, of terms like Arthurian pact. Students need to remember that these are provided for them in the exam, rather than the original audience of the text. It is also worth mentioning that in both tasks a failure to discuss and analyse the text explicitly enough in terms of the language levels impacts upon achievement for both A01 and A03.

Question No. 2

There were plenty of fairly readily apparent differences between the transcript and the comic which even the least able candidates could say something relevant about (e.g.: C has pictures; B has no pictures), whilst the more able could find a lot to say about the more subtle differences. The areas of comparison in terms of mode, audience, purpose and so on seemed to give candidates a contextual focus around which to explain the features across linguistic levels. Although no penalty was imposed on candidates who brought in comments relating to AO2, students should be warned against making extensive discussions on gender, power issues, or indeed Grice's maxims, which were often forced into answers without much relevance, and prevented candidates being able to talk about contextual factors effectively, or to develop interesting or fruitful connections between the two texts. Of course there is cross over between A02 and both A03 and A04, but any material which is included must be relevant to the text(s) and part of a critical and analytical discussion of the language in them.

The very best answers were those which went for a side by side comparison of the two texts throughout the answer, often blending comments about A01 and A03 into well- developed passages of comparative analysis, and clearly introducing new areas of comparison through deft topic sentences and phrases that functioned as cohesive devices throughout the response. There were many candidates who had a clear, and often critical, understanding of the differences between spoken, written and multimodal discourse.

H070/02 Exploring contexts

General Comments:

This paper was approached in a productive manner by many candidates and both sections allowed candidates with varying strengths to prove their learning. The range of concepts and approaches taken to both sections illustrates the breadth of learning candidates and centres have undertaken in preparing for this paper. Centres should be gratified that their preparation for this paper has been so thorough and that so many candidates have understood its demands so clearly during this first series.

The two sections of the paper require different approaches to expressing linguistic and conceptual knowledge. A number of responses showed a good understanding of the differing demands of the questions and of the need to target both a non-specialist audience in Q1 and a specialist audience in Q2/Q3. Some candidates still need to focus on adapting their style of answer to meet the demands of these two questions.

The most successful candidates showed a breadth of conceptual knowledge which they were capable of glossing appropriately in Q1 and which were explored and weighed up in relation to the data in Q2/Q3.

Section A contains one compulsory question and Section B offers a choice of two questions focused on either the representation of power or the representation of gender in a text. In general, Q3 was more popular with candidates. Approaches to both questions in Section B were equally successful and allowed a range of responses which focused on a variety of concepts and linguistic knowledge. In general, comments on multi-modality were made in a more integrated and detailed manner on Q3. A number of candidates numbered the Section B response incorrectly. Rubric infringements, when candidates attempted both questions in Section B, were rare and most candidates seem to have understood the requirements of the paper.

This paper awards 50% of the marks for AO2 and candidates accessed these marks by considering theoretical models and through a consideration of representations of individuals, texts, or producers. Both approaches have their merits and no one approach is favoured by the paper.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No. 1

The Topical Issues question was worded in an open way to encourage a range of approaches to the task.

‘Can those without power use language to gain power?’

This task allowed candidates to consider power in terms of both speech and writing and to define their understanding of who ‘those without power’ actually were. Some responses addressed the issue as a discussion of whether language is power and this was done well by candidates who made the link back to the issue having discussed power and language more broadly. Many candidates identified certain social groups as lacking in power and linked this to a variety of concepts including overt and covert prestige, face theory, divergence and convergence and attitudes to accent/dialect. There were a broad range of concepts used and all were considered valid. Linguistic relativity was used by a number of candidates and this allowed for

detailed and interesting arguments to be made in those responses that showed a good understanding of it. Some candidates sought to reframe the debate as focusing on gender. These candidates redefined ‘those without power’ as women and this approach was considered valid and successful. Again, it is important that centres advise candidates to make sure the link to the issue/statement in the question is made explicit even when re-framing the debate.

There were candidates whose approach to the question was to present a historical or social study of notable figures who used language, amongst other things, to gain power. In some responses, discussion of Hitler, Donald Trump, Martin Luther King Jr and others was used to show a detailed understanding of the practical ways in which power can be enacted in speech. Responses using King to exemplify and explore the power of rhetoric with specific exemplification were successful. Some candidates presented a history of these figures and did not use them to present an understanding of concepts or relevance to language use. These responses were less successful in meeting the requirements of the mark scheme.

The task required candidates to write a “magazine article” that “persuades” and many were able to meet the needs of both the form and purpose. The best responses established a clear and persuasive tone at the outset and maintained a strong sense of their audience throughout. The parenthetical aside was a device employed to good effect by some high achieving responses and there were clear attempts at humour. Some candidates integrated a range of persuasive techniques into their writing which allowed them to prove their ability to meet the task requirements. Some candidates wrote in a formal essay style which did not meet the needs of the form. In many cases, these candidates were able to show an ability to adapt their writing by addressing the needs of audience.

The task will always identify a ‘non-specialist, reasonably well-educated audience’ and many candidates showed their ability to adapt specialist knowledge to the needs of this. Candidates who used overt glossing, often through parenthesis, were able to prove an awareness of the needs of the audience. Some candidates integrated specialist terminology and concepts with anecdotal evidence of their use and this proved a successful approach. Candidates, in some cases, used a range of specialist term without glossing and thus weren’t able to prove their ability to target non-specialists effectively. There was evidence of candidates targeting an audience of their peers and it was felt that this could constitute a ‘reasonably well-educated audience’.

Many candidates produced responses which were considerably longer than the suggested 500 words. These responses included candidates across the marking spectrum and this was not seen as a factor in awarding marks. Longer responses in some cases allowed for detailed knowledge to be explored; in other cases, it resulted in responses which did not remain focused on the issues or concepts named. Centres are advised to remind candidates of the need for careful planning and should advise them to follow the timing guides given in the paper.

Section B

This section assesses AO1, AO2 and AO3 with a 50% weighting on AO2. Centres would be well advised to emphasise to candidates the importance of an integrated approach to the questions and data. Linguistic knowledge is a driving factor behind identifying patterns through which concepts and contexts are explored and many candidates met the needs of the task by methodically exploring these patterns. In some cases, candidates gave explanations of relevant theories prior to drawing links to the data. In other cases, no links to the data were drawn. Candidates should maintain a clear focus on exploring the data in the paper and use conceptual knowledge to illuminate that exploration rather than reproducing learned knowledge. Many responses were able to show a clear ability to identify patterns by grouping linguistic features under various ways in which representations were apparent and this was considered to be a successful approach to the questions. This approach was seen more often on Q3.

Question No. 2

The data was a shortened transcript of a radio interview and a screenshot of the webpage where the interview can be heard, after the original broadcast on Radio 4's morning news programme, Today. As mentioned above, this question was less popular than Q3. A number of candidates approached this text as a transcript and did not take more than a tangential account of the multi-modality and how it could be explored in the wider context of reception or production. Some successful responses did make reference to the image's representation of the topic being explored in the interview and linked this to the quote in the title "slightly bigger elite".

Many candidates identified the types of power (frequently based on Wareing) each interlocutor held and linked this to the data. Some were able to explore the differing contextual factors influencing the language choices of each of the interlocutors individually and these responses considered the interlocutors as producers in their own right as well as part of the whole text. These responses were successful. In other cases, candidates sought to generalise about the influence of context on all three interlocutors.

The most successful responses:

- Clearly identified patterns in language use and explored them before exemplifying clearly and exploring the example specifically.
- Considered the ways in which each interlocutor represented themselves and their employers through specific language choices.
- Identified the text producer as the BBC and applied associated ideas of related to the need for balance.
- Were tentative in suggesting reasons for particular language patterns and their relation to concepts and contexts.
- Looked at patterns of language across the text rather than considering each interlocutor separately.
- Integrated linguistic and conceptual knowledge with the exploration of contexts.

Question No. 3

The data was taken from a website and was a series of advertisements aimed at a target audience of young girls and parents. The question focused on the representations of gender in the text. Many candidates chose to explore the positive ways in which the text presented gender and good responses were able to link this to the overall purpose of persuading the target audience of parents. This focus on representations provided a sound conceptual basis for responses. Some candidates sought to apply gender theories (Deficit, dominance, etc) and this was also a successful approach to the question. Some responses chose to ignore the fact that parents were a key part of the text's audience.

Many candidates focused well on the multi-modality of the text and were able to link this to genre and to representations of gender. In some cases, candidates explored the graphology at length without linking this to other language levels or to concepts and this was a limiting approach to the task.

There were a number of candidates who chose to challenge the notion that this text positively represented gender and these responses provided a sound conceptual and contextual basis for this view. This approach was considered valid and was most successful when balanced with a positive reading of the text as well. Some candidates attempted to approach the text by discussing the absence of male representation and this approach resulted in responses which did not clearly focus on the text. Centres should encourage candidates to see the data as the starting point for all parts of a response.

Some candidates took the approach of discussing each sub-section of the data in turn. This sequential approach limited the opportunity to explore patterns in language use across the data. Other responses did not read the whole text and missed the final advert. This did not have a noticeable impact on the quality of responses; centres are advised to ensure candidates understand the need to read the whole data booklet when selecting texts.

The most successful responses:

- Clearly identified patterns in language use and explored them before exemplifying clearly and exploring the example specifically.
- Considered the ways in which the text producer and the implied reader were represented as well as the female gender more broadly.
- Integrated consideration of gender with the text's actual purpose to persuade.
- Were tentative in suggesting reasons for particular language patterns and their relation to concepts and contexts.
- Looked at patterns of language across the text rather than considering each section separately.
- Integrated linguistic and conceptual knowledge with the exploration of contexts.

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