



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

**English Language and Literature ELLB3
B**

(Specification 2725)

Unit 3: Talk in Life and Literature

Report on the Examination

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General

This summer some candidates made difficulties for themselves by not reading the question carefully. For example, Question 1 was read as 'Hamlet's sense of humour', fortunately by only a very small number of candidates. Many more candidates read the rubric of Question 5 as if Text A was *itself* a television programme on poverty, not a spontaneous discussion of the programme. This led to potential misreadings of genre, purpose and audience. But more often than not, examiners were able to give credit for further relevant and well-supported comparisons within the answer.

Candidates need to watch their spelling and handwriting too – sixteen different spellings of soliloquy is rather too many! Punctuation was afforded too much attention – in drama, it is the pause indicated by punctuation which is of dramatic interest, not the full stop in itself. As usual, spoken register was to be avoided in answering questions (ie Blanche's 'savviness', 'Hamlet's dad', Captain Absolute's 'sneakiness', 'Hamlet was given 'a revenge act order off of Old Hamlet'). Theory was frequently well used by candidates to explain and support an argument, though Grice's maxims are less a 'grid' to be applied than a set of *descriptions* of successful co-operative speech.

Overall, despite these comments, the majority of candidates answered the paper with knowledge and enthusiasm, and some were awarded full marks either for the paper as a whole or for individual questions.

Hamlet

Candidates who knew the context and recognized the parallel between Hamlet and Fortinbras did well on this question. Indeed, knowing who the 'tender prince' was proved to be the discriminator. The key contrast was between Fortinbras's action and Hamlet's procrastination. Many recognized this as a turning point in the play. Candidates who were uncertain of the context made a number of guesses which threw their answer off-course – for example, some thought that the captain was the sea captain of the ship bound for England, or thought that Hamlet himself was engaged in warfare with Norway. As one examiner said, those who didn't recognize the extract rambled. There was much misunderstanding of 'ranker rate' (higher rate of interest), and few candidates seem to understand the metaphor of 'imposthume' (abscess). The best candidates however were able to comment on the honour which Hamlet showed to his inferiors in the initial exchange as well as providing a structured analysis of the soliloquy, which focused on the steer.

The Rivals

Not all examiners saw scripts on *The Rivals*, but those who did found that candidates had no difficulty with the extract, and were able to trace the progression of the lovers' quarrel in linguistic, literary and paralinguistic features. There were some very good answers, and much evidence of enjoyment of the text.

A Streetcar Named Desire

This text is very popular and most candidates were able to respond effectively to the extract and the question. One examiner noted that it was a straightforward task and generally well done. Another noted that the very best responses came from candidates who really understood the dynamics of the scene and tensions arising. Most candidates noted the sexual tension implicit in Stanley's 'smouldering look' and traced its development through the scene, leading to Scene 10 (rape scene). Too much wider reference however, often led to loss of focus on the actual passage. Not all were aware or had really understood the financial tensions related to the loss of Belle Reve from Stanley's point of view. Opinions about whether Blanche or Stanley dominated ranged widely, but the best candidates saw it as fluctuating, with Blanche becoming progressively more vulnerable. Blanche and Stanley as *individuals* tended to interest less able candidates, who found the concept of their

relationship more difficult. Pursuing character study often leads to forgetting the audience and the discourse.

Translations

Examiners who read scripts on *Translations* commented on the strong evidence of good teaching, where candidates clearly understood the issues about the power of language, and were able to work through the extract and come up with independently reasoned responses. It is a little disappointing that the text remains less popular among centres, but those who do study it clearly find it very interesting. There was a range of responses ('a mixed bag' said one examiner), but a substantial number were excellent and did candidates great credit.

Question 5 Unseen Texts

The main issue with this question has been mentioned already. Obviously 'reading the question carefully' is a given for examination candidates, and this has to be a timely reminder to avoid hasty assumptions. As was indicated earlier, fortunately the consequences were often not so serious. A sign that they were on the wrong track was if candidates found themselves describing the transcribed text or *transcript* as a genre! (The transcript is simply a way of recording spontaneous speech so that it becomes permanent and can be analysed. The genre is 'spoken language'). Interestingly, candidates' skills and experience in comparing spoken and crafted texts often led them to work out for themselves that Text A was a spontaneous discussion with the participants as audience. This resolved the difficulty. Even those who misread it were often able to move rapidly on to a comparative analysis without realizing that they'd 'got it wrong' about the genre. A half-way position was to read the text as a 'spontaneous discussion' with a dual audience – the other participants - and the wider television audience. This interpretation caused no difficulties with the comparative analysis. The main difficulty presented by misreading was to miss the fact that A was natural speech; not to recognize that the audience consisted only of the people taking part in the discussion and to think the purpose was 'to entertain'. Even then, most candidates saw that 'to inform' was part of the package, and credit could be given, as it was for identifying attitudes and values. Those very numerous candidates who read the question correctly, produced some excellent answers. Those who differentiated between the more objective views of poverty described in Text A and the subjective pain of the characters in B did well. Although Text B (an extract from *Major Barbara*) presented some challenges to those candidates who thought 1906 was the date of WW1 and that the shelter belonged to the British Army, most candidates understood the situation well, and recognized the complex attitudes to poverty represented by the three characters. There were some simplistic judgements about links between accent, intelligence and social class not unfamiliar to sociolinguists. The best candidates noted the political context for Shaw's play, and were able to differentiate between poverty in 1991 and poverty in 1906, and the difference between talking about poverty when you've experienced it in the past, and living it as Price, Rummy and Shirley were doing.

Overview

In the course of ten years, throughout the lifetime of the legacy B specification and now with the current specification, candidates' levels of knowledge and understanding of linguistics and of the way talk functions in life and literature have increased dramatically. Examiners now comment regularly on candidates' continually improving skills in discourse analysis, schema theory and the rest. All this is down to the enormous hard work of teachers, whose achievement should be celebrated.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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