GCE

English Language & Literature

Advanced GCE **A2 H473**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H073**

Examiners' Reports

January 2011

HX73/R/11J

Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations

CONTENTS

Advanced GCE English Language and Literature – H473

Advanced Subsidiary GCE English Language and Literature – H073

EXAMINERS' REPORTS

F671 Speaking Voices [Closed Text]

General Comments

Since this was the third January session of the new specification, and the fifth outing in total for F671, examiners had expected to see a continuation of the improvement in performance which was discernible in June 2010. However, they were disappointed to find that many candidates had in effect made the paper more difficult for themselves. Candidates would be well advised to look again at advice given in previous Reports.

Nevertheless, it was encouraging to see that candidates were clearly engaged with whatever texts they had studied, and they had generally been well-prepared in terms of both textual knowledge and literary/linguistic approaches.

The great majority of candidates continued to opt for The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time in Section A; and most chose question 4 (The Great Gatsby) in Section B. A smaller but significant number did A Room with a View or Wide Sargasso Sea. Very few did Hawksmoor this session; and no-one offered an answer on Surfacing.

All questions generated a range of responses. As always, stronger candidates wrote more clearly and fluently because they had planned and organised their answers before beginning to write. Such candidates naturally produce more smoothly-integrated responses, keeping the over-arching question in mind while giving the bullet-prompts due attention. Less secure candidates may follow the bullet-prompts more mechanically; if they do, they have no difficulty in constructing relevant answers.

The candidates who do have problems are those who write carelessly. So, in this session, examiners noticed with concern the continuing trend for candidates to assert (for example) that the presence of overlaps in Passage A of Section A shows that the speakers are competing for the floor. Of itself, it doesn't. Overlaps might suggest a competitive atmosphere, but they might equally suggest a co-operative one. Only when specific examples of overlapping are located, quoted and analysed can an evaluation be reached with any confidence.

Candidates would do well to practise more precise use of verbs which will determine the quality and depth of their AO2 work. Currently, the fashion is for shows / reflects / represents. And, more often than not, the assertion that A shows/reflects/represents B is inaccurate.

Using a range of verbs and verb phrases – hints / suggests / reminds us / refers to / underlines the sense that – will allow candidates to be more precise, and to avoid making extravagant claims for a certain feature of language or structure. Pronoun use has before now been accorded astonishing power and status, supposedly showing all manner of things.

Similarly, being tentative is not a weakness of argument. The 'unseen' material on the paper is obviously new to candidates, who may even as they are writing change their minds as to the meaning or effect of a particular exchange. It is perfectly acceptable to write that the overlaps might suggest an element of competitiveness in the interaction, or that they might be one sign of close friends co-operating with each other.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

The question-wording should by now be very familiar, as it invites candidates to compare the **construction** and **effects** of the speaking voices in a piece (Passage A) of transcribed spoken English and an extract (Passage B) from their chosen novel.

The bullet-prompts remind candidates to **consider**

features in Passage A which are characteristic of spoken language
how features of syntax, lexis and register produce distinctive voices in these two passages
ways in which the writer uses speaking voices in Passage B and elsewhere in the novel

Construction refers to the key constituents of language – in the words of AO2, the ways in which structure, form and language shape meanings. The first two bullet-prompts direct attention particularly to features characteristic of spoken language and features of syntax, lexis and register.

Effects refers to the impact of language choice on audience – which may be listener, viewer, interlocutor, reader. The third bullet-prompt directs attention particularly to the (variety of) uses of speaking voices in the novel as a whole, and candidates should find plenty of scope to explore both narrative and dialogue.

Consider doesn't just mean locate-and-list-and-describe. It is a clear indication to candidates that this is a Language and Literature examination, and that they must seek to explain how the words work. Some otherwise very competent candidates limited their own achievement by merely identifying features of spoken language and listing what they were – repairs, or hedges, or false starts, or interruptions – but not **analysing** how they created meaning.

Previous Reports and INSETs have advised against this, but some candidates still seemed to feel it necessary to 'prove' that Passage A was natural more-or-less spontaneous speech by this same simple process of locating, identifying and listing typical features of spoken language. These were often candidates who also struggled to realise that voice in Passage B and elsewhere in the chosen novel is a fictional construct, whereas the spontaneous speech in Passage A is someone's natural utterance. So it is not helpful to write of the speaker(s) using (for example) fillers, repairs or micro-pauses: these might be features of their spoken language, but it is these which construct voice rather than the other way round. Similarly, it is almost always unhelpful to identify 'errors' in spoken language as if it were an inferior version of written Standard English.

One final related point is pertinent here. Since Section A questions are passage-based, it should actually be easier for candidates to maintain a focus on relevant textual detail in this Section than in Section B. A sensible strategy would be to make substantial annotation on the question paper while reading the passages: this would enable candidates more readily to support points with appropriate reference. Many answers, however, made general points about the 'speaking voices' in the passages and the novel without citing (and therefore without being able to analyse and evaluate) specific features of language.

Question 1: Surfacing

There were no answers to this question.

Question 2: The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

Christopher's account of his arrival in London and his struggle to locate the Underground was paired with a transcription – taken from a radio show – of a light-hearted discussion about the misery of travelling by 'Tube'.

Candidates tended not to comment on the essential difference: that while the radio presenters talk in a desultory, casual way with little real purpose beyond entertaining each other and their audience, Christopher is as always desperately purposeful in his interaction. Here it is entirely true to observe that he "can't do chatting."

Examiners noted that the 'default' method of answering the question was: *Identify any features of spoken English that you find in Passage A and then tell us what you know about Christopher's character.* Such a minimal response goes so far and no farther, and throws away the chance offered by the presence of Passage B actually to analyse some of Christopher's language.

For those candidates who were prepared to examine the dynamics of interaction between the 'information lady' and Christopher, there was plenty of good material. Similarly, there was plenty of scope to interpret the exchanges in Passage A. Most answers took Richard's responses as supportive back-channel, though a few noted that the intonation could imply sarcasm – <u>is</u> it ... <u>really</u> ... oh <u>yeah</u> ... – and saw this as the prelude to his eventual outburst:
[*explodes with laughter*].

The instruction to *Compare ...* can be carried out in various ways, but must explore specific examples of how *construction* produces *effects*. So although the pragmatics of interaction were generally well-handled, only the strongest candidates *compared* consistently. Careless use of terminology led to some blurring of analysis: lexis and register were often dealt with as one item; syntax was rarely understood.

The mark-scheme provides many examples of features of language which candidates might with profit have identified and explored.

Question 3: *Hawksmoor*

There were very few answers on *Hawksmoor* this session, but those who did this question found it interesting to compare Nick Dyer's ideas on architecture with Anthony Gormley's views on sculpture!

The mark-scheme offers examples of potentially fruitful avenues for exploration.

Section B

Most candidates answered on The Great Gatsby, and there were only a few responses on the other two texts. The more general of the following comments on candidates' performance on The Great Gatsby apply equally – mutatis mutandis – to the other texts.

AO3 is dominant in Section B. This Assessment Objective is not just about "context", and it is worth quoting its wording in full:
Use integrated approaches to **explore relationships between texts**, analysing and evaluating the significance of contextual factors in their production and reception.

The question paper provides material for the **relationships between texts** focus in the supporting passage(s), which should also nudge candidates in helpful directions by offering cues to aspects of narrative as well as theme.

Question 4: The Great Gatsby
The question invited candidates to examine Fitzgerald's presentation of honesty and dishonesty in The Great Gatsby. As 'cue-quotation', they were given Nick's comment at the end of Chapter III of The Great Gatsby:

> *Everyone suspects himself of at least one of the cardinal virtues, and this is mine: I am one of the few honest people that I have ever known.*

Examiners were dismayed to discover that, although the context of this comment – coming after Nick had described Jordan Baker's dishonesty – was provided, no candidates explored the layers of irony in the presentation. Very few examined Fitzgerald's use of a verb (suspects) with connotations of guilt and shame, and very few had an accurate understanding of Nick's attitude to what he knew of Jordan: Dishonesty in a woman is a thing you never blame deeply - I was casually sorry, and then I forgot.

Understanding of implied meaning in Passage A was stronger, with most candidates able to see that Mr Chrysler's contrast between ordinary men [who] achieve ordinary success by honesty, fair ability, hard work and men who get very far ahead suggested Gatsby as an example of the latter – men who have some other qualities ... are idea-resourceful ... possess imagination ... dare to take a chance and be different ... are willing to tackle anything. This last verb (tackle) was seen by some as a reference to Tom and his footballing prowess, a connection which in itself is perhaps over-literal but not hopelessly misguided. However, it was clear that the students who made this connection were not familiar with any other meaning (denotative or connotative) of the word – which gives pause for thought, if nothing more.

Following Mr Chrysler's opinions, and keeping resolutely to the question, most candidates argued that Wilson was an example – often seen as the only one – of an honest and ordinary man. No-one commented that he had in effect deceived Myrtle by borrowing someone else's suit for their wedding; and this was typical of the tendency to over-simplify everything and everyone in this most subtly-nuanced of novels.

So:
Jordan cheated in golf tournament / Tom lied to George about Gatsby killing Myrtle / Nick was the only honest man throughout OR Nick was a biased and therefore dishonest narrator throughout / Daisy was completely materialistic / Myrtle only wanted Tom for his money

Fitzgerald's nuanced prose is difficult, no doubt, but candidates would spend their time much more profitably in studying and analysing what Fitzgerald actually wrote than in doing what they seemed to have been doing – i.e. researching the novel on various internet sites where they are told that everything has to represent something else.

There is much to say about Fitzgerald's narrative methods without getting bogged down in supposed symbolism. Candidates who tried to explore the added complexities which come from the sections of narrative in Jordan's and/or Gatsby's 'voices' did much better than those who wrote a whole page about how the yellow inside of a daisy is the corruption masked by the pure white of the outside.

AO3 is dominant in Section B. This Assessment Objective is not just about "context", and it is worth quoting its wording in full:
Use integrated approaches to **_explore relationships between texts_**, analysing and evaluating the significance of contextual factors in their production and reception.

As with the assertions about characters and events in the novel, the contextual material offered was regularly very generalised:

everyone was wealthy; everyone was drunk all the time/materialistic/dishonest; the women were all liberated; the war was over so everyone was overjoyed/grieving; the American Dream was ... [fill in your own version of what it was]

As suggested in previous Reports and at INSET, the best advice for this question – and both of the others in Section B – is still first to locate in the novel and the passage(s) evidence that the social/cultural/historical context is having some kind of influence, and then to argue from there. Section B questions can be made quite simple. Candidates who start by writing a page on the American Dream are making things very hard for themselves.

Question 5: Wide Sargasso Sea

A small number of candidates did this question about the Caribbean island setting of the novel. There was some confusion about precisely which island was which, a good deal of generalisation about Antoinette unreservedly loving the West Indies and everything about them, and a good deal of material about how much Rochester missed England.

The mark-scheme contains suggestions as to other fruitful areas for discussion.

Question 6: A Room with a View

The question began with Mr Beebe's attempt to interest George and Freddy in Fate and Coincidence as they walk to the 'Sacred Lake'. Interestingly, no candidates commented on the coincidence which Forster stage-manages here, when Cecil leads the 'ladies' through the bushes at the most inopportune moment possible.

Although Passage A offered a range of synonyms for, and attitudes to, notions of fate / coincidence / destiny, the small number of candidates who chose this question tended to offer prepared material on Cecil and George as representations of the Gothic, the Medieval, the Renaissance.

The mark-scheme contains suggestions as to what might be useful areas of discussion.

F672 Changing Texts

As most centres choose to enter candidates in June for this unit, the number of entries for the January session was small. Those centres that did enter candidates demonstrated a good range of responses in both the analytical and creative elements of the unit. It is clear that candidates respond positively to this unit and real engagement with the texts studied and created was evident in the work submitted.

Previous reports have encouraged centres to develop the range of texts studied in both literary and multimodal form; whilst there is some evidence of this happening, it would be good to see more examples of candidates choosing their own text combinations for Task 1, and creating a range of original multimodal texts for Task 2. Some centres approach this unit by studying a text pairing together as a class, by way of exploration of the issues of multimodality, before the candidates then work on a new pairing for Task 1. A list of suggested literary texts from a range of different genre and periods, with examples of related multimodal texts, can be given to candidates by the centre, or the candidate could choose their own. The possibilities for candidates to then work creatively together in exploring different multimodal treatments of literary texts and in planning their own new text seems, for these centres, to offer excellent learning opportunities.

Task 1

Much of the work submitted for Task 1 was very well handled. The approach from the strongest candidates explores in detail the relationship between the two texts. The very best of this work not only considers how the related multimodal version re-imagines the source text but also how the exploration of this text illuminates their previous understanding of the literary text, thus seeing the connection between the two as a reciprocal one. Where candidates support this debate with the exploration of key moments of comparison and contrast in both texts, analysing language choices with a range of linguistic, literary and other analytical terminologies they can produce very sophisticated work for this element. Less successful work creates an overview of what is different between the literary and the multimodal text without fully addressing *why;* that is, how has the new text been shaped for a new audience and purpose?

The specification requires candidates to study a substantial written text that has given rise to a related multimodal text. Perhaps the word 'substantial' is best considered in this context to mean a text which will reward both literary and linguistic study. Obviously the choices of such texts will be in part determined by the existence of a related multimodal version. It did seem the case in this session that for some candidates it was the multimodal form that had been chosen first (a recent film for example) after which the candidate had found the story or novel on which this text had been based. What tended to follow was a Task 1 discussion that was weighted heavily towards, say, the film version, with some comparisons made with the written text. This approach tends to neglect the important question of what it is about the written text that lends itself to multimodal transformation, and the second question as to how analysis of the film develops an understanding of the written text.

Task 2

A variety of different genres were produced in this session by candidates for Task 2. These included websites, blogs, Facebook pages, newspaper and magazine articles, scripts and monologues. There was evidence in much of the work produced both of creativity and of a sound knowledge of style model conventions. As has been mentioned in previous reports, candidates should be discouraged from creating a whole text comprised of a *faux* transcript of 'spontaneous' speech, as there is no clear audience or purpose for such a text. It is possible to have elements of recorded spontaneous speech as part of, say, a journalistic report and in such cases some transcription conventions could be utilised. Candidates should be reminded that there is a requirement that the text produced should be *multi*modal and therefore should employ

at least two different modes. Dramatic monologues remain a popular choice and can be an excellent form in which to write but in order to meet this requirement it is important that visual elements are carefully considered and evident in the text. It is essential that a record of work for Task 2 is presented for moderation in a paper-based form. Those skilled candidates who design actual web pages and the like will need to present a screenshot of their work for moderation. The best commentaries reflect in detail on the choices the candidate has made in producing their own text. It is expected that part of this discussion will focus on particular language choices and employ some linguistic terminology to describe them, as this is implicit in the first two bullet points for AO1, the single AO for this part of the assessment.

Task 2 and the commentary can be viewed holistically in terms of the word count of 1500 to 2000 words and the allocation of the 20 marks.

Some administrative issues

Please could centres ensure that:

- work is clearly labelled Task 1, Task 2 and Commentary
- cover sheets are filled in accurately and include centre and candidate numbers
- there is clear teacher annotation that explains the mark awarded and evidences internal moderation
- work is securely fastened but is not sent in bulky plastic folders.

F673 Dramatic Voices

General Comments

It remains pleasing to see how well centres have assimilated the specific requirements of this Paper. Many candidates demonstrated an integrated approach to linguistic and literary study, with some impressive textual knowledge in a 'closed book' examination. Many candidates chose to address the specific key words of the question when structuring their responses. The questions provided a consistently fair level of accessibility and provided clear opportunities for differentiation. Candidates responded by offering a welcome range of relevant interpretations and approaches.

It remains the case that some candidates did not engage with opportunities for linguistic analysis provided by the passages in Section A. Evaluation of contextual influences on the text was handled with varying success. The least successful approach was, typically, to offer contextual knowledge as a 'bolted-on' feature of the answer, either in the introduction or the conclusion or in digressive paragraphs within the body of the essay. In these cases, it was substituted for textual analysis and contextual evaluation. Where candidates struggled to focus on the specific keywords in the question, in either Section, the outcomes were less successful.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

Successful candidates: evaluated the significance of the literary as well as the social and historical contexts from *within* the passages; closely analysed the language and dramatic effects; integrated their approaches. Weaker responses: described superficial, poorly understood extrinsic features of the texts (historical usually); tried to match up the extract to vaguely understood historical context.

1) This was the most popular question. The best answers addressed the keywords "conflicts between" as well as "good and evil". Effective approaches included dealing with other readers'/audiences' responses. Some candidates explored the presentation of Hale in the passage, vis-à-vis conflict, with reference to later episodes in the drama. It was pleasing to see how *The Crucible/Dr Faustus* contexts were clearly enjoyed across the range of responses. On the whole, the literary contexts and structures operating within morality plays and literary subgenre were well grasped.

Weaker answers passed over close reading/New Criticism approaches, often in favour of an ill digested form of New Historicism. Limited responses were shaky on the chronological placing of both plays and their settings. Less successful analytical approaches included inaccurate identification of linguistic features and/or limited application of the significance and function of those features as part of analysing the extract in the question. Some candidates struggled to grasp Tituba's possible motivations and remained superficial in their textual exegesis.

2) This question was answered by only a handful of candidates. They were typified by confident and, in some cases, independent responses. Linguistic and literary focus was maintained on both "chance" and "fortune" in the passages and more widely in the plays.

3) This question was, on the whole, competently addressed. Successful responses examined "ways" - multiple - in which marriage is presented here. Developed responses could see the various interpretations and possible contrasts across the two passages. Effective responses evaluated Feminist readings contextually and critically. Many engaged the social class and gender issues through relevant linguistic analysis.

Weaker answers made wild and unhelpful contextual and linguistic generalisations. Suggestions that Margaret Thatcher was really a man produced limited analysis. Misinterpretations of Antonio's commentary on "Say a man never marry" led to difficulties evaluating the presentation of ideas.

Section B

Candidates who took the opportunity to engage Assessment Objective 2 - sometimes more through analysis of dramatic form and structure than by sustained detailed language analysis, given the closed-book format - produced essays which demonstrated an integrated approach to linguistic and literary study. Less successful candidates engaged only limited linguistic and technical aspects of the drama and tended to produce either literature essays, historical summaries or a combination of the two.

4) The most popular question; overwhelmingly, and sometimes despite lack of real textual grasp or knowledge, *The Crucible* was chosen. Successful responses engaged and maintained a focus on the question's key phrase "rebellion against authority" and evaluated how either play evidenced that idea across the assessment objectives for this section. Weaker responses twisted the word "rebellion" into some less effective substitutes - usually self-doubt in Faustus and temptation in Abigail. Some candidates chose to interpret authority as merely opposition, which did not always work. It was in this section that the most misunderstood contextual factors appeared on *The Crucible*.

5) Again, only a handful of work, all competent to excellent. Ideas and contextual implications of the Theatre of the Absurd and Meta-theatre were analysed with real force and insight.

6) This question produced answers on each of the plays. Successful responses selected, systematically or creatively, ample evidence of "obedience and disobedience" as presented - both conceptually and dramatically - in their chosen play, analysing pertinent language and evaluating relevant contexts. Effective essays on *Top Girls* drew convincing evidence from across the play or/and made good use of Act One.

Weaker answers wrote whatever had been prepared or/and tried to fit textual knowledge and dramatic episodes of 'acts of dominance' to ideas about disobedience in the play. This was especially true of *The Duchess of Malfi*. Some candidates had a limited understanding of the keywords and asserted that characters were 'self-disobedient' if they were not true to themselves or even if they had tried to be - for example Marlene or the Duchess, disobedient if they lied, and so on.

F674 Connections Across Texts

As there is only a very small candidature for this unit, with often only one candidate from a centre, it is difficult to see any trends. However, some points have emerged that might be useful for centres preparing candidates for future sessions.

As far as Task 1 is concerned, there seems now to be greater security about what might constitute a 'substantial but non-canonical' text. In the most assured work the text concerned is often literary and it is clear that that it often inspires candidates to think hard about what it is that might make a work problematic in terms of traditional 'lit crit' skills. Often a centre has chosen to teach the text, with each candidate then simply taking a slightly different focus (either of topic, or by using different texts for contrast). The rule of thumb seems to be then that the best work emerges from teaching a text with the same sort of time allowance that would go into, for example, teaching Hamlet to an English Literature group. Candidates who choose short texts that they have explored entirely on their own seem not quite to access the depth of analysis (particularly the elements of AO1, literary study) that would move them into the higher bands of the markscheme. Sometimes this is because the text is not seen in sufficiently literary terms. Often it is because the literary charms of say, Harry Potter or The Hobbit are limited (a point which, of course, could be exploited to explain why these texts are not canonical in terms of A level literature). With some candidates, there is little presented on the contextual factors of production or reception, and this again tends to limit achievement.

In this particular session (but bearing in mind the limited number of folders), candidates seem to have had particular success in using genre - most specifically satire and the way that it has changed over the years - as a way of focusing their work. This, of course, has the advantage that much modern satire is delivered orally (though premeditated) and so automatically fulfils the need for spoken language.

Centres sometimes need to remind candidates that comparison (relationships between texts) is the central issue in Task 1, and that three separate texts, serially treated, will not quite do.

As always, candidates who ask a question as their title, often with the word 'presentation' well to the fore, tend to move more quickly towards analysis rather than mere narrative. It is worth pointing out to candidates that giving the context of a passage is not the same as analysing the text in order to illuminate the context.

In Task 2 there has been a tendency to present transcripts as the creative task. There is nothing in the rules against it, but it is a slightly awkward way of dealing with the requirement for spoken language. If the transcript is a genuine transcript of spoken language, then it's nothing more than that – it's a reflection of a speech act, not a creative piece, and it doesn't then allow the candidate to claim any credit in the commentary for discussion of the piece using 'insights drawn from (linguistic and) literary study (AO1, piece itself, AO4, commentary). If it is pre-meditated and crafted, then simply marking it up as though it was spontaneous is equally suspect. Of course, candidates may wish to discuss conventions of representing speech in a literary text, or talk about how a speaker aims to give the impression of spontaneity, but in work seen by moderators the commentaries often tended towards discussion of an issue rather than of techniques. Candidates who tried dramatic monologues (Talking Heads style) were able to combine the best of both worlds, though here the difficulty was sometimes a lack of understanding of how/ where such texts might be received.

As always, folders that had been marked up fully, with annotations on each page explaining where Assessment Objectives had been fulfilled, tended to be accurately assessed and needed no adjustment. Folders with comments only on the coversheet were sometimes less accurate, more susceptible to moderator interpretation.