GCE

English Language & Literature

OCR Report to Centres

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Advanced GCE English Language and Literature – H473

Advanced Subsidiary GCE English Language and Literature – H073

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

F671 Speaking Voices

General Comments

This was the fourth January session of F671, and the final 'outing' for the first wave of texts.

From the May 2012 session – and it's worth noting how early the paper is (18th May) – centres and candidates will be choosing from the second wave of texts. In **Section A** they will select *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* or *The Remains of the Day* or *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha. In* **Section B** the choice is *A Handful of Dust* or *The Child in Time* or *Persuasion.*

It will be interesting to see whether any one text achieves the 'market share' enjoyed since 2009 by *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night*‑*Time* and *The Great Gatsby.*

Once again in this January session these were the dominant text-choices, though some centres offered *Hawksmoor, Wide Sargasso Sea* or *A Room with a View.*

The quality of engagement shown by the candidates with whatever texts they had studied was, if anything, even stronger than previously, a tribute to the hard work of their teachers.

All questions gave candidates the chance to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding and generated a range of responses. Stronger candidates wrote smoothly-integrated responses, keeping the over-arching question in mind while giving the bullet-prompts due attention. Less secure candidates tended to follow the bullet-prompts more mechanically but should have had no difficulty in constructing relevant answers.

Which raises the most important issues for Centres and candidates – how to make sure that the preparation for F671 is efficiently directed, and how to make the tasks on the question paper itself manageable. Some features of candidate performance so far on this paper have suggested that knowledge of the texts and understanding of appropriate literary/linguistic concepts and approaches are not being translated into writing which addresses the questions in a clear and relevant way.

The *Comments on Individual Questions* below will strive to unravel what candidates are doing which they might better not do, and to indicate more helpful angles of approach.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

A general tendency has been for candidates to repeat received wisdom about the voices in their chosen text, regardless of what is actually in front of them in Section A. This applies even to some quite strong candidates, who end up arguing contradictory views. For example, in Question 2, some candidates diligently rehearsed over-simplified and under-supported assertions about Christopher's supposed "child-like" voice alongside their own much more pertinent observations on details of the actual narrative structure and speaking voice in the extract.

Similarly in terms of not-earning-much-credit – and despite being advised otherwise in previous Reports and at INSET – many candidates provided an exhaustive <u>list</u> of *features in Passage A which are characteristic of spoken language.* This is the wording of the first bullet-prompt, but it needs to be seen as part of the over-arching question, which asks about the *construction* and *effects* of the speaking voices. Merely to identify and catalogue these features is just a first step towards AO2: demonstrate *detailed critical understanding* in *analysing* the ways in which *structure, form and language shape meanings.*

Again despite repeated Principal Examiner entreaties not to do so, some candidates still seemed to feel it necessary to 'prove' that Passage A was natural more-or-less spontaneous speech by this same painstaking-but-unhelpful process of locating, identifying and listing typical features of spoken language. These were often candidates who also struggled to realise (and remember!) that *voice* in Passage B and elsewhere in the chosen novel is a *fictional construct*, whereas the speech in Passage A is someone's natural (mostly un-planned) 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 they *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.

There is always a balance to be struck between the specific and the general in any answer in an English-subjects examination. Being able to extrapolate from detail can be a high-order skill. Some very good candidates are able to make (thoughtful) generalisations from their (careful) reading and then to move back to analysis of the significant textual detail. The risk for not-so-strong candidates is that they never make this move to the specific, and their answers consequently remain on a level of generality which cannot take them above Level 3 in the Level Descriptors.

It is therefore better for most candidates to adopt an approach which begins with careful reading of what is really in the texts in front of them. If they can make accurate deductions and generalisations from the particular details they are analysing, that's fine. But the dynamics of spoken language are constantly changing: a feature such as repetition which appears to suggest (for example) hesitancy at the start of an interaction might later on be an indication of emphatic stress.

Centres and candidates need to be careful in applying theory. Research on spoken language and gender, for example, offers a number of general tendencies, such as that women's speech is closer to the prestige standard or that women use more tag-questions because of insecurity and lack of confidence, or that men are more competitive and interrupt more often. As long as candidates appreciate that these and other similar generalisations are no more than generalisations, and *as long as they focus on the data on the question paper*, then their answers will be helpfully informed by their theoretical knowledge. However, if they assert theoretical positions which they have learned but which are at odds with what's in the Passages in front of them, they will be in danger of mis-interpretation. And while a certain amount of credit is given for (AO1) knowledge and use of *concepts and approaches from integrated linguistic and literary study, using appropriate terminology*, if these approaches don't elucidate the construction of meaning, they are unhelpful.

The only way students will develop an appreciation of which theories to use (Grice? Giles? Leech? Brown and Levinson? Politeness? Accommodation?) is by trying them out on a wide range of transcribed data. The crucial thing is to establish a sound basic understanding of the extract by careful reading, and only then to consider what concepts might be helpful in developing analysis. As with the use of technical terminology, understanding is more important than attaching the right 'label'.

Question 1: *Surfacing*

There were very few answers to this question.

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

Christopher's account of his walk-in-the-park with Mrs Alexander – during which she reveals to him that his mother and Mr Shears were *very good friends. Very, very good friends* – was paired with a transcription of a conversation involving three generations of women from the same family talking about the age at which one might lose one's virginity.

Stronger candidates found examples of the different kinds of awkwardness in the passages and were able to explore how these feelings were constructed by features of the language. Less developed answers relied on identifying and listing non-fluency features in Passage A which might suggest hesitancy/discomfort/embarrassment on the part of one or more of the speakers. Such responses were 'flattened' – and thus limited – by a tendency to see <u>all</u> the instances of a particular feature (for example, overlaps) as evidence of the same thing (for example, competitive speech). Candidates really do need to engage with individual, specific details of interaction, and to build a view of the dynamics. Beginning with an 'overview' assumption (for example, the idea that the exchange will be co-operative because it involves three women, and that's how women speak to each other) is a high-risk strategy. And many of the 'overview' assumptions which candidates made were much less helpful than the one just offered.

As in previous sessions, candidates who insisted on over-simplifying Christopher Boone, and arguing that he 'feels no emotions' were unlikely to get beyond a limited reading of the voices in the passage and in the rest of the novel. Some argued that the long pause in Passage B – *Then she didn't say anything for about 30 seconds* – was an example of Christopher's famously precise counting, thus not only missing the point that he was himself silent when it was his turn to speak, but also the significant fact that he is uncharacteristically imprecise here (*for <u>about</u> 30 seconds*).

Careful readers picked up useful details of the speaking voices – for instance, the way Mrs Alexander uses 'fronting' (of the grammatical subject) to talk to Christopher and try to engage him: *<u>Your</u> <u>mother</u>, before she died, was very good friends with Mr. Shears.* Less careful readers made blanket assertions about Mrs Alexander talking to Christopher as if he were a very young child, and/or Christopher responding in child-like fashion.

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

Question 3: *Hawksmoor*

There were few answers on *Hawksmoor* this session, but those who did this question found it interesting to compare a transcription of a recently-redundant bank employee asking experts about employment rights with the dialogue between detective Nicholas Hawksmoor and the Assistant Commissioner of Police, who is *not so much taking you off this case as putting you on another one…* The best answers were those which discerned echoes of the 18th century Nick (Dyer) in the 20th century policeman's unravelling world-view: *this will be the shape of your damnation, Hawksmoor thought, to look out perpetually and mournfully.*

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

Section B

Most candidates answered on *The Great Gatsby*, but there were relatively more responses to *Wide Sargasso Sea* than in previous January sessions.

Question 4: *The Great Gatsby*

The question invited candidates to examine Fitzgerald's presentation of *pursuing a dream* in *The Great Gatsby.* As 'cue-quotation', they were given Nick's account of Gatsby waiting for a message from Daisy after Myrtle has been killed, beginning:

No telephone message arrived, but the butler went without his sleep and waited for it until four o'clock – until long after there was any one to give it to if it came. I have an idea that Gatsby himself didn't believe it would come, and perhaps he no longer cared.

Despite endless advice in previous Reports and INSET sessions not to do so, many candidates re-wrote the question-focus to equate to their varied (and mostly unhelpful) conceptions of 'The American Dream'. This led to a large number of readings which went against the grain of the cue-quotation, the entire rest of the novel and Passage A – a review of the 1924 silent film version of *The Thief of Bagdad* which began with what should have been a very helpful cue/clue, the rhetorical question *Do you believe in fairy tales?*

The mark-scheme offers some guidance – too late! – as to how candidates might have made this question easier for themselves rather than harder. It is to be hoped that such a principle might be a guiding one for study of the new wave of texts.

Question 5: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

An encouragingly larger-than-previously number of candidates made a mostly good job of this question about *how characters hide their feelings* in the novel. There was a wide range of reference to all parts of the text, and at least one outstandingly good sustained comparison between the metaphorical language of Paul Simon's 1965 lyric *I am a rock* and Jean Rhys's construction of Mr Rochester's repressed Englishness.

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

Question 6: *A Room with a View*

This question began with Forster's comment when the Miss Alans are preparing for their trip to Greece (or even Constantinople): *they regarded travel as a species of warfare, only to be undertaken by those who have been fully armed at the Haymarket Stores.*

The question-focus was *Forster's presentation of the behaviour and attitudes of the English abroad*, behaviour of which Passage A offered another (humorous) example.

Candidates could have taken this as a cue to structure an answer according to whether specific examples of Forster's presentation were equally (or at all) humorous. However, many allowed themselves to be diverted by the urge to off-load prepared material on Victorian values, the passionate nature of Italians, and the characters in the novel who were "really" gay.

The mark-scheme contains suggestions of further useful areas of discussion.

F672 Changing Texts

As the majority of centres choose to prepare their candidates for a May entry for unit F672, the candidate entry in January is small. This is reflected in a shorter Report for January as compared to June. It may be helpful for centres therefore to read this report in conjunction with those from previous sessions as recurrent themes inevitably appear.

On looking back at those previous reports, it is interesting to note how the number of written text and related multimodal text combinations undertaken by students for study in Task 1 has gradually increased over the life of the specification. This development has been the result of centres increasingly enabling candidates to study a *variety* of written texts and pair them with many different multimodal versions, rather than the previously most favoured practice of teaching whole-group core texts and then creating diversity in Task 2 responses. This of course is not to suggest that the whole group experience of a shared text is an approach to text study inferior to the multiple text approach; but it is obviously the case that the latter approach generates a much wider range of text pairings and responses from candidates. In this session, despite the small entry, more than twenty different written texts were explored by candidates in Task 1 and presented for moderation. Two centres presented work where each of their candidates explored a different written text/multimodal version pairing and undertook a different genre of original writing for Task 2. The originality of the insights in Task 1 and the creativity in Task 2 does seem to be greater if candidates are taught *approaches* to text analysis and then apply those skills to texts which they have chosen and so evoke a personal enthusiasm and commitment. It is also interesting to note that the written texts studied for Task 1 include more examples of non-canonical but challenging literary works. Works by P D James, Nick Hornby, Angela Carter, Raymond Chandler, John Le Carre and Alice Sebold were examples of these. Obviously the choice of written text is conditioned by the availability of a related multimodal version, but it would be very interesting to see more examples of texts being studied for this coursework unit that extend the range of candidates' reading experience. The novel remains significantly the most popular literary genre studied for this unit and the most popular pairing for Task 1 is with a film or television version of the text. Plays were also represented in this session, including *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* and several Shakespeare plays. Centres are reminded that this text can come from any literary genre including literary nonfiction.

The most successful candidates use Task 1 as a place to showcase their knowledge and understanding of literary and linguistic study and apply this to the discussion of their paired texts. In order to score highly for AO1 and AO2 it is important that candidates explore the language of their chosen texts in some detail and with precision. It is expected that a good range of critical terminology will have been used accurately, especially by those candidates awarded marks in Bands 4 and 5. The most effective way of fulfilling this requirement is when specific sections of the two texts are directly compared and the similarities and differences described and explored in relation to the audience and purpose to which the text is directed.

Texts produced for Task 2 included audio visual guides, illustrated speeches, lectures, TV documentary scripts, children's story books, magazine articles, online theatre reviews, online revision guides, dramatic monologues, newspaper articles, magazine articles amongst others. Much creativity, enthusiasm and awareness of generic conventions was evident in the creation of these texts. As has been pointed out in previous reports, one type of text that can be problematic is the attempted recreation of what in reality would be spontaneous speech – an interview with an author for example. This format tends to blur the text/transcript distinction and candidates can get bogged down in the awkward business of seeking to replicate the non-fluency features of spontaneous speech. A transcript of speech is fine as long as it is from speech that has been produced and recorded, with the transcript presented as a written record of this. A script or transcript would also need to be presented alongside other material in order for it to meet the specification requirement of at least two different communicative modes being employed.

The best Task 2 commentaries genuinely illuminate the approach taken in Task 2 and allow the candidate a space to explore in detail some of their language choices. The commentary assessment objective is AO1 which requires the use of critical terminology and the application of relevant concepts from literary and linguistic study. Candidates should be justifying and describing particular linguistic choices they have made and be using some linguistic terminology by which to do this. Most centres are now assessing Task 2 and the commentary holistically and awarding a mark out of 20 across the two elements of the task.

Centres are reminded that moderators value script annotation highly, as a means by which the centre can explain the mark awarded. A combination of AO related comment and a more discursive approach works well in this regard.

It is important that all the work that is submitted for moderation is received by the published date. Cover sheets should be completed in detail including centre and candidate numbers, word counts and as full a description of task and text details as possible. Please label work clearly as 'Task 1', 'Task 2' and 'Commentary' and fasten together securely using staples or treasury tags. Paper clips should be avoided as they often become dislodged. Please do not submit work in bulky plastic folders as this unnecessarily increases postal charges.

F673 Dramatic Voices

General Comments

The most striking – and pleasing – observation in this series was an increased proportion of responses that engaged and stayed with the terms of the question set. This unquestionably improved the answers overall and – when this happened – it was reflected in the mark outcome for those individual candidates.

The questions provided a consistently fair level of accessibility and provided clear opportunities for differentiation. As is usual, some candidates responded by offering a welcome range of relevant interpretations and approaches.

What was also noticeable, however, was that some groups of candidates seemed to provide very similar responses to a particular question, often involving very long and unnecessary catch-all context-based introductions. Offering 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, remains the least successful approach to this aspect of AO3. In these cases, it was often substituted for textual analysis and contextual evaluation. At the least, it diminished the overall cogency of the response.

Some candidates still do not adequately engage with opportunities for linguistic analysis provided by the passages in Section A. It is important, particularly for candidates predicted the higher grade ranges, to be mindful of the integrated "Language and Literature" requirements of the paper. This is especially the case in Section A where integrated language analysis of the extracts is embedded within the question and is particularly vital for success at the higher grades.

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- (or even well-) understood extrinsic features of the texts (historical, usually); tried to match up the extract to vaguely (or even well) understood historical context.

1) This was the most popular question.
The best answers differentiated between the keywords "self-deception" and "being deceived". On the whole, the literary contexts and structures operating within morality plays/Jacobean revenge tragedies and literary subgenre were well grasped.

Less successful analytical approaches were the 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 Mary Warren'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 a few cases, independent responses. Often a more literary focus was maintained on both/either of the passages and in the wider plays.

3) This question was, on the whole, competently addressed.
Successful responses examined "ways" (multiple) that "ambition" 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. On the whole, the literary contexts and structures operating within Jacobean revenge tragedy and literary subgenre were well grasped.

Weaker answers were less frequent and seemed better equipped to handle the contexts of Thatcherism and sexual inequality than in the previous January series.

Section B

Candidates who took the opportunity to engage Assessment Objective Two - sometimes more through analysis of dramatic form and structure than by sustained detailed language analysis, given the closed book criterion - produced essays which demonstrated an integrated approach to linguistic and literary study. Less successful candidates, even those with otherwise clearly strong literary-based skills and abilities, 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) This was the most popular question.
Successful responses engaged and maintained a focus on the question's key phrase, "opposition between God and the Devil", and evaluated how either play evidenced that idea across the assessment objectives for this section. Weaker responses twisted the word "opposition" into some less effective substitutes or ignored it entirely.

5) Some very competent to developed work was seen. Some ideas and contextual implications of the Theatre of the Absurd and Meta-theatre were analysed with a degree of philosophical sophistication. In some cases, the significance of linguistic and literary features of relevant aspects of the chosen play had a more limited - and therefore limiting - importance within the answer.

6) Successful responses selected ample evidence of presentations of "family relationships" in their chosen play, analysing pertinent language/dramatic episodes and evaluating relevant contexts. Effective essays on *Top Girls* drew convincing evidence from across the play or/and made as good use of Act One as of Act Two.

F674 Connections Across Texts

There were few submissions for this session, so it is not possible to generalise from such a small sample. On the whole, the folders presented were well balanced, with a slight tendency (rightly, given the evidence) for marks to be higher for Task 2 than Task 1.

Task 1

As in larger sessions, candidates showed that they were capable of comparing texts in interesting and useful ways in order to demonstrate how writers and speakers shape and create meaning. However, although it is a requirement of the unit that candidates deal with a spoken language text, this was not universally done in these folders. Centres need also to remember that it is not enough for candidates to talk about the themes of the text here – issues of spoken language conventions must also be addressed.

Candidates are asked in Task 1 to write about a substantial text and ways in which it has been received, or ways in which orthodoxies and attitudes towards it have grown up around it. This was not fully enough addressed by this group of candidates. Comparisons between texts were often strong, however, and there was much to interest the reader. If anything, centres could perhaps have candidates focus more on the substantial text, with the other two used as supplements, not equal partners in the discussions.

Some centres chose to have a core text in common to all candidates. Whilst within the rules, this can give the work a sense of sameness, with a candidate's own perceptions at times indivisible from those of the group. This choice also tends to lead towards candidates filling in contextual background, rather than considering the reception of texts.

Task 2

Candidates provided a range of different types of writing, from newspaper articles to dramatic monologues. Commentaries showed that they were aware of both literary and language models. All showed that they were able to analyse, not simply report, upon what they had written.

Assessment

Centres had spent significant time on marking up the folders suitably. The tasks had been separately marked and evaluated, often with a tracking commentary in one margin. Overall comments were appropriate in terms of Assessment Objectives, but tended not to be quite critical enough when candidates had not quite fulfilled the unit requirement for discussion of spoken language or text reception.

A number of candidates could have been encouraged to proof read their work carefully.