

Unit F671 - Question 2 - High banded Candidate style answer

Introduction

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As these responses have not been through full moderation and do not replicate student work, they have not been graded and are instead, banded “medium” or “high” to give an indication of the level of each response.

Please note that this resource is provided for advice and guidance only and does not in any way constitute an indication of grade boundaries or endorsed answers.

Question 2

[1]

Mark Haddon: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

Compare the construction and effects of the speaking voices in the following two passages.

In your answer you should consider

- features in Passage A which are characteristic of spoken language
- how features of syntax, lexis and register produce distinctive voices in Passage A and Passage B
- ways in which Haddon uses speaking voices in Passage B and elsewhere in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

Passage A - The following passage is a transcription of part of an interview with an inmate of a prison. Here Mark talks about his strategy for surviving prison life and how he often has to keep his opinions to himself.

Interviewer: how do you how do you stay sane (.) how do you keep yourself

Mark: me music (.) get banged up with somebody who i make sure i know (.) dont talk to very few people keep mesen to mesen (.) and thats about it really (2) try and get through it as fast as possible

Interviewer: yeah

Mark: shortest routes A to B (.) keep in contact with me family out there (.) girlfriend kids and that (1) and thats it.

Interviewer: yeah

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Mark: cos i mean i find ninety percent (2) of people in prison are (.) i don't (.) phew (*sighs*) (.) just by watching them (.) i mean i have very strong opinions (.) most of them are muppets like

Interviewer: mmm

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Mark: yer know what its like (.) especially on education (2) theres a lot of idiots about

Interviewer: (*laughs*)

Mark: i have very strong feelings (.) yer know what i mean

Interviewer: (*laughs*)

Mark: theyre not grown up at all a lot on em (.) yer know what i mean

Interviewer: mmm

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Mark: and if i lost it (.) i mean id end up getting years and years on top

Interviewer: yeah

Mark: so i bite (.) i try and bite me tongue me tongue (.) thats why i come out stronger sometimes cos i just cant hold it in yer know what i mean

Prisoner extract, © BBC, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/recordings/individual/lincolnshire-prison-fottles-mark.shtml>

TRANSCRIPTION KEY

(.) micropause

(1) pause in seconds

// overlapping speech

Passage B - In the following extract from *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, the narrator describes being questioned by the police.

Then the police arrived. I like the police. They have uniforms and numbers and you know what they are meant to be doing. There was a policewoman and a policeman. The policewoman had a little hole in her tights on her left ankle and a red scratch in the middle of the hole. The policeman had a big orange leaf stuck to the bottom of his shoe which was poking out from one side.

The policewoman put her arms round Mrs Shears and led her back towards the house.

I lifted my head off the grass.

The policeman squatted down beside me and said, 'Would you like to tell me what's going on here, young man?'

I sat up and said 'The dog is dead.'

'I'd got that far,' he said.

I said, 'I think someone killed the dog.'

'How old are you?' he asked. I replied, 'I am 15 years and 3 months and 2 days.'

'And what, precisely, were you doing in the garden?' he asked.

'I was holding the dog,' I replied. 'And why were you holding the dog?' he asked.

This was a difficult question. It was something I wanted to do. I like dogs. It made me sad to see that the dog was dead.

I like policemen, too, and I wanted to answer the question properly, but the policeman did not give me enough time to work out the correct answer.

'Why were you holding the dog?' he asked again.

'I like dogs,' I said. 'Did you kill the dog?' he asked.

I said, 'I did not kill the dog.'

'Is this your fork?' he asked.

I said, 'No.'

'You seem very upset about this,' he said.

He was asking too many questions and he was asking them too quickly. They were stacking up in my head like loaves in the factory where Uncle Terry works. The factory is a bakery and he operates the slicing machines. And sometimes the slicer is not working fast enough but the bread keeps coming and there is a blockage. I sometimes think of my mind as a machine, but

not always as a bread-slicing machine. It makes it easier to explain to other people what is going on inside it.

From *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night*, © Mark Haddon

<i>Candidate style answer</i>	<i>Examiner's commentary</i>
<p>There is much repetition in Passage A right from the outset: <i>how do you how do you</i>. This repetition is characteristic of real and spontaneous speech: the speakers are fallible, inclined to make 'mistakes', unlike the characters in a fictional conversation. Even so, the dialogue between Mark and the interviewer is not completely natural. The interviewer may be guiding Mark to talk about subjects that are likely to be of interest to any future potential listeners. So this is an example of semi-spontaneous speech.</p> <p>As such, there are signs of back-channelling, with the interviewer asking the initial question and subsequently just back-channelling with <i>yeah, mmm</i> and (<i>laughs</i>) in between responses from Mark. This back-channelling acts to encourage Mark's response by indicating that the interviewer is following and understands what Mark is saying yet allows him to elaborate in the direction that he chooses. Mark seems to appreciate this when he twice says <i>yer know what I mean</i> and once <i>yer know what its like'</i></p> <p>Another feature of spoken language in Passage A is the use of pauses in the speech. These pauses reflect the thought processes behind the answers showing spontaneity of speech. Mark appears to pause for the longest time when he is giving factual information: <i>I find ninety percent (2) of people in prison are</i> perhaps indicating his concern to get a correct figure. He also lingers over: <i>girlfriend kids and that (1)</i> showing how the emotional side of matters needs more reflection also.</p> <p>A further feature of the speech is Passage A is the evidence of overlap, often happening whilst the interviewer is back-channelling and Mark is continuing to talk:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledge about language more subtly integrated into the fabric and structure of the answer• Moving comfortably between general (conceptualised) comments and analysis of specific textual examples• Developed explanations of the effects of features of spoken language• Insightful comments on how features of language suggest attitudes and emotions• Usefully tentative in offering alternative possible interpretations• Extremely confident and accurate in combined linguistic/literary approaches• Apt reference to other parts of the novel in order to develop insights about character(isation) and style in the passages• Subtle appreciation of how narrator's medical/mental state is communicated in the novel• Has an overview of how the 'speaking voices' work in the novel

//muppets like

// mmm

This overlap has the effect of indicating a co-operative and spontaneous interaction between the speakers and contrasts greatly with Passage B where each speaker strictly waits their turn for a response, creating a much more rigid sense of interaction.

The policeman's opening utterance in Passage B shows signs of politeness strategies - *Would you like to tell me what's going on here, young man?* - and ends with the vocative. In American English, *Would you like to* and *Do you want to* are used as moderately polite imperatives; but in British English the invitation to explain is rather more polite, and typical of the way the police speak to members of the public - or, at least, typical of how such interactions are presented in fiction! As readers, we know that Christopher is hyper-logical, so we might expect (or even fear) that his reply would simply be *Yes* - i.e. he would like to. However, in this instance he adheres more closely to Grice's Maxims (of quality, quantity, relevance and manner) than he does elsewhere. Even so, his initial reply - *The dog is dead* - is a statement of the obvious, and fails to complete what from the policeman's point of view would be a satisfactory adjacency pair.

Authority figures such as the police are often presented as resorting to sarcasm in the face of what they might see as obstructiveness. There are signs of this after the policeman has asked Christopher's age and received an over-precise reply - that is, one which offends the maxim of quantity. (This is not a situation where age needs to be measured so exactly.) The policeman picks up Christopher's precision and refers to it sarcastically in his next question: *And what, precisely, were you doing in the garden?* The danger here, of course, unknown to the policeman, is in the risk that Christopher might take literally the invitation to be precise.

Also noticeable is Christopher's tendency

to speak in complete sentences, which is rare in spoken language. Single-word utterances and minor sentences would be quite normal in natural (and consequently realistic fictional) speech. But apart from his reply to the question *Is this your fork?* Christopher's utterances are syntactically Standard English..

Syntax in Passage A is rather less structured than Passage B and this is characteristic of spoken language. Most of the utterances do not constitute full sentences, particularly the sequence: *cos I mean I find ninety percent (2) of people in prison are (.) I don't know (.) phew (sighs) (.) just by watching them (.) I mean I have very strong opinions (.) most of them are // muppets like.*

This reflects the speaker's thought process, flitting from one thought to the next, not entirely making his point with the structure of the sentence in a conventional manner, but rather having the effect of making his disjointed ideas about the people in prison apparent through his disordered sentence structure. This extract also has a humorous effect as the final part *I mean I have very strong opinions (.) most of them are // muppets like* is a rather contradictory statement: the use of the mediating word *like* tagged on to the end to some extent invalidates the idea of Mark having very strong opinions. In a fictional passage, an author could do this kind of thing for a comic effect. (Jane Austen often does just this.)

The use of *like* is an example of the register used throughout Passage A. Both speakers use a much more informal register than in Passage B. There are colloquial (or slang) words such as *banged up*, *muppets* and *lost it*. There are signs of the accent of the speaker as well as the casual nature of the interaction. The statement *i try and bite me tongue* may show accent or Mark's idiolect; or it might be part of the sociolect of prison. Another hint as to the educational and social background of Mark is the statement *don't talk to very few people keep mesen to mesen*. It is not completely clear from a written

transcript like this whether Mark is using a double negative (*don't talk to very few*) or whether he begins the utterance with *don't talk to* then uses a self-repair to change the construction *don't ... talk to very few people*. The use of a double negative might suggest, perhaps rather crudely, that Mark is of low socio-economic background. His tone seems to be inclusive in his repetition of *yer know what I mean* – though we can't be sure if this has an interrogative tone because there are no markings of intonation in the transcript.

All these elements act to produce a distinctive voice: Mark seems to be a character whose ideas themselves are rather chaotic as his language is. Sentences like *I have very strong feelings (.) yer know what I mean* could be a sign of his desire to convince himself of his feelings and assure himself that he knows what he means.

The syntax of Passage B involves no interrupted constructions or disjointed sentences. In fact the unusual shortness and simplicity of sentence construction is reminiscent of a children's 'learn to read' book:

Did you kill the dog?

I did not kill the dog

The passage is constructed mainly of adjacency pairs with Christopher and the policeman strictly following turn-taking principles. This is very unlike Passage A where the interviewer has little speech, merely back-channelling for the purpose of allowing Mark, the prisoner, to elaborate.

The dialogue between Christopher and the policeman takes on a very strict pattern with Haddon generally book-ending a question or answer with the typical *he said/asked ... I said/replied* construction. This has a very ordered effect, not allowing for much outside the literal, whereas the sequence of utterance in Passage A, as we have seen, enabled internal thought processes to be reflected. Haddon instead uses a section of first-person narrative in the middle

of the dialogue (*This was a difficult question ... but the policeman did not give me enough time to work out the correct answer*) to reflect Christopher's thought processes. This has the effect of separating thought from speech in Christopher's case. This is reminiscent of Christopher's character in general: what is external must be ordered, even if the root of it is disordered.

The lexis of Passage B is accordingly simplistic. Very basic vocabulary is used by both speakers, suggesting a shallow level of communication. Aside from the policeman's opening question *Would you like to tell me what's going on here, young man?* and the later question *And what, precisely, were you doing in the garden?*, which indicate his dominance in the interaction, neither Christopher nor the policeman use much vocabulary particular to the situation or to reflect any details of their characters. This plainness of language acts itself to create a distinctive voice: Christopher strives endlessly to ensure that everything around him is ordered and has its place and purpose, and his language is reflective of this, with no hint of spontaneity or elaboration.

The impact of such simple language in speech interactions in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* is further developed by the reporting clauses. Throughout the book, Haddon surrounds such communication with rather painfully simple and repetitive connections:

And I said "I'm going to see Mother"

And he said, "Mother?"

And I said "Yes, Mother."

And he said, "When's your train?"

And I said, "I don't know. She lives in London. I don't know when there is a train to London."'

This has a monotonous effect, highlighting the theme of striving for order and stability that recurs throughout the novel. Christopher, because of his Asperger's Syndrome, sees

chaos in everything around him and is continually attempting to restore order to his world.

Christopher's thoughts when the policeman questions him reflect this perfectly: *He was asking too many questions and he was asking them too quickly. They were stacking up in my head like loaves in the factory where Uncle Terry works.* The concrete lexis of this very basic imagery demonstrates exactly how Christopher needs to 'process' questions and speech, in a factory-like manner. (It is noticeable that Christopher cannot generalise to the indefinite article a - it has to be the *factory where Uncle Terry works.*) He needs each question or statement to be responded to and a conclusion made before he can discard this thought and move onto the next, maintaining order. This is why the connecting sentences remain so simplistic: it is as if he is ticking off each question and each answer as he goes.

When there is a possibility of confusion in a communication, where it might not be possible for the loaf to be moved along the factory line, Christopher perceives a problem, and he ensures it is cleared up immediately:

And I asked the policeman, "How much does it cost to get a ticket for a train to London?"

And he said, "About 20 quid"

And I said, "Is that pounds?"

And he said, "Christ alive" and he laughed.....

And he stopped laughing, and he said, "Yep, it's 20 pounds."

There is no room in Christopher's mind to deal with elaborative speech as this confuses and disorders his world. Hence the speaking voices throughout *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* remain ordered and simplistic.