

GCE English Language and Literature

Unit F671 - Question 2 - Medium banded Candidate style answer

Introduction

OCR has produced these candidate style answers to support teachers in interpreting the assessment criteria for the new GCE specifications and to bridge the gap between new specification release and availability of exemplar candidate work.

This content has been produced by senior OCR *Examiner's*, with the input of Chairs of *Examiner's*, to illustrate how the sample assessment questions might be answered and provide some commentary on what factors contribute to an overall grading. The candidate style answers are not written in a way that is intended to replicate student work but to demonstrate what a “good” or “excellent” response might include, supported by examiner commentary and conclusions.

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

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

[1]

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

//

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

//

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

//

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>Passage A is part of an interview, so is not completely spontaneous speech. The interviewer starts off by asking a question to encourage Mark to talk. Mark's utterances are longer than the interviewer's, but they are still quite short. His reply to the first question is his longest and most complex. He has been asked <i>how do you how do you stay sane (.) how do you keep yourself</i> and he gives four separate answers in three separate utterances. The first one is a minor sentence - <i>me music</i> - and the next two - <i>get banged up with somebody who i make sure i know (.) don't talk to</i></p> <p><i>very few people keep mesen to mesen</i> - also show ellipsis. Ellipsis is a feature typical of spoken language and happens when words are left out of constructions. For example, Mark answers the question about how he stays sane in prison by saying <i>get banged up ...</i> and the interviewer understands he means "One way I keep sane is to get banged up ..." In Standard English we would have to write the construction out in full, but in spoken English it is normal to leave out words because the context of the conversation means the listener will understand.</p> <p>There are many other typical features of spoken English in Passage A. People often use slang or colloquial language in conversation, and <i>get banged up</i> is also an example of this. The Standard English equivalent would be "locked up in a prison cell". Mark is using a slang or colloquial verb phrase which he might have learned in prison; or it might be part of the <u>dialect</u> from the area where he grew up. Alternatively, it could be a term which is part of the <u>sociolect</u> of prison or criminal life; it could even be seen as part of Mark's <u>idiolect</u>, the choices of lexis he makes because he is the person who he is. Another example of lexis like this is <i>muppets</i>. Most people are familiar with these terms from watching crime series on television, so writers can use them in fiction to give</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and explicit focus on aspects of spoken v. written language • Technical terminology (and associated linguistic/literary concepts) used competently • Candidate has drawn explicit attention to AO1 and AO2 aspects by <u>under-lining</u> some of the technical terminology • Concepts defined, and exemplified from the passages • Some complex concepts referred to – e.g. <u>conversational implicature</u> – with evidence of at least competent understanding • Consistent and systematic focus on the elements of the task • Wide range of knowledge of linguistic features of speech • Linking linguistic approach with some appreciation of (literary) concepts of prose narrative • Analysis of significant features of both passages – but stronger on Passage A • Some reference to the rest of the novel – but restricted in scope to one example, and limited to the single idea (of Christopher's difficulty in knowing how much information it is appropriate to offer in conversation) • Useful <i>general</i> comment on Christopher's speaking voice in the novel as a whole, but no exemplification of (for example) his inability to use metaphors or to lie: these are asserted but not explored • Competently-structured answer, stronger on spoken language than on any other

the impression of a real situation. Mark Haddon makes fun of this convention in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* when Christopher is being arrested for hitting the policeman. The policeman tells Christopher: *I am arresting you for assaulting a police officer.* Christopher tells us: *This made me feel calmer because it is what policemen say on television and in films.*

The conversation in Passage B is fiction. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* is a first-person narrative which includes sequences of dialogue between the narrator (Christopher) and various other characters. Dialogue involving Christopher is very unlike most dialogue in real life and in fiction because he has Asperger's Syndrome, which causes him to speak in very simple grammatical structures. He cannot lie or use metaphors. He also has difficulty judging how much information to give.

We see this when he answers the policeman's first question by telling him something unnecessary. It is true that *The dog is dead*; but the policeman already knows this, and might think Christopher is being awkward or cheeky. The dialogue carries on in adjacency pairs: this is an ABAB sequence where one speaker's utterance is matched or answered by the next speaker. Question and answer is the most obvious example. (In natural conversation, sequences like this are unlikely to go on for very long. But in some situations, for example a doctor asking a patient questions about her/his symptoms, question-and-answer adjacency pairs might go on for longer than they would between peers.)

The person asking the questions in an exchange usually has more power, and this is true here because the policeman has higher status as the representative of the law. The policeman can set the agenda and hold the floor. Christopher has less power and lower status; he is expected to answer the questions and stick to the topic(s) chosen by the policeman. Mark Haddon shows us how unusual Christopher is through the first-person narration when he hesitates before answering the

aspect of the task

- Clearly underpinned by at least competent understanding of the required skills/knowledge

question *And why were you holding the dog?* The average person would probably recognise the conversational implicature here and realise that the policeman is giving him the opportunity to explain what looks like suspicious behaviour.

But Christopher takes things very literally and thinks there should be a correct answer to the question:

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.

He can cope easily enough with direct closed questions:

*'Did you kill the dog?' he asked.
I said, 'I did not kill the dog.'
'Is this your fork?' he asked.
I said, 'No.'*

But when he is asked a more open question he is likely to get into difficulties. For example, when he reaches the police station he is asked if he has any family. Instead of realising this is an invitation to say who his closest relation is, he simply says he has. Then, when asked who they are, he offers far too much information: he tells the police about his Father, his Mother (although he thinks she is dead), his Uncle Terry and his grandparents (three dead, one alive with senile dementia).

In Passage A, Mark has little difficulty in knowing how much to say. He probably appreciates that, in the context of a radio interview, listeners might need things explained in more detail. At first he seems to have run out of ideas - *and that's about it really* - but then he carries on and only needs very brief back-channelling from the interviewer (*yeah ... yeah ... mmm ...*) in order to keep talking. There are many overlaps, where one speaker talks over the other, but they are signs of co-operation not competition. The interviewer is not interrupting Mark; he is supporting and encouraging him. This is characteristic of spoken language. The non-verbal

features like laughter are probably also signs of support and co-operation, and would be likely to be backed up by body language like nodding and smiling.

Because Mark is left holding the floor for long stretches of time, he uses non-fluency features like fillers, to gain time to think and perhaps to re-arrange what he wants to say. There are unfilled micro-pauses and filled pauses too - *cos I mean ... yer know what I mean ...* Mark may be looking for support when he says *yer know what it's like ... yer know what I mean ...* Or these phrases may just be characteristic of his idiolect.

Repetitions and interrupted constructions are also typical of spoken language. Like fillers, they also provide thinking time for the speaker. Repetitions might show that the speaker is a bit hesitant, for example at the start when the interviewer asks *how do you how do you stay sane*. He might be a bit wary of using the adjective *sane* because of the implicature (that Mark might be in danger of not being sane.) This is supported by the fact that he then goes on to re-formulate the question: *how do you keep yourself*.

Mark's syntax is quite disjointed, especially when he is explaining his prison survival strategy: *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*. Here he starts off what looks as if it will be a complex sentence, then interrupts himself. He changes the construction several times with self-repairs and hesitations. However, the interviewer offers supportive feedback and eventually Mark is able to expand on all the ideas he started to express. This is all typical of spoken language.