

English Language

Advanced GCE **A2 7827**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS 3827**

Report on the Units

January 2007

3827/7827/MS/R/07J

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All Examiners are instructed that alternative correct answers and unexpected approaches in candidates' scripts must be given marks that fairly reflect the relevant knowledge and skills demonstrated.

The reports on the Examinations provide information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Mark schemes and Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers.

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Any enquiries about publications should be addressed to:

OCR Publications
PO Box 5050
Annesley
NOTTINGHAM
NG15 0DL

Telephone: 0870 870 6622
Facsimile: 0870 870 6621
E-mail: publications@ocr.org.uk

CONTENTS

Advanced GCE English Language 7827

Advanced Subsidiary GCE English Language 3827

REPORT ON THE UNITS

Unit	Content	Page
*	Chief Examiner's Report	1
2701	Frameworks for the Description of English	2
2702	Variation in Usage of English	3
2704	Language Contexts – Structural and Social	5
2706	Exploring, Analysing and Evaluating English	8
2703/2705	Principal Moderator's Report	9
*	Grade Thresholds	10

GCE English Language

Chief Examiner's Report

Candidates entered for the various Units this January generally seemed to be well-prepared. Wherever this was not the case, the reasons appeared similar to those identified in previous sessions: over-reliance on learned theoretical positions; a tendency to adopt a deficiency model for natural speech; making ill-informed assertions about speakers' accents and dialects (and sometimes conflating these terms); falling down on aspects of QWC (Quality of Written Communication) in extended, essay-style answers. The individual Unit reports give insight and guidance concerning these issues (and others) arising during this January series. Hopefully the illustrations given will provide helpful focus for those preparing for future sessions as well as those reviewing performance this time round.

English Language: Unit 2701 Frameworks for the Description of English (Examination)

General Comments

This session's paper evoked a mixed response from candidates. Some seemed to be slightly baffled by the informal nature of the discussion that possibly departed from previous transcripts where there has been more of a sense of speech being transactional (in some manner) rather than mostly expressive. Others were also exercised by the marked use of regional accent and dialect and were moved to comment upon Sheffield's industrial heritage and the 'inarticulate' nature of the speakers. Candidates are *not* penalized for these kinds of inaccurate comment, but there has always been clear guidance from Principal Examiners on all units that speculative comments on speaker's class and/or social background are unhelpful. Comments on regional features of speech are very welcome (and often very well made), as are discussion of attitudes towards regional dialects, but these should be worded in objective language and in the framework of taught theory as far as possible. On a positive note, there appear to be far fewer openly pejorative terms such as 'sloppy' or 'lazy' used.

AO1 was generally positively addressed, with candidates of all levels using an impressive range of technical terms and making every effort to write in a formal and structured manner. There were fewer candidates making 'shopping list' style responses, and although there are still a good number who misspell *sentence* and use *accent* and *dialect* interchangeably, it is very clear that centres are teaching AO1 very thoroughly.

In terms of AO3i, there are still a good number of candidates who are not paying sufficient attention to the requirement to comment on four key areas - phonology, lexis, semantics and syntax. Candidates who do not explicitly comment on all these areas will struggle to reach the highest bands. The mark scheme makes specific reference to these areas and highlights the kinds of comments that are acceptable. There appears to be no difficulty with phonology, and comments on syntax and lexis are often generally made, if more implicitly than explicitly. However, as pointed out in the Principal Examiner's report June 2006, comments on semantics are often few and far between. Candidates should be looking for examples of the way that we use words, often in a colloquial, idiomatic or dialectal way, and impart specific meanings to them that are context-dependent. In this transcript, for example, the use of the phrase 'holding to ransom' was semantically interesting, as was the meaning of the word 'nightmare', here used as a pre-modifier.

There were many positive discussions of the language and gender issues (AO4) presented by this transcription, such as the use of tag questions by Owen and Emma and Chloe's relative dominance in the discussion. There was also some useful and judicious application of Giles Accommodation theory and Brown's theories about conversation functions. Grice is still frequently used but it would be helpful if more candidates could explain comments such as 'the manner is generally good' with some definition of terms like 'good' and some evidence from the transcription in the form of quotations and line references.

It is clear that many candidates are open minded and thoughtful in their approaches and centres should continue to encourage candidates to listen to, record and read as wide a range of transcripts and conversations from everyday talk as possible.

English Language: Unit 2702 Variations in the Usage of English (Examination)

General Comments

Markers noted that overall candidate performance was slightly better than previous January entries. There remain, however, issues which have been raised in previous reports and are still present. One issue, consistently repeated, is the Quality of Written Communication in a persistent minority of scripts. Such candidates appear to have had little practice in structuring an academic essay and standards of spelling and punctuation are not commensurate with general requirements of AS work. These papers are invariably presented in a casual register, often displaying little understanding of the basic technical requirements of language study. Another recurrent problem is the failure of a minority of candidates to read the rubric of Question 1. The prompt passage is not the sole focus of the question; nor, indeed, need it be addressed at all. Grammar, syntax and lexical analysis must be evident throughout candidates' answers, whatever the chosen variants of English which are under scrutiny. Centres are reminded the whole paper is synchronic. References to advertisements and media issues dating back to the 70's and 80's are not acceptable as exemplification material.

Comments on Individual Questions

Question 1

As has become common practice, text messaging and e-language holds its popularity. Centres should remind candidates that the focus is analysis of grammar and syntax, and not an endless litany of examples and emoticons, presented in an uncritical narrative. This is a clear case of the need to read what the rubric requires. The press was rather less popular and this made the sociological response about class and readership far less a marking issue. The sound development was in legal language. This, it should be noted, needs more detailed illustration than the occasional reference to mortgage or habeas corpus. Detailed citation is required plus clear syntactic and grammatical analysis, in order to show why it is variant. Some responses failed entirely to show technically how it was different and ended up implying it was really standard English after all. Advertising answers remain strangely prone to cite the Heinz 1970's examples. Markers now do not accept this as evidence of a study of contemporary issues in English writing. Given the sheer weight of available materials, centres do need to ensure candidates are being prepared to offer materials which are clearly synchronic. In terms of the Specification, centres are reminded of the precise requirements of this written academic essay. They should also ensure candidates' focus is upon linguistic issues and not general media and sociological narratives.

Question 2

Candidates who answered this question appeared to have enjoyed the passages and produced some sound answers. Most spotted that the register was selling rather different commodities. Most picked up the clairvoyant's shifting between the intimacy of first person and third person hard facts. In passage (b) most candidates could see the cultural markers of AA Milne, though more through TV cartoons than the written text. One or two enterprising candidates made incisive cross-references to the selling of the Hobbits and Hogwarts. Since advertising discourse is usually fairly transparent, candidates found it

easy to negotiate the broad ideological markers in the text. Layout was addressed, and some persuasive comments made about the actual forms of syntax, seen correctly as part of the persuasive language of the whole advertisement. Several candidates made interesting observations about the adjectival 'natural', applied to the clairvoyant, relating to other adjectives used in promotion which suggest total lack of human interference.

Centres might like to note that some of the analysis of the set material suggests that similar examples could enhance the structural approaches required by candidates in Question 1.

Question 3

This question was confidently addressed by most candidates. Though a few were still driven by the deficit approach, most realised that James was a confident conversationalist, quite able to participate in a mature exchange of views. The inclusion of a few phonetic symbols appeared to help candidates in fixing a possible local accent and gave them an added awareness of his personality. The core of most answers raised the range of syntactic and spoken grammatical skills which showed a lively and intelligent five year old talking about his social and academic environments. Perhaps this needed greater emphasis in a few scripts. This maturation in speech represents a huge move beyond what is the norm only two years before. It needs to be seen as proto-adult in both lexis and discourse skills. The incisive abilities shown by a number of candidates in this question raises again the fact that grammar and syntax are not difficult properties to discuss. This puts a further query over the less assured performances which are a feature of a number of Question 1 answers. Perhaps centres might look at writing for children, which clearly is a variant and often does invoke a number of issues of a grammatical and lexical nature.

**English Language: Unit 2704 Language Contexts – Social and Structural
(Examination)**

General Comments

Candidates' performance was generally reasonably secure, on a slightly bigger January entry than in some previous years. Markers noted better preparation for most questions and fewer pre-packaged general narratives being inappropriately applied. In nearly all scripts the question rubric had been adhered to, though this perhaps was more the case in Section A than in some section B answers. For a few candidates QWC and organisation of an academic essay commensurate with A2 level proved problematic.

Comments on Individual Questions

SECTION A

Question 1 Language and Speech Sounds

This was a minority choice and most candidates who did it had been instructed in the issues of basic phonics. Centres might like to note that candidates need to apply the IPA in a sensitive way themselves, if they are being systematic in approach. Most candidates realised that orthography is inadequate for transcribed speech. There were some sensible commentaries upon prosodic features being necessary. Vowel Quads were mentioned but not applied technically. Whilst the witness, who had a few marked features of a regional nature inscribed, drew attention, the Lawyer was assumed to speak RP (on absolutely no evidence) and was not technically subjected to analytical scrutiny. Such ideologically dubious comments merit consideration in the way speech seems to be taught in some centres. The technical nature of this question does mean that candidates need actual practice in phonetic transcription, at a simple level, in order not to enter into broader debate which would be more suited to certain aspects of Section B.

Question.2 Language and Grammar

This was another minority choice. Markers reported a slight improvement over previous years. The negative model ('writer is consistently wrong') appeared in a very few scripts. Most answers were able to use native intuition and a limited amount of syntactic terminology to follow a competent foreign language learner able to read Thomas Hardy novels in English systematically. The only problem was that few had any clear method for notating grammar in sentence form. It has been pointed out in the past that Tree Structures, Chomskyan, or any other simple form of analysis is a clear and academically essential way of discussing grammar and syntax. The question does not ask for a general narrative essay but rather a controlled dissection of the actual syntactic structures and grammatical attributions to be made in some depth. Centres might like to note that at A2 level candidates should not address punctuation as a grammatical issue. It is an orthographic one.

Question 3 Language and Meaning

This was quite popular and prompted some sound answers. Systematic use of morphology as a method was helpful to some extent. However, the whole word needed thought as well as its elements. Candidates are still insecure about derivational morphemes and inflectional morphemes. The allomorph appears to be unknown. Candidates who moved into semiotics, pragmatics and general semantics tended to miss the more lexicographical drive of the question. There were interesting responses to Frankenfood, White Van Man and screenager. The possible and more immediate cultural,

social or derivational influences were picked up well. Candidates should be given every encouragement to follow up word development, dictionary-making and debates over acceptable idiolects and sociolects. There is now a significant secondary literature on this subject plus several very good web-sites. It might be worth noting that a reasonable scrutiny of all answers to this question did not find many candidates who thought about the possible grammatical attribution which would be needed for dictionary inclusion.

Nor was there any attempt to challenge the offered definitions by writing alternatives and backing-up by analysis and derivational support.

SECTION B

Question 4 Language Change

This was a minority choice. There were a couple of astute responses which recognised that both passages were looking at occupational register. Candidates tended to equate the servant with the ill-educated, though the actual passage did not support this contention. Its lexis was lively, though privies and grates were entirely outside the pale.

No one saw the actual abbreviations as part of letter conventions (shades of the email to come?), or the fact that the woman had been in service nearly all her life. 'Pictours' was seen as dialect; though pronunciation could be deemed to be that likely by her 'betters' as well. Passage (b) 'username', 'password', 'access the site' allowed candidates to slide into broad issues about how technology had changed things, without any detailed lexical analysis. No one could see the potential irony of a very different form of spin to the factuality of the servant. The world of (b) was 'lifestyle'. This not mentioned by any of those answering. Centres considering this topic might like to ensure candidates are able to look both analytically and culturally at the language change. This is the time to put the material into its Social Context (title of this part of paper).

Question 5 Language and Gender

This remains a popular area for candidates. Markers note a significant divide between candidates who read the passage carefully and candidates who rush to off-load Lakoff and Komrovy. Both critics date back to a rather different period of feminism; both critics have been heavily challenged over a number of linguistic assumptions; both are critics not necessary to be applied too rigorously to the passage. Candidates who choose to beach-comb such critics usually gloss the passage as a comprehension and do not analyse what the writer is actually choosing to illustrate in the discourse(s) The more focused candidates clearly liked the writer and saw her as stating some truths about the maturation processes of a young woman. They picked up the socio-sexual language of experimentation and saw this as evidence of the commodification of young women which fills acres of print in magazines and newspapers, especially in terms of fashion and lifestyle. They perhaps tended to miss the way the narrative implied she was writing about her female peer group and not merely suggesting that men were the overall consumers of the feminine. These responses are looking at lexis and syntax and seeing the passage as a kind of ironic even humorous, look at life at the sharp end for a young girl. The constant references to the emblems and icons of the female were quite transparent in the passage. Centres need to remind candidates that gender does not equal repression. The passage set will give clear indications which way candidates need to think of linguistic structures and so negotiate the necessary AOs.

Question 6 Language and Society

Despite clear rubric information, where candidates were asked to concentrate upon dialect, a few simply wrote general narratives about sounds of Estuary, cockney(s) and Scottish. One marker noted references to 'people who live in the West'. Such general directions do not begin to address the question, which had a good range of examples. It

would be expected, also, that those addressing this question would have some supportive information from a broad study of modern English idiom. (It has appeared in a number of past papers.) Candidates could even have looked at 'smudging' as listed in Q.3. One outstanding script talked at length about peer group bi-dialecticism, family and school being superbly illustrated in appropriate linguistic manner. The region chosen was clearly identified and was supported by the fact that candidate had undertaken research on such issues for 2705. This seemed excellent as a critical strategy. Centres need to tell candidates to exercise caution with Trudgill and Labov (not really relevant in UK in any case). They might ask their candidates if they listen to modern song lyrics, TV programmes, or are familiar with idiolects/ sociolects related to the cultures of anti-social behaviour or activities which pertain to all the normal functions of modern later adolescence. There are now various web sites giving examples and encouraging critical discussion. It is to these kinds of resources that candidate should be guided. Such references would illuminate and develop the passages and give crisp coherence to the relevant AOs.

2706: Exploring, Analysing and Evaluating English

Due to the low entry for this unit no Report for Centres has been written.

Principal Moderators Report (2703/2705)

Due to the low entries for these units no Report for Centres has been written.

**Advanced GCE English Language 3827 / 7827
January 2007 Assessment Series**

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	a	b	c	d	e	u
2701	Raw	60	42	38	34	30	27	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2702	Raw	60	46	41	36	31	26	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2703	Raw	60	48	43	38	33	28	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2704	Raw	60	46	41	36	31	27	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2705	Raw	60	49	44	39	34	29	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2706	Raw	60	43	38	33	29	25	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (i.e. after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
3827	300	240	210	180	150	120	0
7827	600	480	420	360	300	240	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
3827	0.0	0.0	20.0	60.0	80.0	100	5
7827	57.1	71.4	85.7	100	100	100	7

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:
http://www.ocr.org.uk/exam_system/understand_ums.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU

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Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: helpdesk@ocr.org.uk

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