

English Language

Advanced GCE A2 7827

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS 3827

Report on the Units

January 2008

OCR (Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations) is a unitary awarding body, established by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate and the RSA Examinations Board in January 1998. OCR provides a full range of GCSE, A level, GNVQ, Key Skills and other qualifications for schools and colleges in the United Kingdom, including those previously provided by MEG and OCEAC. It is also responsible for developing new syllabuses to meet national requirements and the needs of students and teachers.

This report on the Examination provides 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.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

OCR will not enter into any discussion or correspondence in connection with this Report.

© OCR 2008

Any enquiries about publications should be addressed to:

OCR Publications
PO Box 5050
Annesley
NOTTINGHAM
NG15 0DL

Telephone: 0870 770 6622
Facsimile: 01223 552610
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
Grade Thresholds	9

Chief Examiner's Report

There were some positive achievements across the Specification. Centres continue to prepare candidates with a secure range of analytical linguistic skills. This ensures there is a sustained concentration upon AO3/4/5. It was also apparent that AO1 was generally better in most scripts. The use of pre-packaged notes has decreased considerably. This was particularly noticeable at the A2 level. In those papers where wider reading was applied it was usually sensibly located within the realms of the set passages. At AS level there were far fewer candidates with only a basic appreciation of formal language studies. Centres might wish to ensure that A2 candidates in the January sitting are fully prepared for the increased intellectual rigour of the papers. A minority of candidates still tend to treat the rubric of questions in a too casual way. This inevitably leads to a diminution in marks awarded.

2701 Frameworks for the Description of English

This session's paper generated an interesting range of responses. Candidates felt comfortable with the nature of the discussion and explored some of the politeness issues as well as the effect of being a non-native speaker of English. One or two candidates fell into the trap of assuming that Nancy used 'poor' English, but the stronger candidates avoided this deficit approach and deftly commented on the range and variety of Nancy's language and her emerging idiolect and ability to make jokes in English. There were different responses to Jenny's speeches. Some candidates believed she was rude and dominating, whereas others saw that she often deferred to Nancy. The best answers were able to be open-minded and took care to provide evidence and language based explanations for their assertions, often expressing a degree of tentativeness that can be much more helpful when approaching potentially ambiguous texts. There were very few comments on class, education level or background which was pleasing.

Of the four main frameworks for analysis specified for AO3i, phonology and lexis were the most frequently addressed, as is usually the case on this paper. There was still some confusion between accent and dialect which has been raised several times in previous examiners reports. Many candidates noted the lexical fields of cookery and ingredients that leant cohesion to the discussion and were influenced by Nancy's Malaysian background. There were some missed opportunities, however, in terms of the potential richness of discussion around syntax and grammar, particularly presented by Nancy's non-standard construction. It would be helpful if candidates are securely grounded with at least the basic of clause structure and word class (and this will continue to apply with the new specifications that will be taught from September 2008). Candidates did spot 'errors', but this demonstrated a tendency to still use terminology which takes a prescriptive, rather than a descriptive approach. Semantic features were touched upon, but again often neglected. Some fascinating ideas about the use of 'yeah' as a request for feedback and the semantics of words such as 'coffee' and 'potato' as signifiers of 'Englishness' for Nancy.

As mentioned earlier, there were some interesting discussions of politeness strategies and power issues (AO4). Candidates looked at dominance in terms of topic management, length of utterance, questions and commands, forms of address, and again, the best responses had the confidence to express uncertainty and to offer evidence-based suggestions rather than vague assertions. There was some evidence of AO4 dominating answers at the expense of AO3, which should be discouraged. There was also some concern that conceptual ideas were treated as 'stand alone' elements, rather than integrating them into wider analysis. For example, a successful candidate may explain the grammatical structure of an utterance in terms politeness strategies. It is clear that many candidates are now familiar with the concept of pragmatics and that is being applied very successfully and is to be welcomed as a positive development. Grice was applied with varying success, but there were some interesting use of 'functionality' frameworks. Overall, it felt that the paper allowed students to demonstrate much of the excellent work that has been done by centres in preparation for this examination.

2702 Variation in Usage of English

General Comments

The markers were pleased to note that the quality of written language showed improved clarity and more specific linguistic focus. The view, raised in the 2007 summer report, about fewer candidates entering for the examination with only very basic linguistic skills seems to be supported in this paper. There are still lingering issues with candidates simply ignoring the specific demands of the rubric of questions. This, inevitably, leads to a loss of potential marks. It was also helpful that fewer candidates engaged in writing answers more suitable for media studies or sociology examinations.

Question 1

The steer passage was cited in a number of answers. However, this did not lead to a linking of such material with journalese, which has been a popular, if technically unfocused, response in past papers. E-languages and legalese dominated candidates' work. Such contrasts certainly seemed to prevent wandering into general summaries about variation and allowed less secure candidates to make basic observations about stylistic divergences. Candidates seemed to be able to apply some grammatical terminology to legalese but were less certain in using the same with e-languages. The issue was raised by markers that many candidates now see the discourses of texts and chat rooms as a kind of 'Standard'. If this is the case, they need to be given further help in applying grammatical terminology to examples, showing what the variance from other personal forms of written communication is. There is a complex issue with the citing of emoticons. These are a coded language and not alphabetic. Since there is in effect no 'grammar' of such, it is very difficult for candidates to make any technical contrast with conventional written formats. This means that the work often does not conform to the specific focus demanded in the rubric of the question. Centres might wish to give further encouragement to candidates in opening up other areas of linguistic diversity, so helping to give breadth to the topic area of Written Language.

Question 2

Candidates were forced to concentrate upon register by having both passages taken from the same publication. A number appeared baffled that such variance could occur within the same newspaper and spent some time in making imprecise observations about the social dimensions of intended readerships. It was clear in the answers that a number of candidates were unfamiliar with what was not specifically difficult lexis. This was noted by markers, expressing surprise that the world of broadcast media was something with which familiarity might be assumed. Discourse markers, such as 'traditional media groups' seemed to be of little concern to candidates. Also the popular cultural references to *Neighbours/Home and Away* did not evoke any consideration of how such fitted into a specific register of cultural writing. The focus on 'youth' in passage (b) was of great importance to a detailed response concerning the formality of the writing. Surprise was expressed that the 'gravitas' of *The Times* was infected with such idiom as 'cruddy' and 'breast-and-football TV.' Yet very few saw that this vernacular was a crucial appeal in terms of addressing 'Trash TV'. Centres will help candidates if they ensure that the context and potential cultural assumptions of the article are addressed via the linguistic structures. This requires a close reading of the passages and the ability to move rather further in depth than worrying about a supposed misuse of the subordinating conjunction.

Question 3

There are still a number of candidates who are not responding to the precise demands of the rubric in this question. Skills do not include spending time worrying over Chomskyan LAD, or Skinnerian Behaviourism. Skills demand an application to the grammatical, lexical and syntactical issues in the passage, supported by a residue of information which candidates have needed in 2701 – turn-taking, hedging, repairs etc. It was surprising that candidates talked about 'Telegraphic' speech, when it was quite clear that the child had moved beyond such a stage – complex responses, modality in verbs, use of auxiliaries in tenses, lexical patterns – all of these marked out real advanced fluency. Neither is it some social or linguistic deficiency if a child elides the 'g' or 'n' phoneme, or pronounces 'with' as 'wiv'. All of these are widely common in adult speakers. Skills means accentuate the positive. Those scripts which worked carefully through the range of skills the child had acquired were fully able to recognize a fluent and grammatically mature three-year-old, quite able to engage effectively with an adult and sustain the conversation. A careful reading of the sense being generated in his responses and the way his language showed a secure collocative and deictic ability lead some candidates to see the high skills employed by the child. Centres would help candidates if they gave them practice in answering positively and not pursuing minor grammatical and phonological blemishes as indicative of either social or intellectual impoverishment.

2704 Language Contexts – Structural and Social

General Comments

There was some variability in candidates' performance. Markers expressed concern that some candidates appeared to be under-prepared for the examination. The weakness was manifested in two areas. One was in the very limited use of analytical linguistic terminology being applied to data in order to cover AO3ii, AO4 and AO5ii. What was appearing was very similar in its limitations to the average standard expected at AS level. The other problem, which has been raised in previous reports, was a failure to respond to the rubric of specific questions. In some cases, candidates were answering largely by repeating pre-packaged materials, which had only marginal relevance to the set passage. Centres might wish to remind their candidates of the importance of structuring answers firmly around what is set in the passages. In this paper general theories about language need discreet application, usually in terms of AO4. Their broad application to cover AO3ii and AO5ii leads to an unnecessary reduction of marks. It should be said that there were some excellent scripts which were a pleasure to read because of their firm handling of a suitable range of terminology. Also they showed candidates' abilities to weave elements drawn from broader theories into a relevant enhancement of their answers.

Section A - Structures

Question 1

There were a number of responses to this question and they divided neatly into two categories. There were those which reflected excellent strategies in teaching simple phonetics, to include practice at transcribing using the IPA. These scripts could also raise issues about prosodics, which is the other major technical area as inscribed in the rubric. These technical approaches were applied consistently to the data as given in the passage.

The more problematic scripts spent too much time treating the text as if it was set for the 2701 paper, worrying too much over where to put a micropause. Even more difficult to assess were those candidates who simply spent time talking in general about the IPA v. orthography, RP and Estuary. Or giving inaccurate examples of vowel sounds which were in no way linked to the actual passage. Centres will give real help to candidates if they allow them to practice upon phonetic transcription of sentences from old papers. They will also give them help if they encourage them to listen to where stress and intonation play a significant part in any spoken exchange.

Question 2

Most candidates analysed the grammar in reasonable detail. There was a distinct tendency to apply a deficit model approach, rather than responding to the precise aims of the writer, who clearly was from an EFL background. There was also the drift into making lists: 'This is a noun, this is an adjective', without any comment of how this fitted into a syntactic pattern. A discriminator for AO3ii was the fairly limited range of terms many candidates could apply. At A2 level the whole range, including passive constructions, modality, complex and kernel clauses should be discussed. These need clear exemplification in an indented fashion upon the page. This issue has been raised in several previous reports. Additional grammatical issues like complex cohesion, collocation and anaphoric/cataphoric references were only addressed by very few.

Question 3

Markers noted a tendency to spend too long simply repeating information in the steer example. Few candidates completed the whole set of examples, though this was a rubric requirement. Few candidates produced a really plausible set of interpretations suitable for a dictionary – naming what the grammatical category was etc. To candidates' credit there was some good evidence of relevant word-directed websites and some interesting and amusing examples. Those who engaged at a basic level of etymological commentary were able to deal positively with AO3ii. Some candidates placed too much confidence that all is revealed in a contextualised usage. It is also worth commenting upon the fact that the layout and analytical methods applied were sometimes neither easy to read, nor easy to follow in the logic of structure. AO1 is assessed in this section of the paper and the quality of answers should reflect orthodox linguistic analysis and layout.

Section B - Social Contexts

Question 4

Very few candidates attempted this question. For those who did, a number made the mistake of assuming the girl in (a) had written the narrative. This, despite the fact that the general rubric stated it was an interview. Some answers then pursued the idea that she could not write 'properly' and attempted to correct her grammatical blemishes. This is clearly not the aim of this question, which is diachronic change in lexis and grammar. The whole set of discourse markers of poverty and deprivation were not addressed. Candidates also found passage (b) difficult. The nature of educational jargon and the ideology of learning in the range of lexical choices were not really well addressed. Candidates need guidance in addressing the correct issues in this topic and not wandering into areas of unfocused sociological generality.

Question 5

Markers pointed out that a number of candidates did not read the passage with enough care, presuming it was a male viewpoint being expressed, rather than a male journalist reflecting upon an article produced by a female magazine editor. Weaker answers embarked upon rudimentary data, drawn from feminist thought of thirty years ago, so avoiding the lively format of the article. This was unashamedly 'women as part of the pattern of body commodification', not at all concerned with issues of exploitation via males. The whole article undermines the wild assertion that male language subverts the female. Only well-focused candidates applied themselves to some of the current idioms in the lexis. They also were able to raise secure AO5ii materials in discussing the mode(s) of popular journalism, which thrive upon this kind of gender discourse and idealised role models taken from 'celebrity' sub-texts of the great body advancing a woman's career. Previous reports have stressed that the regurgitation of dated theories about gender is not the purpose of this question and certainly inhibits candidates from reading what is in the set passage.

Question 6

Although quite a popular question, a number of candidates failed to take advantage of a rather strange article. Their answers quickly abandoned the passage and set out on general essays about accent and dialect. It should be noted that accentual issues were not part of the set question. They ignored entirely the crucial final three sentences about 'teaching dialects' Diversity, multiculturalism and linguistic blending were the big issues in the passage. Better responses treated these quite well and tried to give some more examples of what is happening with the vernacular of young people across the country. This approach was a sensible use of wider knowledge, really supporting good AO4 and AO5ii points. Markers were surprised by the presence of Basil Bernstein (1964/5) and could not see how his views on social class and linguistic deficiencies fitted around the set data. Centres need to give candidates practice in mining the passages in detail and using some reasonably basic theoretical materials as secondary support.

2706 Exploring, Analysing and Evaluating English

General Comments

The candidature for this Unit was small, so any judgement about standards is necessarily limited. However, the paper worked well in enabling responses which explored, evaluated and analysed the use of language in the passages.

The 'Notes on Task' in the published mark-scheme offer detailed examples of features which might profitably have been explored in relation to each of the four passages.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1) (a) The transcription task was to write the text for a flyer encouraging newcomers to a naturist beach. Candidates had little difficulty in selecting and sustaining (AO2) an appropriate register for this part of the task.
- (b) The second part of the task was comparison of the candidate's transposition with the original transcription. A basic answer would have described the structure and content of the transposition, going on to make some general points (AO4) about the presentation of speech in written form. In this session, most candidates were able to develop an extended comparison, making some perceptive comments about relevant issues.
- 2) Language use in the four different passages was the focus of this question. There were at least sound levels of understanding of each passage, with some insightful points of comparison. Purpose and audience were competently understood, and there were genuine attempts to engage with grammatical and syntactical features.

Candidates noticed and were able to account for the formality of (scientific) register in Passage C, and engaged with the rather less formal "surferish" in Passage D. Encouragingly, most candidates developed their comments on 'archaic' features of Passage B beyond a basic identification of words no longer in use: the author's distinctive voice was evaluated in terms of syntax as well as lexis.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE English Language 3827 / 7827
January 2008 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	a	b	c	d	e	u
2701	Raw	60	44	39	35	31	27	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2702	Raw	60	43	38	34	30	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	42	37	32	28	24	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 (ie 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	12.5	12.5	25.0	87.5	100	100	11
7827	15.4	76.9	84.6	84.6	100	100	13

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:

http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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

OCR Customer Contact Centre

14 – 19 Qualifications (General)

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

For staff training purposes and as part of our quality assurance programme your call may be recorded or monitored

Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations
is a Company Limited by Guarantee
Registered in England
Registered Office; 1 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB1 2EU
Registered Company Number: 3484466
OCR is an exempt Charity

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
Head office
Telephone: 01223 552552
Facsimile: 01223 552553

© OCR 2008

