

English Language

Advanced GCE A2 7827

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS 3827

Report on the Units

January 2009

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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.

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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

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Chief Examiner's Report

Some very good work at A2 level was noted, in which candidates handled structural and social issues with confidence. Relevant Assessment Objectives were addressed in depth, the only problematic one being AO5ii. Where AO2 was assessed, many responses showed a degree of confidence in transpositional writing.

A further reduction in the use of pre-packaged materials showed that centres have gained greater confidence in widening the kinds of resources to support candidates' work.

At AS level some candidates still find the formality of an organised academic essay a problem - in particular, giving clear and concise examples of variation, supported by basic structural analysis of the same.

However, the range of examples for *Variations in the Usage of English* (Unit 2702) has shown a marked widening of choice. Transcribed and acquisitional data has largely been successfully mastered by candidates. Some work on Child Language has been a pleasure to read.

As the Specification has now matured, centres are to be congratulated upon the overall quality of work now appearing in a number of examination scripts.

2701 Frameworks for the Description of English

This year's paper generated a range of responses and the candidates were engaged and open minded. The candidates responded well to the informal nature of the transcription and made good use of the regional dialectal and accent features. There were no comments on educational background or 'lazy' English, which was very reassuring, and it appears that a non-prescriptive or non-judgmental approach is now routine. It is hoped that this will continue into the new specification. The AOs were addressed diligently and many candidates made interesting grammatical comments and were able to look at syntax and word class quite thoroughly. This may suggest that the recommendations of previous PE reports are now embedded and utilized as a teaching support, which is one of their primary purposes.

The major weakness overall in responses was the almost total lack of attention paid to the expressive, narrative and humorous elements of the text and it was felt that this was a missed opportunity. It would have been great to see candidates getting to grips with phrases such as 'evil little snow fairies' and 'kind of doing freefall' and exploring the way that we use semantics, shared knowledge and incongruity of language and imagery to create humour. Another weakness in some answers was a tendency to fall back on simplistic discussions of the way that speech differs from writing and then failing to develop such comments in a way that might elucidate specific features of the transcription to any real extent.

Gender issues were raised for AO4 and candidates on the whole dealt confidently with the apparent 'role reversal' here, in which the woman was the dominant speaker, and were able to make straightforward comments on communicative competence in general.

To reiterate some of the comments from previous reports, as centres are now preparing and delivering the new specification: AO1 was addressed best by candidates who dealt with issues and features rather than taking a line by line approach or merely feature-spotting. However, there is still interchangeable use of the terms accent and dialect and there are still many candidates who do not use a capital 'E' for 'English'. The best responses are able to employ a wide range of technical terminology accurately and have a good grammatical grounding. Good practice that has been put into place by a number of centres has been to develop a glossary of terms that is available to all students on the school computer network and is developed by the students as they work through the course. Many centres have also commented that the A Level Support Materials for the new English Language specification, now available free at www.ocr.org.uk, are a useful resource for both the legacy and the new specifications.

2702 Variation in Usage of English

General Comments

Quality of written language was generally secure and most candidates appeared to have a practical grasp of simple linguistic comment. There were very few answers which addressed questions as if this was a media studies/communications paper – a welcome development. Centres might like to note a drift away from addressing the correct AO's in Sections (a) and (b). Section (a) covers AO1 and AO4. Section (b) covers AO3i and AO5i. Candidates can lose valuable marks by not ensuring that section (b) answers respond to the context of the writing.

Question 1

The steer passage evoked little comment, even though it appeared predicated upon a descriptivist approach to the language. Legalese has grown in popularity. Centres should be cautious in allowing candidates to assume that the noun *mortgage* is not standard English. Extra historical generalities about Old Norman French and Latin are not assessed in this question. Answers tend to be slightly formulaic and repeat the same limited words from a legal register. There are no attempts to analyse syntactic or grammatical differences. It seems a slight deficit that no candidate has ever quoted from a modern law report – readily available online and in textbooks. E-languages were slightly less in evidence and class-directed assertions about the readership of the press seemed to have gone. It should be clearly stressed that candidates are assessed upon issues of lexis, grammar and syntax, as is clearly printed in the rubric. If these constituents are absent, it is hard for markers to find much to reward.

Question 2

This proved quite popular and a number of answers showed a degree of common-sense towards the passages. It needs noting that candidates frequently misread passage (a) as an entire speech, rather than one which was reported. At AS level it is assumed that candidates will understand the differences between direct and reported speech. None seemed to pick up on the formality of a press release, which assumed a knowledgeable professional audience, whereas a review raises different issues about register-perfect AO5i material in terms of context. Candidates picked up the major discourse features well in passage (b) but were less able to see some key passages and nouns flagging up a textual position in (a). Few answers were able to analyse any of the sentences or compare them at a syntactic level.

Question 3

Most candidates answering this question had a better sense of what was needed than in some past papers. There were fewer responses commenting on a five-year-old's supposed deficiencies. There were also fewer responses repeating the kind of analysis of speech needed to answer 2702. This led to some good answers, where candidates recognised the skills, both lexical and grammatical, in Laura's confident and mature grasp of heuristic conversation. The passage was rich in use of tenses and interesting syntactic organisation. Her lexis was entirely appropriate for a detailed exchange with her mother. On a cautionary note, it should not be necessary to remind candidates that overlaps are not 'poor speech' and that the elision of the /g/ phoneme does not indicate some social class fault - it is common in most adult speech. To repeat from past reports: it is not necessary for candidates to seek out minor phonological or grammatical blemishes and spend time deliberating upon them. The key issue, quite clearly written in the rubric (and covering AO5i), is language skills. This is where the technical analytical evidence is needed in order to match both the AO's and move well up the mark bands.

2704 Language Contexts – Structural and Social

General Comments

Markers noted that many candidates were better prepared than in some previous January papers. There seemed to be a more extensive use of apposite terminology and this was matched by some fluent analytical writing. The rubric was more closely respected and the relevant technical steer given with the question was usually addressed with a degree of assurance. There were a few issues with interpretation of the passages, most notably in a number of answers appearing to misread the intentions of the writer in Q.5. In Q.1 some candidates ignored the need to use phonemic symbols and to score prosodic features. Candidates covered all questions and this degree of breadth was another sound feature of the responses.

Comments on individual Questions

Section A - Structures

Question 1 *Language and Speech Sounds*

The under-marked transcription was quite popular and there were some very sound answers making use of phonemics/prosodics in order to suggest methods to clarify the sounds of the speaker. There was a real consistency with these answers, indicating much greater confidence in centres in developing the correct skills for this kind of analysis.

A few answers adopted a 2701 approach and summarised what the symbols already in the passage did. This is clearly not what the question asks. Centres might like to note that candidates are allowed some degree of latitude in transposing some of the materials into phonemic script. Also, suggestions about prosodic/intonation markers need not be entirely accurate in every case. The aim is to encourage analysis, using the correct technical methodologies.

Question 2 *Language and Grammar*

Although Aurelia suffered some unjustifiable criticisms over her English idioms, candidates did not fall into a completely 'deficit' model. There were some really good answers, using tree diagrams, which showed methodically they deviations from standard English in the writing. One candidate, who clearly knew French, argued that some of the simple errors might have been that the writer was thinking in the subjunctive, hence the grammatical deviations in places. These answers were happy in handling collocation and the basic discourse features employed. Centres who have been working along these lines with candidates have really helped in developing the A03ii objective.

Question 3 *Language and Meaning*

There was some variability in answers to this question. Two issues arose. Candidates were required to answer all italicised words; in almost all scripts this was not done and so affected the final mark. A careful reading of all rubrics is essential examination policy. Second, very few candidates could see the underlying discourse patterns in the extract. These were roughly: religion/myth, morality – fight the good fight - and technical stylistics. Hence most answers were often laboured in suggesting connotative meanings and likely metaphorical dimensions, and could not place these more analytically in the complex resonances of the words as they formed a discursal pattern. It should be noted that this is exactly what the importance of context is asking. Semantics are quite a challenging area of linguistics. It would be sensible to consider

whether some candidates have enough knowledge of language and meaning to undertake this question at A2 level.

Section B - Social Contexts

Question 4 *Language Change*

As usual this was a minority choice. A few candidates seemed not to understand the general drift of the author's argument. Also a number of lexical items were not remarked upon, indicating a lack of knowledge of such nouns as *orthography*, *conceit*, *pamphlets*, *etymology*. The long sentences, with their clausal structures, were not subjected to any detailed syntactic analysis. Candidates seemed contented to list obvious shifts in spelling and capitalised nouns. Passage (b) received rather scant attention, despite two names that should have been familiar to students of linguistics. The fact that the issue of prescriptive/descriptive was raised clearly in the extracts and its connection with the 18th century passage was overlooked. No remark was made about the meaning of the adjective 'sloppy', which might have been interestingly contrasted with the 18th century cry for 'plain' English.

Question 5 *Language and Gender*

Answers fell into two camps. There were some excellent responses, looking carefully at the writer's choice of lexis and commenting in some depth upon many of the nouns in the passage. These answers reached the idea that the writer was not presenting a feminist tract, but was concerned with the whole issue of 'objectification' being feminine in origins. The very issue which worried the 'sisters' was generally not clearly understood by candidates. Weaker answers pursued the familiar trajectory of brief and rather misread comments about the passage and then embarked upon a litany of gender materials, some of which dated back to 1970's. This is not making use of the wider study in any meaningful fashion and has been raised in a number of past reports.

Question 6 *Language and Society*

This was rather more popular than in some past papers and produced a range of thoughtful and quite lengthy answers. Many picked up the key 'basic grasp of written and spoken' and investigated what this meant in linguistic terms. Others debated how any slang can make people unemployable and cited some interesting use of slang terms from various social groups. It pleased markers to read candidates saying how they were unfamiliar with the terms in the passage, but offering idiolects common to their own cultural and topographical experiences. There were some interesting and acidic comments on the teaching of spoken English and what it was meant to do. As a surprise, the issue of texts etc., which emerged in latter part of article, did not attract the attention it might have done. A number of the scripts were interesting to read and showed the potential that this kind of topic has if approached using a secure linguistic framework. This did include some excellent phonological references, a most promising development.

2706 Exploring, Analysing and Evaluating English

General Comments

Candidates taking this exam in the January 2009 session performed to a high standard and most of them coped well with the transposition task and the passages for analysis.

Comments on Individual Questions

Question 1

- a) The transposition task was to write a response to a magazine article on “Women and Alcohol”.

There were some lively responses, including a few which managed a convincingly polemical tone. Candidates were clearly engaged by the task, and had their own opinions on the subject. However – perhaps because of this engagement – the requirement to *use the material in the transcription* was not always fulfilled.

- b) The second part of the task is a commentary making comparison of the candidate's transposition with the original transcription.

Skilful transpositions were generally complemented by proficient commentaries, though as usual some candidates missed the opportunity to explain and explore specific details of their own language choices. They also tended to under-value the co-operative nature of the conversation in the transcription.

Question 2

This section of the paper tests candidates' knowledge of linguistic frameworks and their ability to apply them (AO3) to four thematically-linked passages. The AO5 dimension entails exploration of language variation according to time and context.

Most answers were systematic, taking either a passage-by-passage or a framework-by-framework approach. Weaker responses were more inclined to identify and describe than to analyse and explore. Stronger responses explored, for example, the variety of ways in which advice is imparted in passages B and D, and the workings of features of lower formality in passages A and C.

Overall standards of control and accuracy in the use of language and in terminology (AO1/AO4) were relatively high, but basic errors of punctuation and spelling continue to mar answers at times

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE English Language 3827 / 7827
January 2009 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	a	b	c	d	e	u
2701	Raw	60	45	40	36	32	28	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2702	Raw	60	42	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	44	39	34	30	26	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	3.8	30.8	61.5	80.8	100	100	26
7827	50.0	66.7	75.0	100	100	100	12

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

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Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

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Facsimile: 01223 552553

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