**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

**English Language and Literature   ELLA3
A**

(Specification 2720)

**Unit 3: Comparative Analysis and Text
Adaptation**

Report on the Examination

There were many varied and interesting scripts to see in the second Summer sitting of the Advanced part of this specification. Where candidates had been carefully prepared for the unseen comparison as well as applying their skills of analysis in a variety of ways, and not being constrained to one single method, they then executed their answers in vibrant and often illuminating fashion. Where candidates were well acquainted with their set texts, knowing how to deal with adaptation tasks and the supporting commentary, they then wrote believable recastings with enlightening commentaries.

Sadly there were many reports of lack of preparation for the unseen analysis, with candidates all too ready to rely on overt narrative approaches and over-reliance on linguistic theory which resulted in inadequate answers and lack of engagement with the unseen texts; similarly, too many candidates had little or no idea as to how to deal with textual adaptation. This is not an exercise in invention; rather it is a test in how well the given material can be adapted and then how effectively some of the adaptive examples can be explained.

It is gratifying to note that most candidates follow the advice of the rubric and spend a proportionate amount of time on each section. It is now rare for examiners to see unbalanced scripts.

Section A

Question 1: Analytical comparison

Successful candidates:
- showed evidence of close reading, textual engagement and thorough understanding of all three texts
- tackled the comparison in a commonsense manner, with many using the anchor method to help them structure a meaningful analysis
- used the integrated approach to produce answers which dealt with specific differences about which they found something interesting to write, rather than producing mechanical lists of differences or similarities
- used apt, carefully selected terminology with which to make valid and instructive comparisons
- found interesting angles for comparison leading to thoughtful points being made
- used the three point critical sentence to help to structure their analysis.

Less successful candidates:
- had not carefully read the three texts and showed little or no evidence of knowing how to organise an analytical answer
- made obvious, often empty, comparisons that barely aided any textual interpretation
- made very few literary, linguistic or stylistic points of interest, instead taking a straightforward narrative view of the texts
- wrote three separate accounts with minimal links being made
- hardly mentioned the attitudes and feelings of the speakers or narrators in the three texts
- persistently misspelled simple terms such as "sentence" and "simile."

Many candidates start with a contextual introduction on mode/purpose/audience; this can be a useful way to begin as it sets out the premises for an answer, as well as writing themselves into the paper. It can show how observant they are as evidenced by such comments as B's audience 'may have been intrigued by the title' rather than 'must be interested in and knowledgeable about Greek food' or C's audience 'may be attracted to the (deliberate) laddishness of Clarkson' rather than 'would be interested in spicy foods.' Many candidates clearly saw the benefits of planning their response, and detailed plans were usually a promising sign of engagement with the texts. Some candidates still take too much time laboriously generalising on audience, purpose and mode to the detriment of their detailed

analysis; some use a page and a half or more on this rather unproductive exercise, rather than using a concise half page single paragraph to do so.

Those who chose Text A as an anchor wrote well on speech features, though were often inclined to generic comments such as overlaps being synonymous with power struggles or register, and where friendliness was confused with dialect or, more worryingly, non-standard and lower class forms of speech. The televised context produced problems for some, where too much time was spent on discussing what wasn't present rather than focusing on the fact of the extract being at the end of the section on the cooking, and by focusing on the Hairy Bikers' reaction to the food and the evident friendly banter between them and the chef. Some found it disconcerting at the lack of imagery and found it difficult to discuss the positive language and back channelling , with 'uhuh', and 'mmm' being generally mistakenly referred to as fillers. Some struggled with the joke about egg and chips; the more perspicacious candidates realised it was ironic and explained the contrast between the simplicity of it compared to the complexity of the dish cooked; some incorrectly thought Si wanted egg and chips and didn't like the trout.

If Text C was chosen as the anchor, many discussed its structure as it was clearer with its sequence of events: the arrogance and confidence of opinion foreshadowing the inevitable fall. This could have been usefully compared to the adjacency pairs and chaining in Text A or by examining the narrative structure of Text B where the narrator was very much the recipient and passive participator in the food event. Occasionally certain answers made clear comments about the relationship between characters in Text B, with the ritual of 'morsel after morsel' and the mysterious reference to 'predestined' being the main thrust of discussion. Some sensitive responses were alert to the way that appreciation of food was used by Davidson to comment in some way on the development of the couple's relationship. However, Text B was rarely used as the anchor text.

The highly metaphorical language of Text B was convincingly contrasted with the similarly metaphorical language of Jeremy Clarkson and candidates were able to show how the figurative language was employed for entirely different purposes: listing and simile figured heavily in the analyses seen, with varying degrees of success, the best being a focus on one or two examples from Texts B and C and discussing their meaning and effectiveness in context.

Many responses, however, were very narrow and showed little engagement with meaning. There was a frequent strong tendency to feature-spot, seeking out, for instance, 'high-register' or 'low register' words with little awareness of context. Metaphors and oxymorons were spotted by most candidates but there was often little attempt to explain the effects achieved.

There was still disturbing evidence of candidates' lack of understanding of word class, such as seeing 'agony' as a verb, 'perfectly' as an adjective and with 'bastardly' proving a real problem to classify; classification of sentence types caused confusion and was rarely informative or illuminating; the difference between asyndetic and syndetic listing frequently caused problems.

A cautionary note on linguistic theory needs to be made: it is rarely used to any positive effect; one examiner noted that a centre had mentioned 14 different linguistic and literary theories ranging from the ever-present Grice to Giles's Accommodation Theory and from Feminist and Marxist criticism to Fishman's study on same sex conversations, with one candidate managing to cram 9 of the 14 into their response. Whilst this was at the extreme end of the spectrum, it serves to warn centres that candidates producing this type of response usually spend so long writing about theory that they fail to mention any (or very many) features from the actual texts. At the other end of the spectrum, there are still candidates who manage to write their response with barely a feature of speech in their analysis or, if they do mention specific speech terms learned at AS level, they are usually so meaningless that they could be applied to any speech text.

Many candidates wrote well on purpose and topicality but there continues to be some very narrow readings of audience, with candidates not using their common sense at all in this area: examples of the more narrow and plainly erroneous were: "….men who ride bikes……housewives…burns victims…people interested in burns, like doctors, nurses and fire-fighters…people interested in hospital food….like my parents....bachelors…well-spoken readers…teenagers over the age of 16." Plainly such narrowness is at best simplistic and at worst foolish, leading to rather warped responses where candidates bend their analyses to meet their claims.

The best answers focused on the subtle differences in the texts and how they were conveyed by linking these differences to attitude: for instance, Text A's anticipation of the food and its quality, Text B's reflection on the quantity and quality, and Text C's bravado approach followed by the negative reaction to it.

Section B

Successful candidates:
- showed evidence of textual knowledge and effortlessly manipulated the material into believable, new pieces which could have been broadcast with no difficulty at all
- wrote with confidence and knowledge
- made few spelling or grammatical errors
- picked out 4 or 5 meaningful examples from their own writing to exemplify why they had chosen to write them in a particular way.

Less successful candidates:
- quoted widely from the source material, a direct contravention of what the question asks
- wrote with many inconsistencies being shown, such as lack of uniformity of voice
- wrote commentaries which were too short, were painfully lengthy or far too general
- made many spelling errors, often of sub-GCSE standard.

Question 2: *Cupcakes and Kalashnikovs*

By far the more popular of the two texts, registers varied enormously between the highly believable to the completely unacceptable. Most candidates clearly managed to fashion a 'radio-style' format, although this varied between exhuming Djuna Barnes (without any recognition of the anachronism involved), through to the more acceptable Radio 4 historical programme series, to a setting of a Radio 1 chat show forum, the latter being totally inappropriate for the seriousness of the subject matter, especially when ex-suffragettes who were interviewed dropped into modern style 'street chat.' Some attempted, with varying degrees of success, to create a transcript, although this is not to be encouraged, as there is too much time spent on creating features rather than focusing on relevant content. Some set out a 'block' of material and some were very polished indeed, capturing and sustaining an appropriate tone, showing a flair for language and imaginative use of source. The best answers tended to have a single speaker by creating a clear sense of context (without necessarily feeling the need to employ actors or interview people) and found an authoritative voice that took the listeners back to the time of the suffragettes' struggle. Those who used two or more people interacting also enjoyed varying degrees of success. These included: one or two presenters with an expert, such as an historian for suffragettes, which encouraged a question and answer approach, or a presenter and someone personally involved, such as a suffragette's great-granddaughter, who had letters or diaries to draw on for their material.

The use of source varied enormously, but most incorporated enough to provide some sense of shaping sufficient to offer an adaptation that was credible. Word limits often went by the board, however, and lack of editing often left gaping errors and awkwardness. Some candidates still used direct quotations despite being told not to in the rubric. Some

candidates had a strange notion of history in placing the suffragettes; some missed the idea that the adaptation was a 'section' of a programme; others lost focus on 'the experience of being force-fed', instead delivering rants on democracy in the modern world or simply spent too long on chatting with one another that the actual source got squeezed out. There were some serious misunderstandings too: that the force-feeding was simply an act of torture and part of their punishment or that the women were suffering from eating disorders and needed to go through this drastic regime in order to save their lives.

Overall, candidates did better if they kept within range of the word limit and spent time limiting any extraneous material to the very minimum in contextualising the task in question.

Question 4: *A House Somewhere*

As with Question 2, the format for the radio programme varied widely; some interviewed Alex Kerr, some involved a panel of experts, and others had individual presenters. Some overlooked the brief of 'the experience of living in a foreign country' and many responses read like general essays about the charms of Japan, occasionally veering towards the register of the travel agent. Indeed, there were many answers which strayed into advert territory and consequently missed out great chunks of material that should have been used. Few responses dealt with the central idea of change and candidates seemed to have problems with setting up the clear distinction in the source between the 1970s and modern times. Candidates found it difficult to distinguish between Kyoto, Kameoka and Tenmangu and gave the impression that they had only glanced at the original full article. Some also had difficulty in sustaining an appropriate register.

Questions 3 and 5: The Commentaries

The best answers to the commentary were written by those candidates who impressed by their analysis, considering the efforts they had already put into their other questions. Some candidates wrote convincingly about structure and attempted to explain their language choices in terms of their contexts, which always produced sound and thoughtful points. Where candidates were actually focusing on specific features and commenting on the effects created in their adaptation, marks were able to be rewarded at the highest level. The best answers focused on four or five features which were selectively made and covered a variety of issues.

Some candidates suffered from mishandling the time allocation, and so produced hurried responses of very little substance. Others spent too long on description or narrative, and loosely commenting on purpose and audience before getting on to serious analysis of stylistic choices. Some candidates failed to include evidence of their choices and broadly commented on a scattering of features.

Unfortunately, very few candidates seemed to go into the exam prepared with the sort of techniques they might use in their adaptation and an idea of the sort of effects that they might have on an audience. With 20 minutes to do the commentary, there isn't enough time to think from scratch.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results statistics page of the AQA Website

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion