OCR
RECOGNISING ACHIEVEMENT

GCE

English Language

Advanced GCE **A2 H469**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H069**

Report on the Units

June 2009

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Advanced GCE English Language H469

Advanced Subsidiary GCE English Language H069

REPORT ON THE UNITS

Chief Examiner's Report

Centres appeared to have found few problems in adapting teaching to the new specification. The written paper, with its broader approach to spoken language, was very effectively addressed by many candidates. It should prove a valuable introduction to the compulsory speech question in F653.

The challenges of multi-modal coursework were largely met by the candidates. They appeared to find the great potential of digital and visual culture both provocative and invigorating in terms of originality and linguistic enterprise. This, also, should prove valuable as groundwork for the F653 and F654 papers to be taken at A2 level.

F651 The Dynamics of Speech

General Comments

Centres and candidates are to be commended on having coped well with the demands of this first summer session for paper F651, and more generally with the requirements of the new specification. Performance indicated careful and thorough preparation, informed by relevant theoretical knowledge.

In each of Sections A and B there was a choice of two questions. Answers in both Sections were fairly evenly split between the alternative questions; there was no significant overall difference between relative performances on the two Sections.

Phonemic symbols – a table is printed on the last page of the question paper – were used by some candidates. This was encouraging, since characteristic speech sounds and intonation patterns (phonetics and phonology) are very much part of the subject content at AS level. Although only one of the passages in this session represented speech sounds phonemically, all of the passages included features of accent; and future passages may well highlight phonological features. Candidates need to be comfortable interpreting and using phonemic symbols.

The Unit title is *The Dynamics of Speech.* It would be possible – though clearly not desirable – to trace the dynamics of interaction in the passages in 'common-sense' terms, without using a specifically *linguistic* method. Indeed, some candidates did this, with *limited* (Band 1 or 2) results. *Linguistic* (AO1) approaches, terminology and methods are essential in order to succeed at higher levels in this paper.

The Assessment Objective weightings for the Unit mean that AO2 is dominant in Section A, AO3 in Section B. However, there will always be significant overlap between the AOs, and a competent linguistic approach is likely to integrate aspects of AO1, AO2 and AO3 into virtually every relevant comment.

Centres are reminded that, although the intention of OCR was to retain the best features of the 'legacy' specification, the new Subject Criteria and Assessment Objectives are necessarily different from the old. It is vital to study the requirements of individual units in the specification booklet, in terms both of content and of skills. For example, the initial description of the Unit states that the focus is *the analysis of speech, both scripted and unscripted.* The recommended range of transcripts with which candidates should be familiar comprises *transcripts from scripted, partly scripted or spontaneous speech, from fictional texts such as plays, novels and poems and from representations in non-fiction formats such as magazine interviews.*

The **passages** from the 2009 sessions and from the Sample Assessment Material are typical of what might be set in future, but not exhaustive of the possible range.

Similarly, the **questions** in each paper will require *discussion of the use of language* supported by *reference to specific examples* from the transcription/passage. However, the precise question-wordings are likely to vary from task to task and session to session in order to prompt candidates in ways suited to the material.

The following comments on responses in this session should provide helpful guidance to those entering in subsequent sessions. Reference should also be made to the published mark-scheme for an indication of appropriate response in terms of the Assessment Objectives.

Section A: Speech and Children

N.B. Centres need to keep in mind the Unit Content in the specification. Child Language Acquisition is <u>amongst</u> the topics, but it is by no means the <u>only</u> required subject for study. Some knowledge of the theories of child language is required, but knowledge of how to use theoretical ideas in practice is more important.
Other topics include the social contexts of talk and children, children's language in use (child-child and child-adult) and children's language in the media and in the wider community.

Question 1

The transcription was of a conversation taking place between Polly (aged 9:1), Eve (aged 1:7) and their mother, Lou, while the two girls were painting pictures.

The task-wording provided an open-ended prompt: to *write about some of the different ways in which the three speakers use language to communicate.*

Candidates engaged readily with the dynamics of speech here, recognising that the interaction was shaped by Eve's needs. Most candidates argued that Lou, as the mother, was the dominant speaker and topic manager, and the more careful readers noticed how skilfully she coped with the very different needs of the two children.

Useful comment was made on the use of proper nouns as well as pronouns as terms of address, and on the incidence of imperative and interrogative utterances. Even when terminology was not accurate – for example when candidates wrote *declarative* for *imperative* – the effect was understood.

Common (non-fluency) features of spoken language were identified and discussed in terms of the dynamics of interaction. Candidates noticed false starts/corrections/repairs in Polly's speech as she re-cast utterances to provide a more detailed response to her mother. They identified similar features, and particularly repetitions, in Lou's utterances, and accounted for them in terms of her need to direct/clarify/simplify/explain. Forms of child-directed talk such as 'care-taker' language and 'motherese' were referred to, though at times simple mention of these forms was used as a substitute for genuine analysis of the language.

Useful reference was made to Accommodation Theory, to theories of Child Language Acquisition and to ideas of gender-lect. Only in the weakest responses was this reference perfunctory: many competent candidates supported their discussion with specific examples of language use, informed by the theory.

The mark-scheme indicates other avenues of discussion which proved fruitful.

Question 2

The transcription was of a conversation involving two seven year old boys at a summer activity centre. Mohammed is telling a story while he and Antony are working at a table with Mrs Hanif.

The task-wording was again an open-ended prompt: to *discuss the ways in which Mohammed uses language to tell his story and the ways in which Antony, Mohammed and Mrs Hanif use language in their conversation*.

Candidates were able to explore the two boys' very different levels of conversational contribution and skill, and to account for them in terms both of language development **and of speech**

dynamics. Weaker answers tended to over-state the (alleged) dominance of Mohammed and to cite Grice in order to criticise him for breaking the Maxim of Quantity. Better answers were characterised by careful reading of the transcription evidence and exploration of how Mrs Hanif skilfully encourages Mohammed with his story-telling while simultaneously trying to involve the apparently much more reluctant Antony.

Similarly, good answers were flexible enough to consider alternative analyses of the non-standard verbs – *there was (.) it were (.) our neighbour … it were eid* – and to consider how these usages might be features of dialect/sociolect rather than grammatical 'errors'.

There was a tendency – here and in answer to all the other questions too – to describe all interrogatives as *tag questions.* But it was more important to recognise, as candidates did, that Mrs Hanif uses a variety of questions to involve, encourage, direct and praise the boys.

Again, the mark-scheme contains further indications of material and issues for discussion.

Section B: Speech Varieties and Social Groups

N.B. Centres need to keep in mind the Unit Content in the specification. Amongst the topics for study are the subjects of group identities created through specific features of language, the use of language to exclude and include, slang and jargon, social class, regional variation, occupation / age / power, and how language can demonstrate attitudes and values.

In terms of response to phonological features, it is worth remembering that discussion of *accent* usually becomes unprofitable when it moves into assertions about *class.* Similarly, comment on *accent* is often conflated with notions of *dialect.* Most often, weaker candidates equate Received Pronunciation with Standard English. However, sometimes candidates are able to write themselves out of such confusion as easily as they wrote themselves into it. Certainly they should not be discouraged from exploring phonological features, but they do need to be as exact as possible in looking at the transcript evidence. The 'default' position of assuming that most features of accent are indicative of a 'Cockney' or 'Estuary' accent is almost always unhelpful.

Question 3

The transcription was of a meeting between a dog behaviour expert, Diane, and a mother and daughter, Tony and Wendy, who have been having problems with their two dogs.

The task-wording reflected the content of the transcription: to *discuss ways in which Diane uses language to give advice and signify her expertise and the ways in which Tony and Wendy respond to her*

All candidates identified Diane as the dominant speaker, and most avoided making the obvious (but wrong) assumption that she would use a significant amount of occupational language or technical jargon. Discussion concentrated on how Diane exerted dominance by means of imperatives, repetition and emphatic stress.

Alternative interpretations of the dynamics emerged, any of which were fine as long as they were supported by *reference to specific examples from the transcription.* So some candidates saw Tony's and Wendy's minimal responses as indicating agreement, perhaps as co-operative features of 'typically' female interaction. At the opposite end of the co-operation continuum, many candidates argued that Diane flouts politeness principles, ignores Grice (!) and patronises her clients (*yes I know dear*).

Interruptions and overlaps were accurately identified and discussed, but candidates were sometimes unsure who was being addressed. For example, when Tony says in line 25 *well I mean YOU don't get all that cross* there was some uncertainty as to whether she means to refer to Diane or to Wendy. This uncertainty was complicated for some candidates who mistakenly thought Tony was male. If this led them to explore the interaction in terms of gendered expectations, they were given credit for relevant understanding of the theorists (e.g. Tannen and Lakoff) and application of this to the transcript evidence.

Candidates tried to write about Diane's accent, on the basis of her *h*-dropping (*it cant appen*), but struggled unless they were able to consider possibilities of *downward convergence.*

Reference may be made to the mark-scheme for further examples of relevant issues for discussion.

Question 4

The transcription was of a television game show in which the adult contestants are covering themselves in paint in order to paint a picture on a board.

The task-wording was closely matched to the content and purpose of the transcription: *How does the host use language to control and encourage the contestants?*

Candidates who did this question entered into the spirit of the game-show with as much pluck as the contestants. They had no difficulty in tracing the dynamics of interaction, and showed good knowledge of the conventions of such shows by being able to imagine the paralinguistic activity which might accompany the words.

Better answers included a recognition that the considerably higher complexity, formality and cohesiveness of the opening utterance might suggest scripted speech, whereas the increasing non-fluency as the game gets under way indicates frantic *ad lib*-ing as well as frenetic activity.

There was some impressively developed discussion of phonological features in the Host's utterance, based on its orthographic and phonemic representation. The most astute answers noticed the inconsistencies – the *h*-dropping from *ELP* but not from *do you want me to help you* and the variants of *Rodney* – and went on to argue that the Host might either be 'lapsing' into his own native accent, or making fun of features of accent he detected in the contestants, or that he might be deliberately using an accent generally perceived (a perception supported by research findings) as more friendly/casual/working-class.

The mark-scheme offers some further ideas of what might have proved helpful lines of exploration.

F652 Text and Audiences

General Comments

This was the first entry of this new internally assessed unit and moderators reported that they were impressed with how well centres had adapted to the new requirements. Students had obviously been well prepared in all aspects of the new AS course and were able to apply their knowledge and skills to the different kinds of writing needed for this component.

Task 1: Text study

Selection of texts

Interesting and varied written and multimodal texts were presented for analysis. Written texts included newspaper articles, novels, poetry, autobiography, recipes, reviews, film scripts and song lyrics. There was also a good selection of multimodal texts including illustrated books, cartoons, real-life stories, magazine articles and advertisements.

Some centres had difficulty distinguishing between written and multimodal texts. Written texts are defined as texts which contain written material only and multimodal texts are those which contain more than one mode: eg. written text accompanied by visual images. Centres must ensure that written texts do not contain any accompanying visual material. It is not acceptable to select a multimodal text and ignore the visual features in order to present the text as a 'written' piece.

Please note that copies of the two texts must be included with the analysis to facilitate the assessment and moderation process. Please label clearly which is the written and which is the multimodal text.

Analysis

The analytical essay is designed to assess Assessment Objectives 1, 2 and 3 so candidates are required to discuss the key linguistic and stylistic features of both texts focussing on context, audience and purpose. This task was generally well executed. Most candidates were able to adopt appropriate linguistic methods to produce detailed discussion and exemplification of the linguistic and stylistic conventions of the chosen genre.

Discussion of contextual factors focussed on the time and place of publication and how use of language reflects the specific audience and purpose of the text.

When analysing literary texts candidates need to focus on linguistic features covering, for example, lexis, syntax, prosody and phonology. Analysis of the multimodal text should explain how more than one mode is used. There should be some discussion of how visual features work in conjunction with the written text to create meaning in the text as a whole.

If using extracts from DVDs, television or film as multimodal texts, then a description of the visual features needs to be included either in the transcript itself or in the analysis. Candidates need to discuss how non verbal features work alongside the spoken text to add to meaning.

There were some excellent analyses of film extracts, with useful discussion of paralinguistic features including body language, gestures and prosodic features.

Please note that this unit does not require candidates to compare the two texts, although an element of comparison may be included.

Task 2: Adaptive Writing and Commentary

Adaptive writing was very creative and suited to purpose and showed engagement on the part of the candidates. Successful pieces adapted autobiography to transcript, political speech to newspaper article, poem to interview, factual report to fictional story and the reverse.

Some centres had difficulty interpreting the term 'adaptive writing.' Candidates are required to adapt the language of the original text into a new text. The aim is not to imitate the style of the original or to write a piece 'inspired by' or 'suggested by' the original but to provide an actual adaptation which relates closely to the original where some of the original language is retained and some replaced to create a new text. The links between the two texts should be clear and a significant amount of the language of the original should be present in the adapted piece. It is not sufficient to simply adopt the theme of the original and write a new piece based on the same theme.

This task assesses assessment objectives 1 and 4. Many candidates were able to demonstrate expertise and creativity in their use of language and to apply appropriate linguistic methods to their commentaries. It is important to ensure that candidates choose adaptive tasks which give them sufficient scope for detailed discussion in the commentary.

The best commentaries demonstrated close links between the language of the original and adaptive piece. Candidates discussed in detail how the language of the original had been adapted into the language of the new piece, focussing on which linguistic and stylistic features had been retained, which replaced or removed and reasons for doing so.

Weaker commentaries were largely descriptive including much general discussion of context or intention, eg. 'I wanted to..' 'I tried to..' and little exemplification of how language had actually been used to address the needs of the specific audience and purpose.

Application of Mark Scheme and General Administration

There were, understandably, some administration problems associated with the new system which meant that some centres were very late in sending material for moderation. The date for submission of coursework marks is May 15th and coursework samples should be sent to the moderator as soon as possible after this date.

There is still a requirement to send CCS160 forms. It is helpful to the moderators if these can be sent at the same time as the MS1 marksheets. Please ensure that all details are filled in on the coursework cover sheets as moderators received a number of submissions with no candidate numbers attached.

Most centres had applied the mark scheme accurately and assessment was extremely precise. Many teachers made helpful reference to the assessment objectives in their summative comments. Centres are reminded of the need to ensure that candidates adhere to the 3000 word limit, as a small number of submissions were clearly in excess of this limit.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE English Language (H069)
June 2009 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
F651	Raw	60	45	40	35	30	26	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
F652	Raw	40	32	27	22	17	13	0
	UMS	80	64	56	48	40	32	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
H069	200	160	140	120	100	80	0

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

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
H069	12.3	34.4	64.1	83.5	96.5	100	517

517 candidates aggregated this series

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.

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