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Examiners' Reports

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CONTENTS

Advanced GCE English Language (H469)

Advanced Subsidiary GCE English Language (H069)

EXAMINERS' REPORTS

Content	Page

F651 The Dynamics of Speech

General Comments

Candidates coped with the broad demands of this paper, though some of the discussion was at a generalised and descriptive level, rather than clearly linguistic/analytical.

Examiners were disappointed to see evidence of careless writing (and reading – about which more will be said later in the Report) in candidates' work. Names and other words copied from the Question Paper were often mis-spelled, and the tendency to write two-word phrases as one word (alot for a lot; eachother) was pervasive.

Candidates entering an examination in English Language should be more-than-ordinarily aware of morphology, yet examiners frequently saw solecisms such as one and other and higher archy which betray not just carelessness but an indifference to linguistic function.

Some comments were unnecessarily inaccurate. If a candidate writes "Tom asks Lexie lots of questions" or "Baljit interrupts much more often than Anna", the examiner is bound to check how many there really are of these alleged questions and interruptions. In fact, Tom asks Lexie four direct questions in nine utterances directed at her; and Baljit interrupts/overlaps Anna six times, while Anna returns the compliment three times. So these judgments are broadly correct. However, they were often left as unsupported and undeveloped assertions, or followed by a quotation/reference which was not a question (or an interruption) and/or not said by Tom (or Baljit). It is as easy to get these things right as it is to get them wrong.

Looking on the brighter side, examiners were encouraged to see that the levels of theoretical knowledge which some candidates had displayed in the summer session – mostly in relation to Child Language Acquisition or to gendered speech – were generally maintained.

Stronger candidates adopted a specifically linguistic method. It is possible to trace The Dynamics of Speech in the passages in 'common-sense' (generally descriptive) terms, without using an approach which is explicitly linguistic. But candidates who did this gained, at best, Band 3 marks. Linguistic (AO1) approaches, terminology and methods are essential in order to succeed at higher levels in this paper.

It is worth remembering the Assessment Objective weightings for this Unit. 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.

The following comments on responses in this session should provide helpful guidance to those entering in subsequent sessions. In addition, the published mark-scheme offers indications of appropriate response in terms of the Assessment Objectives.

Section A: Speech and Children

In Section A, many more candidates answered Question 1, which was based on a radio phone-in programme, than Question 2, a transcription of a conversation between two teenage girls.

Centres need to keep in mind the Unit Content in the specification. Child Language Acquisition is amongst the topics, but it is by no means the only subject required for study. 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.

Some knowledge of the theories of child language is required, but knowledge of how to use theoretical ideas in practice is more important.

Question 1

The transcription was of part of The Money Pit Home Improvement Radio Show. Presenters Tom and Lesley are talking on the telephone to Mark about do-it-yourself projects when Mark's four year old daughter Lexie joins in.

Unfortunately, many candidates mis-read this introductory information. They assumed that Lexie was two (not four) because she and her father refer to her having been two when she started helping him with D-i-Y. They also failed to notice that American public radio is from America and hence were not inclined to discuss phonological features as signs of accent.

This carelessness in reading was pervasive throughout the paper, and was reflected in inaccurate writing. There was a tendency – here and in answers to all the other questions too – to describe all interrogatives as **tag** questions, and to employ terminology in a haphazard way. Interrogatives were confused with imperatives; utterances were called 'sentences'; phrase and clause were used interchangeably; anything short was called simple, anything long complex. Terminology of itself is not what earns credit: it is always more important to be able to develop relevant analysis/evaluation from the initial identification of a significant feature of language. Nevertheless, precision is developed from good habits, and examiners received a strong impression of the opposite from the script evidence.

The question invited discussion of how Lexie and the adults use language here to interact with each other. Candidates engaged readily with the dynamics of interaction between child and adults, recognising that the dual contexts of telephone and radio show might be exciting and/or confusing to a four-year-old. This led naturally and helpfully to consideration of Child-Directed Speech.

It was inferred in broad terms that adults spoke differently to children from the way they spoke to other adults. Candidates made useful reference to increased volume, address by first name, and short utterances with frequent pauses. They showed some competence in evaluating the way in which the presenters in particular demonstrated intonation and stress patterns that indicated how they were altering the manner of their speech in order to accommodate to a four-year-old child. Some went on to a more developed discussion of accommodation and the role played in general speech by stress and volume and intonation.
The context of radio, both in this transcript and in Q.3, gave candidates good opportunity to talk about how aspects of context – such as not being able to see or be seen by the audience – can affect both what is said and how it must be said for greatest effect. Such AO3 aspects were the stronger element in the work of those candidates who were inclined conscientiously to accumulate numerous examples of non-fluency features (fillers, pauses, false starts, repairs, overlaps) but equally conscientiously to avoid analysing how any specific example of these features might work to construct the dynamics of speech.

Ideas about gendered speech were helpful when applied with care and due attention to what speakers actually said. Stronger candidates considered the details of the opening exchanges between the presenter Tom and the 'caller' Mark, noting that each interrupts/overlaps the other once, but that these are not necessarily features of 'typical' male competitiveness in speech. Few candidates tried to argue for a significant difference between male and female ways of speaking to a child, although the evidence was there in Lesley's realisation that Lexie might appreciate some female solidarity in matters of colour choice for tool belts.

A great deal of thought at question-paper-setting stage goes into deciding whether or not to indicate the gender of speakers in transcriptions, since experience has taught that candidates sometime jump to conclusions or make assumptions, based on gender, which are not actually

supported by the transcript evidence. In the absence of an explicit indication that the second presenter was female, many candidates assumed that Lesley was male but subordinate to Tom in status. If they argued this coherently and adduced evidence to support their argument, they were given credit.

Similarly, the *buffalo* in Lexie's fifth utterance confused many candidates, who saw it as a false start and therefore identified *and (.) daddy **are** fixing* as an incorrect verb form. Again, this was rewarded if it was coherently argued. As with the traditional good advice about showing-the-working-out in a Maths exam, candidates will always be rewarded for relevant explanation even if the initial point is based on a mis-reading.

Understanding and use of phonemic symbols was a problem for some candidates. A number read */bæθ/ room* as a wholly different word: back room or bedroom. Such errors suggest a lack of familiarity with phonemic symbols – which are printed on the back page of the question paper. Similarly, candidates who wrote of Lexie's or Mark's 'use' of phonemic 'language' are misunderstanding how transcripts are written and how they are to be read and evaluated. Often candidates were writing, 'here Mark uses a phonemic word ... which, in the English language would be ... ' Fewer than half of the candidates grasped from the question itself that this was an American broadcast, and that therefore the accents were showing typical American pronunciation and slang, such as *you guys*. There was consequently a tendency to argue either that Lexie could not pronounce some sounds or that Tom and Lesley were 'imitating' Lexie's speech sounds – converging towards her – in order to make her feel more comfortable.

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

Question 2

The transcription was of a conversation between two thirteen year old girls who had just attended an anti-smoking day at their school The task-wording was: *How do the two speakers use language here to explore the topic of smoking?*

The question was attempted by only a very few candidates, and of these most struggled to comprehend the dynamics. The better answers were characterised by careful reading of the transcription evidence and analysis of utterance types. Weaker answers were limited by a tendency to make assumptions about speakers on the basis of age, developmental stage and gender, rather than responding to what the speakers actually said. Assertions about social class and levels of education were unhelpful and misguided, as they almost always are.

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

Section B: Speech Varieties and Social Groups

Answers in Section B were more evenly split between the alternatives, with a few more candidates opting for Question 4.

Centres need to keep in mind the Unit Content in the specification. Amongst the topics for study are: 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.

Question 3

The transcription was of part of a radio programme involving an expert perfume-maker from Israel talking to a presenter about the ingredients used in ancient Hebrew recipes for perfumes.

The task-wording reflected the content of the transcription: *How do the two speakers use language here to communicate specialist knowledge to a radio audience?*

Candidates generally engaged well with Avraham and his efforts to explain his perfumes. Intonation and stress were well treated, as were field-specific lexis (more appropriate here than elsewhere) and the interaction with the presenter as someone who, like the wider audience, didn't know much about the topic. There were few comments regarding the religious references: candidates seemed not to have been confused by the complexities, but didn't attempt to engage with the philosophical/metaphysical aspects. Non-fluency features were interpreted either as evidence of nervousness or as signs that Avraham might be operating in a language which wasn't his first.

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

Question 4

This was the more popular question in Section B. The transcription was of part of a conversation in which three women friends in their forties are talking about clothes and the impressions they create.

The task-wording was closely matched to the content of the transcription: *How do the three women use language here to interact with each other and to express particular attitudes?*

Candidates engaged readily with the speakers and their subject, and had little difficulty in tracing the dynamics of interaction. Jane was seen as the dominant speaker, but simplistic assumptions about status were generally resisted as candidates recognised the agenda and anecdote (and floor) were Jane's to exploit. There was good understanding of the dynamics of the telling and listening to an anecdote, including the supportive sounds and remarks made along the way. One frequent error here and elsewhere was to call back-channel *fillers*; but generally this transcript gave the opportunity for candidates to identify and begin to analyse a wide range of speech features, and to refer to theories which inform this kind of dynamic.
Better answers managed to analyse these features in linguistic terms. Weaker answers tended to be *descriptive* of language rather than analytical.

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

F653 Culture, Language and Identity

General comments

Markers noted some variability in performance. Candidates in the upper bands showed a secure understanding of the specific demands of the questions and produced answers which successfully negotiated the three relevant assessment objectives. Candidates in the lower bands produced answers which were often little more than summative commentaries, failing to illustrate their responses with the level of linguistic analysis necessary to A2 standards. Some of the problems associated with insecure performance can be addressed by centres reminding candidates that the paper does not require any basic sociological/social class speculation, unless such material is firmly supported by illustration with relevant linguistic determinants. Advice should also be given about reading through answers to avoid the numerous grammatical and orthographical errors which caused markers some concern. This reduces the AO1 mark and draws attention to candidates who fail to spell correctly words and phrases which appear in the Reading Booklet.

Section A

Question 1 Language and Speech

Most candidates were able to find routes through the stimulus passages and respond at varying levels of phonological understanding. Less developed answers tended to summarise the given data, occasionally trying to analyse the grammar and lexis of the passages, rather than responding with phonological comments and illustration. More incisive answers attempted to give some attention to crucial nouns such as *Jockney*, *Cockney*, *Mockney*, *RP* and *Estuary*, supporting this by further illustration of what some of these nouns meant for a phonologist. Passage (c) stretched candidates by offering some basic technical language. The more linguistically attuned answers addressed further issues about affricatives, schwa vowel sounds and aspiration. This was commendable and showed that in some centres candidates are being encouraged to think in terms of precision when illustrating answers. It should be added that candidates need instruction in finding some suitable way of exemplifying answers. This can be by using phonemic symbols, by the use of quadrilaterals, or by orthographic representation. Any of these will clearly address the needs of the dominant AO2 objective. In this question quite a number of candidates supported their response with examples from wider reading. This is good practice. However, a problem in the work of some candidates was the use of statements like: 'I have done research on Jockney, Cockney etc., and I agree with the passage(s)'. Such evidence of local investigation is commendable. However, it must be supported by clearly annotated examples drawn from such research and then presented in a way which complements the data given in the stimulus passages.

Section B

Question 2 The Language of Popular Written Texts

It may be valuable to remind centres that in all answers to Section B markers anticipate that the full range of linguistic constituents - lexis, grammar, morphology, phonology and features of discourse - will be used, as relevant, and will form a significant part of candidates' answers. Conversely, lengthy summary and generalised social commentaries should not be the dominant feature of candidates' responses.

There were some interesting answers to this question. In these responses candidates clearly made reference to the contextual basics, outlined in the Reading Booklet. So, passage (d) was seen as a personal reflection, switching between third and first person voice - one candidate

linked this to a filmic structure, so opening a possible multi-modal response linking visual/verbal signifiers. Passage (e) allowed candidates to respond with some familiarity to website style. One or two responses made valuable comments upon how the 'disorganisation of syntax' (common in many sites) masked the marketese, selling a largely unchanged picture of the traditional UK seaside. Such answers picked up on the plethora of proper nouns like *Butlins*, *Holiday Parks*, *B&B* etc., to support the discoursal position which they held in the text. Passage (f) was seen as a more clearly defined example of heritage writing. Attention was drawn by the image, which one or two linked to the constant selling of traditions. This was then compared with the collocations which identified the marketing strategy behind this kind of publicity. Candidates saw how historical traditions were formulated in a register which was essentially constructed around a series of marketing lexemes. Such work showed that, with guidance, candidates can fruitfully investigate how stylistic features underpin the structure of texts and offer numerous opportunites to explore linguistic diversity.

Section C

Question 3 Language and Cultural Production

Possibly a useful way to help candidates with this question is to get them to ask what kind of culture is being made by the language. In a number of the responses this was substituted by easier sociological generalities about posh/chav and Stacey's potential five minutes of fame. Candidates missed out on the metonymous use of X-Factor in (g) and concentrated upon generalities about class and public schools. Yet the passage was a good example of the way an ecumenic could be formulated around the signifier X Factor. Stacey might well have been the clearest construction of what was the core of the discourse in (g). Candidates seemed more at ease with (i) and here there were some sound attempts to link image, as shown, with the language of siblings, Dublin duo, John, Edward, cocky, cheeky and irritating. So the nominals/adverbial could be imbricated with the actual picture - another multi-modal possibility. A few answers did circle around the possible ideological intentions in the language of the web article, picking up the adverbial 'as it is every year' and linking this to the show biz collocations, which suggested a formulaic enterprise tied around the 'production' and 'fame, fortune and adoration', the interesting triad in line 9.

Section D

Question 4 Language, Power and Identity

Candidates seemed relatively at ease with the question and the more incisive answers were usually able to show some links between language and construction of identity/power. French lexis - *toilette, peripherique* - was seen as a necessary stylistic trope to sell an image of the self. In passage (k) candidates responded to the formula used, imitation of conversational first person style, as a linguistic feature of certain kinds of magazine production. Also the limited sexualisation of fashion was picked up in passage (k), though markers questioned how far Lakoff and Tannen (work largely on spoken language) might be deemed relevant in this case. Brogan was berated by class/background rather than by the authorial language - again the collocations of proper nouns dominating as discoursal markers. Candidates need guidance in not simply assuming that tabloid writing is inferior to other forms. In this article the house style creates a very effective formula for exactly what 'identity,' in terms of self as a consumer, can be. In passage (m), candidates might have considered how the male is as much a gendered entity as the woman, especially in the terms of lifestyle. One astute response noted how the syntax placed the whole show in a theatrical/filmic setting. The writer also noted a range of adjectives and nouns which enriched the selling of clothing, largely in terms of racial identities and a specific kind of gendered power, clearly exemplified in the final sentence, which did start with the conjunctive.