

English Language

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H069

Report on the Units

January 2009

H069/MS/R/09J

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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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F651: The Dynamics of Speech (Written Examination)

General Comments

This, the first paper of the new specification, was taken by a small but significant number of candidates, whose work indicated careful and thorough preparation. It is always difficult for Centres and candidates to feel their way into the changed requirements of a new specification: both are to be commended on having coped well.

In each of Sections A and B there was a choice of two questions. Answers to Section A were fairly evenly split between questions 1 and 2. In Section B, the overwhelming majority of candidates chose question 3. 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 very little used by candidates. This is a missed opportunity: characteristic speech sounds and intonation patterns (phonetics and phonology) are very much part of the subject content at AS level. Although none of the passages in this session represented speech sounds phonemically, future passages may well do; and candidates need to be comfortable interpreting and using phonemic symbols.

The Unit title is The Dynamics of Speech. It would be possible to trace the dynamics of interaction in the passages in ‘common-sense’ terms, without using a 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 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 old 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 Unit F651 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 this first session 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 a way suited to the material.

Although it is hard to predict likely patterns of future answers from a small initial sample, 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.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A: Speech and Children

N.B. 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 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 three girls at school – Fay is 13, Lisa is 9 and Jenny is 7 – performing a role-play of a radio phone-in programme.

The task-wording provided an open-ended prompt: to *discuss the ways in which the children use language to carry out their role-play task*.

Candidates engaged with the dynamics of the interaction, recognising that the speakers' spontaneity would be affected by the need to imitate (adult) speech patterns absorbed from their experience of radio phone-ins and similar occurrences of contemporary speech. They recognised that Fay, as presenter, took responsibility for topic management and turn-taking.

Useful comment was made on how Fay's opening utterance set up the lexical field of the radio phone-in ("*on the line* with us today") as well as using interrogatives ("is that right (.) hello lisa are you there sweetheart") to include and encourage the younger girl. Fay was correctly seen as using *child-directed* talk, and many candidates commented on how Fay also used terms of address/endearment ("sweetheart ... darling") as well as their names to encourage Lisa and Jenny.

Common (non-fluency) features of spoken language were identified. Candidates noted the incidence of false starts, self-corrections and repairs in Fay's speech as she re-cast utterances in order to clarify/simplify/explain for the younger children. There was competent discussion of how Fay (in particular) used changes in intonation and volume to express interest or (exaggerated) shock at Lisa's revelations about the "sylvanian family caravan".

Weaker answers tended to explain aspects of the dynamics of interaction in terms of emotions, for example accounting for Jenny's two monosyllabic contributions by suggesting shyness or fear of saying the wrong thing. Better answers took linguistic approaches, and noticed that each of Jenny's utterances successfully completed an adjacency pair. They noticed that Lisa began to appreciate the need for more developed answers, and were able to use their knowledge of Grice's conversational maxims to analyse the larger structures of discourse.

Less helpful approaches were characterised by a determination to use prepared material regardless of the passage and task. The better answers were those which applied knowledge of language used to, by and between children to a detailed evaluation of how the interaction worked.

Question 2

The transcription was from the children's television show *Raven*, in which children are given various tasks to perform in pairs and groups. The speakers – a boy and two girls – were all ten years old and had been given fantasy names.

The task-wording was again an open-ended prompt: to *discuss the ways in which the children use language to help each other carry out their tasks*.

Candidates were able to refer to theories of child language acquisition and of co-operative language use, and also to consider the influence of gender on interaction. Weaker answers tended to over-state the (alleged) dominance of the single male. Better answers were characterised by careful reading of the transcription evidence and exploration of how carrying out the joint tasks affected the dynamics of speech.

Talen was seen as the dominant speaker, sometimes on the basis of apt reference to specific examples of speech by and to him from the transcription, but sometimes on the more tenuous grounds of his gender. Candidates who offered theories of gender differences in (children's) speech sometimes went on usefully to explore the instances of praise and support ("GREAT well done" / "that's GREAT that's GREAT"). They noted an example of 'teenspeak' in "thats BRILLIANT that's cool". The most astute candidates identified instances of uncertainty in some of Talen's utterances, two examples of "sort of" and one "kind of". These were variously (and acceptably) described as *hedges* or *fillers*.

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: 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 a professional boxer talking to an amateur.

The task-wording reflected the content of the transcription: to *discuss ways in which the two speakers use language to talk about boxing techniques*.

The interaction between Matt and Noel was seen by most candidates as an example of *occupational dialect*. Matt was correctly identified as the dominant speaker. A good range of terminology – and the associated concepts – was deployed, with generally informed reference to *convergence* and *symmetrical / asymmetrical* relationships. Some candidates made a good case for seeing Matt's "yeah yeah" as an aggressive overlap; others argued equally persuasively for a more co-operative view of the dynamics.

There was some tendency to over-state Noel's (assumed) subordinate position. A corresponding tendency to over-simplify, to see differences as entirely clear-cut, led also to some less helpful assertions about the social class and education of Matt and/or Noel. Candidates quite reasonably cited research by Trudgill (or other linguists) in order to develop points about speech sounds. However, it was too easy for some answers to drift into inaccurate speculation about accent, and to confuse/conflate ideas of sociolect, dialect and idiolect. Better answers included attempts to represent Matt's contractions, elisions and *h-dropping* phonemically.

Another area in which candidates were inclined to over-state and over-simplify was that of register and levels of formality. Distinctions of *formal / informal*, and ideas of *slang* and the *colloquial*, were often imprecise. Occupational dialect was generally seen as exclusive: candidates regularly claimed that the boxing terms in the transcription were completely impenetrable to them. Exaggerated claims were often made, too, for the effects of pronoun use. Here, it would have been relevant to explore the shifts in the meaning of “you” in Matt’s last utterance: “so like if i want to get to a guy (.) youre usually on top of a guy so like if i’m standing back here do you wanna go right up close”.

In this question, as in others, some candidates used the terms *lexis* and *semantic field* interchangeably. Again, the crucial thing is to use concepts and terminology to develop evaluation, so some confusion of technical terms is not of itself necessarily damaging. But candidates who were imprecise in the AO1 dimension tended not to explore potentially interesting semanticity. For example, although almost every answer contained a recognition that *jab*, *block* and *counter* were from a lexical field of terms for boxing techniques, or explored the question of hypernyms/hyponyms, very few considered processes of semantic shift – broadening or narrowing, pejoration or amelioration.

There was good awareness of how the dynamics of interaction might be accompanied by paralinguistic/supra-segmental features. Better answers also turned up telling details in Matt’s and/or Noel’s utterances, such as the *tautology* of “slightest little bit” and the idiolectal “if the fellows got any bit of quality”.

Question 4

The transcription was of the interactions with his audience of a professional psychic who claims he can talk to dead people.

The task-wording was closely matched to the content and purpose of the transcription: to *discuss ways in which the psychic uses language to pass on these ‘messages’*.

Very few candidates did this question. Those who did struggled to make good use of the marks of rising and falling intonation, and found it hard to trace accurately the dynamics of the interactions.

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

Grade Thresholds

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January 2009 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
F651	Raw	60	43	38	33	28	23	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0

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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