

EFL Monitoring Board

English Language Examination – November 2005

Examiners' Report

Section A

While a relatively large number of candidates were able to name the structures in Part 1 correctly, few were competent when asked to underline the stressed syllable in the list of words in Part 2, some even marking two syllables instead of one. Giving phonetic transcription of words in Part 4 also presented difficulties, with some candidates using letters of the alphabet instead of the required phoneme. On the other hand, candidates did not find it so difficult to identify the words given in phonetic script in Part 3. Here, of course, an element of intelligent guesswork must be allowed to have played a part.

It is quite obvious that candidates had not prepared themselves well for this part of the examination and this accounts, in part, for the poor performance of the majority of the candidates in the examination. It therefore needs to be stressed that candidates aspiring to become EFL teachers must be able to decipher phonetic script and interpret correctly the indication of stress given in a dictionary, otherwise they cannot claim to act as models of English for their students since, as the answers given clearly indicate, many familiar English words are incorrectly stressed.

Section B

In Part 1 several candidates did not realize that the words to be compared had been brought to their attention by being printed in bold. They therefore ended up trying to compare whole sentences. In those cases where the single word was identified, the explanation was either not given, or, if given, was often not grammatically valid.

Most candidates fared well in Part 2. However, some ignored the context and inserted words which were grammatically correct but illogical in the context.

In Part 3, a large number of candidates were able to identify and correct mistakes in the letter. However, a number of obvious mistakes were not identified, and some candidates did not indicate that there was no mistake in a particular line by writing an 'o', thus failing to answer the question and get marks for it. The impression was given that some candidates only looked at lines, considering each line in isolation instead of looking at whole sentences.

Section C

In many respects, this Section turned out to be the most disappointing part of the examination paper. In Part 1, many candidates did quite well, yet some failed to give importance to meaning, inserting words which were grammatically correct yet did not match the meaning given in 'The Situation'

It is quite clear from the answers to Parts 2 and 3 that few candidates feel at home with the idiomatic use of English or the use of phrasal verbs. These are exercises that occur frequently in EFL texts; one wonders how many of the candidates would be able to cope confidently if faced with such an exercise in a teaching situation.

Section D

It must be pointed out that few candidates reached the high level of accuracy and fluency which examiners expect when awarding marks of 75% and over. Apart from the two qualities already mentioned, examiners also expect candidates to make use of a range of vocabulary and grammatical structures that is adequate to the demands of the topic they are writing about and not restrict themselves to a monotonous repetition of the same phrases. In the majority of cases, the use of vocabulary and syntax was plagued by Maltesisms caused by direct first language interference and literal translation from Maltese into English.

Many candidates did not plan their essay and must have written as ideas and words came to mind without giving importance to the use of paragraphs, linking of ideas and punctuation. In some cases what they produced resembled more an e-mail to a friend than an examination essay. The influence of SMS language usage was also obvious, such as the use of small case 'i' instead of the large case 'I'.

Topics were often expounded in a naïve and childish manner that one would associate with younger secondary students and not would-be EFL teachers.

Concluding Comment

Overall the standard of many candidates was well below what is expected of them, reflecting the fact that they did not prepare much, or at all, before sitting for the examination. These candidates definitely need to spend more time working on phonetics, grammar and idiomatic expressions. A small number of candidates should never have sat for the examination in the first place since their English is nowhere near the required level. Ultimately the examination reflected a clear lack of confidence in English which can only be gained through long and regular exposure to the language.