

## Extra Practice 3

### Excerpt from *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Mark Haddon

- 1 I find people confusing.
- 2 This is for two main reasons.
- 3 The first main reason is that people do a lot of talking without using any words. Siobhan says that if you raise one eyebrow it can mean lots of different things. It can mean “I want to do sex with you” and it can also mean “I think that what you just said was very stupid.”
- 4 Siobhan also says that if you close your mouth and breathe out loudly through your nose, it can mean that you are relaxed, or that you are bored, or that you are angry, and it all depends on how much air comes out of your nose and how fast and what shape your mouth is when you do it and how you are sitting and what you said just before and hundreds of other things which are too complicated to work out in a few seconds.
- 5 The second main reason is that people often talk using metaphors. These are examples of metaphors  
**I laughed my socks off.**  
**He was the apple of her eye.**  
**They had a skeleton in the cupboard.**  
**We had a real pig of a day.**  
**The dog was stone dead.**
- 6 The word metaphor means carrying something from one place to another, and it comes from the Greek words meta (which means from one place to another) and fereith (which means to carry), and it is when you describe something by using a word for something that it isn't. This means that the word metaphor is a metaphor.

#### Answer the following questions:

- 1 Comment on the narrator in the text. How would you describe him/her<sup>1</sup>?
- 2 Explain the meaning of the metaphors/idioms used in the text. Include three more idioms including (i) a piece of clothing, (ii) food, and (iii) an animal (Total: 9 idioms).
- 3 Explain the type of sentences used and the effect they create<sup>2</sup>.
- 4 Explain the words underlined in the text: word class, grammatical function in the sentence, reason why they end in *-ing*.
- 5 Comment on the punctuation in paragraph 4 and the effect it creates<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> This question will **not** come up as such in Andalucía, since we are not asked to carry out a ‘literary commentary’. It could appear in other Communities, though. At any rate, it is useful for all candidates in order to revise contents in Topics 2 and 10.

<sup>2</sup> This question will **not** come up as such in Andalucía either. However, it could in other Communities, depending on the nature of their practical part. In any case, it is useful for all candidates in order to revise contents in Topics 4, 5 and 6.

## SUGGESTED ANSWERS:

### 1. Comment on the narrator in the text. How would you describe him?

*Topic 2 / Topic 10*

#### Option 1

After one single reading, the audience can already infer that the narrator lacks the language ability necessary for effective communication. Clearly, s/he fails to manage the so-called “negotiation of meaning”, always present in any act of communication.

To start with, s/he states that “[...] people do a lot of talking without using any words.” (par.3) In other words, what s/he is trying to say is that people mean a lot more than they actually say. Indeed, an essential part of communication is that speakers assume that certain information is already known by their listeners (previous, shared knowledge). Since it is treated as known, this information is not stated and counts as part of what is communicated but not said. Therefore, understanding what people mean is not the same as understanding the words they use, a fact the narrator is well aware of.

In that same paragraph, s/he says “[...] if you raise one eyebrow it can mean lots of different things”. Another crucial aspect of communication is that every linguistic expression contains the potential for a multiplicity of meanings, and it is our task as participants to interpret which one is realised on a particular occasion.

In the example mentioned, and the one included in Paragraph 4 (*breathing out loudly through your nose*), we have the insertion of body language. This also brings into play the notion of non-verbal communication, which may be even more difficult to understand than the words themselves, since they require a careful observation of the situation, plus knowledge of culture.

Finally, the narrator includes “metaphors”, which are examples of lexical creativity: they are unexpected and closely related to the extension or shift of meaning. Since the narrator is unable to infer meanings, these metaphors become impossible to understand, since a literal meaning is absolutely non-sensical. S/he him/herself describes metaphors as “when you describe something by using a word for something that it isn’t”. Such is his/her bewilderment.

The paragraphs above show that communication is indeed a very complex matter which requires mutual accommodation as appropriate to purpose. The effective transaction relies on the assumption that speakers and listeners involved in conversation are generally cooperating with each other.

The narrator wonders how it is possible for a speaker to say one thing and mean that but also to mean something else. Such is generally the problem posed to linguistics when tackling indirect speech acts: the example *can you pass me the salt?* would be difficult for our narrator, since s/he would probably simply answer ‘yes’, referring to the fact that s/he is able to pass the salt (ability). S/he would not be able to go beyond and understand the sentence as a request for salt.

Searle suggests that we are able to derive meaning by means of a cooperative process out of which we are able to derive multiple illocutions. Similarly, we should also mention Grice’s

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<sup>3</sup> See footnote 1.

Cooperative Principle, which states that inferences ('implicatures') arise to preserve the assumption of co-operation. These multiple illocutions or implicatures are clearly lacking in our narrator.

### Option 2

As regards the narrative point of view, the narrator is a first-person narrator, as s/he is a character within the story and reveals the plot from his/her own point of view. This allows the insertion of more personal feelings and thoughts; indeed, the text could not be more subjective, a fact evinced by the constant use of the personal pronoun "I" and the extremely personal statements and judgements the narrator makes.

The presentation of speech and thought also conveys important information about the point of view from which a story is narrated. Paragraphs 3 and 4 are clear instances of direct speech ("Siobhan says that if you raise one eyebrow [...]", "Siobhan also says that [...]"), since the "reported words" are transmitted by quoting the words used verbatim. This makes the character's speech be more direct towards the reader.

The narrator's use of simple, everyday language, together with the choice of structures and punctuation, convey a certain idea of innocence which makes the reader sympathise with him/her.

### **2. Explain the meaning of the metaphors/idioms used in the text. Include three more idioms including (i) a piece of clothing, (ii) food, and (iii) an animal (Total: 9 idioms).**

The meaning of the idioms used in the text is included below:

- "I laughed my socks off": I laughed out loud because of something hilarious.
- "He was the apple of her eye": he was her favourite.
- "They had a skeleton in the cupboard": they had something shocking or embarrassing that they wanted to keep secret.
- "We had a real pig of a day": a very difficult or unpleasant day
- "The dog was stone dead": the dog was dead as dead could be

Now some more idioms shall be provided for each category (*please, include a definition and an example for each*. Your answer must be as comprehensive as possible, at all times):

Idioms containing a piece of clothing (*choose 3 only*):

- The boot/shoe is on the other foot
- See sth through rose-coloured glasses
- To be a turncoat
- To fit like a glove
- To tighten one's belt
- In one's birthday suit
- Hit someone below the belt
- Have a card up one's sleeve
- To buckle down
- To buckle up
- Off the cuff
- Pull up one's socks
- Roll up one's sleeves
- Wear one's heart on one's sleeve

Idioms containing food (*choose 3 only*):

- To go pear-shaped
- A piece of cake

- Have a bun in the oven
- To be a big cheese/fish
- Bread and butter
- To have one's cake and eat it
- Cool as a cucumber
- The cream of the crop
- To cry over spilled milk
- **The icing on the cake**
- Not my cup of tea
- Full of beans
- A hard nut to crack
- In a nutshell
- To be nuts
- To take something with a pinch of salt

Idioms containing an animal (*choose 3 only*):

- The donkey work
- Like water off a duck's back
- Like a fish out of water
- Take the bull by the horns (opp: **to sit on the fence**)
- The lion's share
- To be a dark horse
- To be in the doghouse
- **To be like a cat on a hot tin roof**
- Make a pig of oneself
- The last straw (that breaks the camel's back)
- To smell a rat
- **To beat/flog a dead horse**
- **To wolf down** (way of eating)
- With his tail between his legs

### **3. Explain the type of sentences used and the effect they create.**

#### **Topics 4, 5, 6 and 29**

The first two lines constitute instances of simple, affirmative declarative sentences. Paragraph 3 already introduces some subordination, but the text does not yet indulge in much complexity. It is from paragraph 4 onwards that we can more steadily recognize the structure of the sentences used, which allows us to discern the reasoning going on in the narrator's mind. Clearly, the text does not follow the conventions of written language, but rather resemble the features of speech.

Spoken language tends to have clauses connected by coordinate conjunctions, since the processing conditions of speech affect the speaker's ability to plan and organise the message (the words are decided as they are being spoken). When writing, however, the writer has more time to plan and organise his/her message.

If we pay attention to paragraphs 4 and 6, we shall clearly verify that the message has not been planned, nor carefully written nor thought-out. The narrator opts for long complex structures which give the reader the impression of actually being talking with him/her. This way of writing, which parallels the features of speech but also the functioning of our mind, resembles the "stream-of-thought" technique which many writers have employed in their works. An outstanding example is James Joyce, whose Penelope's soliloquy in *Ulysses* is entirely written abiding to this technique.

The effect that this organisation of discourse provokes may be varied. On the one hand, it conveys the idea of immediacy and speed. However, the technique is exploited to such an extent that at times the reader is able to feel the anguish and despair of the narrator, who does

not understand communication around him, not even knowing why. This makes the text astoundingly more personal, since the reader is made to feel the same as the narrator. A veritable achievement on the part of the author.

**4. Explain the words underlined in the text: word class, grammatical function in the sentence, reason why they end in *-ing*.**

*Topics 35, 42 and 43<sup>4</sup>*

	Word-class	Grammatical function	Reason why it ends in <i>-ing</i>
<i>confusing</i>	Adjective	Object complement	Derivational morphology. It is a deverbal adjective: the suffix <i>-ing</i> has been added to the base verb <i>confuse</i> .
<i>talking</i>	Verb: gerund / noun	It is the complement of the preposition <i>of</i> . The whole Prepositional Phrase ( <i>a lot of talking</i> ) functions as Direct Object.	Inflectional morphology: the gerund of the verb, which grammatically functions as a noun, is needed when the verb is the complement of a preposition.
<i>using</i> (par. 3)	Verb: present participle	The grammatical function within its clause ( <i>using any words</i> ) is that of Predicator. The clause functions as an Adverbial Adjunct of Manner.	The <i>-ing</i> form is obligatory after a preposition ( <i>without</i> in this case).
<i>using</i> (par. 5)	Verb: present participle	The grammatical function within its clause ( <i>using metaphors</i> ) is that of Predicator. The clause functions as an Adverbial Adjunct of Manner.	If an adverbial adjunct of manner is formally realised by a clause, the verb takes the form of the present participle, "simulating" the insertion of the preposition <i>by</i> , which is the prototypical one to express "manner".

**5. Comment on the punctuation in paragraph 4 and the effect it creates.**

Punctuation in this paragraph is restricted to four instances of a comma and a final full stop to mark the change of paragraph. The first comma is used to separate the subordinate conditional clause ("if") from its main clause. The remaining three are used in an enumeration. However, there is a point in which the narrator opts for not using commas at all, even if the enumeration has not finished yet. S/he opts for not interrupting his stream of thought.

<sup>4</sup> Topics 42 and 43 are included in Volume III, which you have not received yet. However, I am certain you will be able to carry out the activity nonetheless.

At least one full stop should have been employed (“[...] or that you are angry. It all depends [...]”), and the second part of the text where no commas appear should be rephrased to allow for a coherent and cohesive organisation of ideas.

Punctuation is one of the most important aspects of written English, since it helps us to organise the message clearly: it contributes to the internal cohesion of the text. However, the rather abnormal use that the narrator makes of punctuation reinforces the general feeling that s/he is writing as s/he speaks.

Together with the type of sentences employed, the use (or rather non-use) of punctuation conveys the idea of immediacy and speed. The reader can actually feel the anguish and despair of the narrator, who does not understand communication around him, not even knowing why. This makes the text astoundingly more personal, since the reader is made to feel the same as the narrator. A veritable achievement on the part of the author.