



## Evaluating 'Evaluation': A Case Study of the Application Question in the General Paper

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## The Context

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- The General Paper (GP) – what is it?
- H1 Subject
  - “broadening purpose”
  - “acquire foundational knowledge and skills”
  - “future studies at the university level”



## General Paper – 2008 Syllabus

- “continues to underscore maturity of thought, independent thinking and the proficient use of language.”
- “Develop the skills of evaluation of arguments and opinions”
- “... analyse and evaluate issues **across disciplines**, showing awareness of their significance and implications for the individual and society.”
- “ ... evaluate information”



## The Application Question (AQ)

- What is it? - Status in the General Paper
- “Candidates will also be required to synthesise information and respond to concepts or ideas conveyed. They will apply their response, based on their understanding and interpretation of the text(s) as a whole, to a task derived from the text(s).”



## Questions & Issues

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- What does it mean to evaluate?
- How do we recognise it *in* and *for* assessment?
- *Who* counts *what* as evaluation, and *for whom*?



## Issue 1

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- A shared 'language' among teachers that systematically articulates their sense of the complexity of evaluation to students?
- Compatibility of this 'language' to the perceived official consciousness of what evaluation is as construed by UCLES and curriculum designers?



## Issue 2

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- Artificial division between thought and language, content and language
- Embedding of linguistic processes within a dominant official consciousness of evaluation as content-oriented



- “They demonstrated an agility in using ideas of one author to counter arguments of the other, as well as coming up with their own ideas to expose flaws they recognised.”
- “They argued passionately that making mistakes was a learning experience”
- “... write with fluency, variety and an individual voice in the application question.”



## Appraisal – how does it fit in?

- Useful in making explicit the 'hidden' linguistic processes that construe evaluation
- "the semantic resources used to negotiate emotions, judgements, and valuations, alongside resources for amplifying and engaging with these evaluations" (Martin 2001:145)
- Linguistic resources for evaluation systematically organised into three inter-related sub-systems: ATTITUDE, GRADUATION & ENGAGEMENT



## Systems of Appraisal (Attitude)

- Appreciation > Judgement > Affect
  - Result of context and nature of discourse
- Predominance of Appreciation: valuation
  - Assessment of the social significance of the text/process in question
  - "Of these dimensions [of Appreciation], valuation is especially tied up with field, since the criteria for valuing a text/process are for the most part institutionally specific." (Martin, 2001: 160)



## Implicit VS Explicit Evaluation

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- Implicit
  - Eg. Irony

- “This is true, especially as that is how society works as well. Society emphasizes on speed and efficiency and the ones who cannot keep up are left behind. In Singapore, the main example will have to be the education system. In the examination scheme, hard work throughout the years of education depends on a few hours. The content you write on the paper need not be the best, just the best you can do within the specified time. Elaborate answers are not needed as they take up the time that can be better spent skimming the surface and meeting the requirements of more questions so as to get more marks within the shortest amount of time. The reality is that the fastest person wins, so it is only natural that computer speeds get faster and faster, as do modern speeds.”



- Explicit
  - Engagement
  - Balanced treatment to the evaluation of the text through inter-subjective positioning.



## Engagement – Inter-subjective positioning of multiple views

- Evaluation in the AQ requires students to draw upon linguistic resources to discursively position their own views in relation to the viewpoints found in the passage(s)



## Projection

- Frequent instances of Attribution
- Evaluation implied in the choice of projective verbs used (i.e. they vary in their intensity of rhetorical action)
- "Nicholas Carr asserts ...", "Douglas Rushkoff states ..."
- "While Rushkoff may argue that we can develop our own understanding of texts, Carr counters with the point that websites present their own interpretations of it"



## Modality and Concession

- Crucial in constructing a balanced perspective when writing an AQ response
- Achieving balance equated with "maturity of thought"

- The prevalence of networking websites like Friendster and more recently, Facebook, of which the majority (EV) are teenagers, illustrates the pancake phenomenon through "our networked communities". This **indeed does** reduce the inconvenience of having to attain information that **might** be work-related or otherwise. (EV)  
Teenagers who are part of various networking communities, however, **are not as** experienced in life because they are young and while these communities **might** allow them to make new friends, [there] are also more avenues by which youths **can** fall prey to crime, (EV/EX), illustrating how the pancake phenomenon is **more broadly** harmful than beneficial. (Script B)

- I am **more** inclined to agree with Carr, **(R)** even though both writers have good points, as the Internet and the collectiveness of the people **cannot** replace the sacred human thought ...  
To form our own thoughts, we **have to** immerse in things that provoke thought, such as paintings or literature. As Descartes, the great philosopher, said, "You are what you think", so we **have to** form our own thoughts and **not** be satisfied with others', [**t, Judgement: + propriety**] or we **will** lose our own identity. [**t, Judgement: - propriety** → **t, Affect: insecurity**]  
(Script A)

- Overall, I feel that the pancake phenomenon does us more harm than good. Even though pancakes may strike us as something good and tasty, they are flat, homogeneous and plain. Some toppings in the form of the artistic may be able to make us better people. (Script A)



- Mastery of linguistic controls that position a discursive voice which simultaneously expands and regulates the heteroglossic space between reader and text
- Movement along the cline of Extra-vocalisation and Intra-vocalisation

- Nicholas Carr **asserts**
- that the pancake phenomenon has led to an increasing dependence on the Internet and the *subsumation* of other technologies, and the printing press. (R) [Extra-v]
- This is **largely true**
- in the sense that the overdependence of the Internet **especially by teenagers today** has led to the subsequent *alienation* of other means to attain information,
- and a paradigm shift in society that might be **more broadly harmful than beneficial.** (EV/EX) [Intra-v]
- (Clauses 2-6)

- Douglas Rushkoff **states**
- that "what creates the pancake phenomenon is our access to other people". (R) [Extra-v]
- This is the key characteristic of the pancake phenomenon – (EV)
- the *loss of the individual's information to anyone who chooses to do so* and the **sheer powerlessness** of a particular individual. (EX) [Intra-v]
- This is **broadly harmful** to the youth of today. (R) (Clauses 9-13)



## Pedagogical Implications

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- Teaching the AQ
- Appraisal as a complement to current approaches – Socratic Questioning & the 'structural' approach
- Using Appraisal to talk about the use of language in constructing evaluation



## Implications on Assessment

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- Pedagogical aims VS Assessment methods
  - Mismatch?
- Assessor's understanding of evaluation
  - Expand current perceptions of evaluation



## Evaluation, Field and Disciplinarity

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- What counts as evaluation depends significantly on the field of discourse and more importantly, the discipline of the text/process.



- Institutional practices
  - Evaluation of given texts on the grounds of the discipline of the subject in question.
  - Evaluation of given texts with the awareness of his/her response as part of the *General Paper*.
- Inter-dialogic disciplines within a single discursive event



- Effective students is one who is able to negotiate the different disciplines involved.
- Expectation of student in terms of:
  1. Knowledge of field
  2. Understanding of discipline(s)
  3. Critical evaluation of using (1) and (2).