



UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA
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CENTRE FOR DISTANCE AND CONTINUING EDUCATION
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FIRST EXAMINATION IN ARTS (EXTERNAL) - DECEMBER 2018
ප්‍රථම ශාස්ත්‍ර පරීක්ෂණය (ඛාහිර) - දෙසැම්බර් 2018
ENGE 101: Writing and Comprehension Skills in English

Time allowed: Three (03) Hours

Answer all three questions.

- 1) Write an essay of at least 250 words on ONE of the following topics. (Please note that you are free to adopt any view on the topic.) (40 Marks)
- It is more important to eradicate the root causes of a war than to win the war.
 - Should same-sex marriage be legalized in Sri Lanka?
 - Child labour is a crime.
 - Development that destroys nature is meaningless.
- 2) Write a précis, summarising the passage given below, according to the following instructions. Use your own words as far as possible. Simply reproducing sentences from the original text will not earn you full marks. (30 Marks)
- Provide the passage with a title. Mention it at the beginning.
 - Write the précis in approximately 205 words.
 - State the number of words you have used at the end of the précis.

The most fundamental mechanism by which humans share information is language, but does language fall into the category of biologically evolved function or cultural invention? If it is, at least in part, an evolved function, how did language evolve, and what are the mechanisms of the mind that depend upon it? How language came into being has intrigued many great minds, including Charles Darwin, but it is also a question that we can all understand and ponder. In the course of thinking about language and its evolution, we inevitably introspect and examine the very process of thought itself. We grit our teeth in frustration with what the past hides from us. But ultimately, we may experience personal epiphanies about the workings of the mind, triggered by ideas conveyed to us through the language upon which we are reflecting. There is a great deal to read on this topic, and much of it is worthwhile. Here we shall only attempt to whet the appetite.

In the scientifically literate world, and even in many parts of the United States, evolution has become mundane fact. Wander through any museum of natural history and view the skeletons of animals from both past and present, and this central theme around which all biology is organized will seem obvious. We recognize the structure of our own hand and pelvis in the articulated forelimb and vestigial pelvis of a whale skeleton. That we share an ancestor with these behemoths of the sea seems clear.

The question arises not whether evolution occurred, but why people were so slow to grasp it. Is evolution like the seemingly unsolvable puzzle that becomes trivial once the answer is revealed? Are we just smarter than people were 150 years ago? And if evolution is obvious, why do we make such a big deal of Darwin? Evolution and the relatedness of animals are in fact very old ideas and common to many cultures, presumably because they are obvious. What is not obvious, however, are the mechanisms by which evolution operates.

The theory of natural selection, Darwin's great idea, was important because it resolved aspects of evolution that run counter to our intuitive sense about information: information does not arise spontaneously, but is transmitted from a source to a receiver. In a seminal paper in 1948, Claude Shannon formulated these ideas into a precise mathematical theory, known as "information theory", that allowed for exact quantities of information being transmitted to be calculated (information theory is important in many subfields of neuroscience – for background see Lucent's Information Theory Web Page. But in the case of evolution, the source of the information that has led to increasingly complex structures in some organisms is unclear. Darwin's insight was that the information source is the environment. Random mutations in our DNA do not generate information. Rather it is the selection of individuals that carry these mutations (a euphemism for the relatively higher killing of those who don't) by the environment that imparts new information to the gene pool.

Many vertebrates, however, do not rely solely on genetics to transmit information to the next generation. Conditions in the mother's external environment can influence the conditions in the womb, which can in turn greatly influence the developing embryo. After birth, parental nurturing can transfer still more information to the young. In humans, this extra-genetic transmission has become massive through the invention of culture and technology. The written word is certainly a profound cultural invention that has greatly changed the amount of information being transmitted from generation to generation. But is the language upon which writing is built a cultural construct or a biological capacity? This question continues to be one of some debate, but the answer certainly lies somewhere between these two extremes.

3) Read the following passage and answer all the questions given below.

(30 Marks)

Okika sprang to his feet and also saluted his clansmen four times. Then he began to speak:

"All our gods are weeping. Idemili is weeping. Ogwugwu is weeping, Agbala is weeping, and all the others. Our dead fathers are weeping because of the shameful sacrilege they

are suffering and the abomination we have all seen with our eyes.” He stopped again to steady his trembling voice.

“This is a great gathering. No clan can boast of greater numbers or greater valour. But are we all here? I ask you: Are all the sons of Umuofia with us here?” A deep murmur swept through the crowd.

“They are not,” he said. “They have broken the clan and gone their several ways. We who are here this morning have remained true to our fathers, but our brothers have deserted us and joined a stranger to soil their fatherland. If we fight the stranger we shall hit our brothers and perhaps shed the blood of a clansman. But we must do it. Our fathers never dreamt of such a thing, they never killed their brothers. But a white man never came to them. So we must do what our fathers would never have done. Eneke the bird was asked why he was always on the wing and he replied: ‘Men have learnt to shoot without missing their mark and I have learnt to fly without perching on a twig.’ We must root out this evil. And if our brothers take the side of evil we must root them out too. And we must do it *now*. We must bale this water now that it is only ankle-deep.”

At this point there was a sudden stir in the crowd and every eye was turned in one direction. There was a sharp bend in the road that led from the market-place to the white man’s court, and to the stream beyond it. And so no one had seen the approach of the five court messengers until they had come round the bend, a few paces from the edge of the crowd. Okonkwo was sitting at the edge.

He sprang to his feet as soon as he saw who it was. He confronted the head messenger, trembling with hate, unable to utter a word. The man was fearless and stood his ground, his four men lined up behind him.

In that brief moment the world seemed to stand still, waiting. There was utter silence. The men of Umuofia were merged into the mute backcloth of trees and giant creepers, waiting.

The spell was broken by the head messenger. “Let me pass!” he ordered.

“What do you want here?”

“The white man whose power you know too well has ordered this meeting to stop.”

In a flash Okonkwo drew his matchet. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. Okonkwo’s matchet descended twice and the man’s head lay beside his uniformed body.

He wiped his matchet on the sand and went away.

When the District Commissioner arrived at Okonkwo’s compound at the head of an armed band of soldiers and court messengers he found a small crowd of men sitting wearily in the *obi*. He commanded them to come outside, and they obeyed without a murmur.

“Which among you is called Okonkwo?” he asked through his interpreter.

“He is not here,” replied Obierika.

“Where is he?”

“He is not here!”

The Commissioner became angry and red in the face. He warned the men that unless they produced Okonkwo forthwith he would lock them all up. The men murmured among themselves, and Obierika spoke again.

“We can take you where he is, and perhaps your men will help us.”

The Commissioner did not understand what Obierika meant when he said, "Perhaps your men can help us." One of the most infuriating habits of these people was their love of superfluous words, he thought.

Obierika with five or six others led the way. The Commissioner and his men followed, their firearms held at the ready. He had warned Obierika that if he and his men played any monkey tricks they would be shot. And so they went.

There was a small bush behind Okonkwo's compound. The only opening into this bush from the compound was a little round hole in the red-earth wall through which fowls went in and out in their endless search for food. The hole would not let a man through. It was to this bush that Obierika led the Commissioner and his men. They skirted round the compound, keeping close to the wall. The only sound they made was with their feet as they crushed dry leaves.

Then they came to the tree from which Okonkwo's body was dangling, and they stopped dead.

"Perhaps your men can help us bring him down and bury him," said Obierika. "We have sent for strangers from another village to do it for us, but they may be a long time coming."

The District Commissioner changed instantaneously. The resolute administrator in him gave way to the student of primitive customs.

"Why can't you take him down yourselves?" he asked.

"It is against our custom," said one of the men. "It is an abomination for a man to take his own life. It is an offense against the Earth, and a man who commits it will not be buried by his clansmen. His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it. That is why we ask your people to bring him down, because you are strangers."

"Will you bury him like any other man?" asked the Commissioner.

"We cannot bury him. Only strangers can. We shall pay your men to do it. When he has been buried we will then do our duty by him. We shall make sacrifices to cleanse the desecrated land."

Obierika, who had been gazing steadily at his friend's dangling body, turned suddenly to the District Commissioner and said ferociously: "That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog." He could not say any more. His voice trembled and choked his words.

"Shut up!" shouted one of the messengers, quite unnecessarily.

"Take down the body," the Commissioner ordered his chief messenger, "and bring it and all these people to the court."

"Yes, sah," the messenger said, saluting.

The Commissioner went away, taking three or four of the soldiers with him. In the many years in which he had toiled to bring civilisation to different parts of Africa he had learnt a number of things. One of them was that a District Commissioner must never attend to such undignified details as cutting down a hanged man from the tree. Such attention would give the natives a poor opinion of him. In the book which he planned to write he would stress that point. As he walked back to the court he thought about the book. Everyday brought him some new material. The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out details. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.

- a) Briefly discuss two characteristic features of the lifestyle of the community described in this passage. Support your answer with examples from the passage.
- b) What kind of a person is Okonkwo? Support your answer with examples from the passage.
- c) What can you infer about the position of women in this community? Support your answer with examples from the passage.
- d) Explain what the following sentence means in the context of the passage: “We must bale this water now that it is only ankle-deep.” (The sentence is underlined for your convenience.)
- e) Explain what the following sentence means in the context of the passage: “The resolute administrator in him gave way to the student of primitive customs.” (The sentence is underlined for your convenience.)
- f) Briefly discuss the nature of the relationship between the District Commissioner and the community described in the passage.
