

SPANISH

Paper 8685/01

Speaking

General

As in previous sessions, Centres fell into two main categories in their conduct of the speaking tests: the majority carried out the tests competently and professionally and Examiners acknowledge with thanks the efforts made by these Centres to enable the moderation to be carried out efficiently and effectively. A significant minority, however, still caused problems similar to those noted in previous reports through failure to complete the necessary documentation.

A few Centres were still not adequately familiar with the mark scheme, leading to distorted, over-optimistic assessment, or provided only a total percentage mark with no justification of how the constituent marks were scored.

Examiners repeat that working mark sheets must show a mark for each of the criteria for each section of the test, i.e. thirteen columns, 3 for part one, 5 each for parts two and three, not just a section total, or the overall total.

The Moderator must hear clear evidence that the candidate is seeking information from the Examiner for a mark to be awarded in both the topic conversation and general conversation. Some Centres were still awarding marks even when no such questions were asked. Examiners should remind candidates to ask questions at the end of each section if this has not happened naturally in the course of the conversations.

Additionally there were problems with recording quality from a few Centres and occasional instances of an unrecorded test even though the introductory details were recorded. Please check recording and re-wind tapes to the start before sending.

Topic presentation and discussion

The presentation is a formal exercise in which candidates should clearly and concisely give a relevant overview of a topic related to the Spanish-speaking world.

An interesting range of subjects was offered by candidates in many Centres. There were, however, sometimes cases where the topic was not sufficiently focused on the Hispanic context – it is essential that when dealing with themes such as, for example, the environment, health, social issues, etc., the candidate can clearly relate the issues specifically and explicitly to a Spanish-speaking country or region. In the topic conversation, teacher Examiners should take care to draw relevant cultural information from the candidate. It was pleasing to note increasingly that Examiners were gently prompting candidates where necessary to go beyond universal application or general knowledge.

There were, however, still a few examples of topics that either did not meet the academic depth of this level, or were clearly not relevant, such as 'my hobbies', 'my holidays in', etc.

General Conversation

Although 'general', the conversation should reflect the academic and linguistic depth appropriate to advanced level. This part of the test continued to be more variable in terms both of examining and candidate response. Topics discussed should allow the candidate to show the ability not just to provide information but also to debate, using a varied range of structure and register. There should also be a degree of unpredictability, to allow the candidate to gain credit, where appropriate, for higher-level language and spontaneity. Of course, weaker candidates may well have found that they could only concentrate on a couple of prepared items such as future plans or leisure interests, and their mark should reflect such

limitation accordingly. In all cases, however, candidates should be offered sufficient challenges to be given the opportunity to perform at their highest possible level.

Most candidates remembered the need to ask the Examiner questions and obtain information – or were reminded to do so. Candidates should be given due credit for relevant questioning, though Centres are reminded that high marks should not be awarded for rhetorical, all-purpose, unrelated or one-word questions.

SPANISH

Paper 8685/02
Reading and Writing

General comments

This June's examination followed a tried and tested format which most candidates appeared to be very familiar with. The paper discriminated well and a wide range of marks was awarded across the ability range. Candidates responded well to the different aspects of the topic of violence presented by the two texts; sometimes a little too well by adding extra information which was not being tested to their answers.

The time allocation for the exam was adequate for all but the very weakest of candidates. Occasionally parts of questions or even whole questions were omitted, apparently by oversight rather than through incomprehension. There was a marked improvement in candidates keeping within the 140 word limit in **Question 5**. (Anything beyond that limit, sometimes an entire **Question 5b**, will be disregarded.)

There was some very good paraphrasing of relevant points in **Questions 3** and **4**. Even candidates of more modest linguistic ability made valiant efforts, clearly being aware that an attempt to say things in their own words had a chance of scoring, whereas more than four consecutive words lifted directly from the text would not.

Comments on specific questions

SECCIÓN PRIMERA

Question 1

This multiple choice vocabulary test provided a very accessible start to the exam. Few candidates failed to identify at least two correct definitions and a considerable number successfully identified all five. On the few occasions when candidates answered with both a number and a non-matching definition the number alone was marked, as in the example on the paper.

Question 2

The transformation exercise, designed to test knowledge of grammatical structure, proved to be a sterner task. Only the very good candidates succeeded in scoring full marks whilst less able candidates frequently had difficulty in scoring one or more. With this type of exercise it must be remembered that a correct linguistic manipulation may not be enough in itself; the answer should fit back into the original text and retain exactly the same meaning.

- (a) This was generally done well, the commonest error being a failure to make the agreement for *presentadas*.
- (b) The use of *soler* did not appear to be so widely known and many candidates came unstuck here.
- (c) The element of comparison contained in *mayores* was sometimes overlooked with *más* being omitted from answers.
- (d) Although this structure is not uncommon to language manipulation tests many candidates tried to link *al* with *hombre* rather than a verb.
- (e) Only a minority of candidates identified the need for the subjunctive.

Question 3

Although this was quite a challenging text it was comfortably within the range of those taking an examination at this level. The better candidates took the linguistic difficulties comfortably in their stride and were often able to come up with some excellent paraphrasing whilst less able candidates frequently struggled with comprehension and then resorted to 'lifting'.

- (a) There was some good paraphrasing of *violación a los derechos humanos* and also *represalias*. Candidates sometimes just missed scoring the other marks not giving full enough answers: *la principal causa de muerte* and *separación...del domicilio familiar* were both elements sought by the mark scheme.
- (b) The first part of this question was generally answered well. The second part was often omitted, possibly because of the presence of the unfamiliar term *pincelada*. Candidates who did recognise this word, or those who were able to guess at its meaning because of the context in which it appeared, gave good answers in their own words.
- (c) There were answers which began *En mi opinión...* and then went on to discuss the matter without making any reference to the text. It should be remembered that whenever the candidate's personal opinion is sought this will always be clearly signposted in the question. Apart from this, the question proved to be a very good discriminator, challenging candidates to compare the different reactions of women who are well-off and those from a more disadvantaged background.
- (d) The first part of this question produced a wide variety of excellent paraphrase for the idea of women who have more control in a relationship. Sometimes the second mark was missed when candidates said that this provoked attacks rather than giving a reason for it such as *los hombres se sienten inferiores o amenazados*.
- (e) The mark scheme allowed for five different aspects of domestic violence which could be mentioned, although only three were needed to score full marks. Many candidates scored well here, although weaker candidates sometimes had difficulty in avoiding copying directly from the text.

SECCIÓN SEGUNDA

Question 4

Questions on this text dealing with a different aspect of violence (violence among young people) also discriminated well. Good candidates achieved scores which were comparable with those of the previous question but it was noticeable that weaker candidates often appeared to run out of stamina here and preferred to concentrate their efforts on the final question.

- (a) A surprising number of candidates failed to convey both elements of the comparison. Either the bustle and activity of a workday morning was missing or the fact that this was being likened to the crowds of young people going out on the town after midnight.
- (b) This was another question which sometimes prompted answers from candidates' personal experience and not from the text (*porque un insulto lo toman personal y éste quiere vengarse*). Apart from this the question was generally well answered despite a tendency to overlook the crowds of people in a confined space, or simply to 'lift' *una gran masa de personas*.
- (c) The fact that this question was divided into two sections helped candidates to score marks, if not always full ones.
- (d) Although marks were readily available for identifying the causes of violence only better candidates picked up on the fact that films or computer games are to be blamed for outbreaks of youth violence within the family. Some candidates wrongly returned to the topic of domestic violence at this point.
- (e) If candidates were able to avoid directly copying phrases from the text they generally did well here. However, it was another of those questions where there was a tendency to offer personal opinions in addition to, or even instead of, the information given.

Question 5

- (a) There were some good summaries written this year. Centres appear to be making their candidates aware that this question carries 10+ very accessible marks and have practised the techniques required. The 90-100 words available leave no room for lengthy introductions; it is necessary to plunge straight in and select details from the text which are relevant. Many of these details will often have featured as answers to questions in earlier parts of the exam but on this occasion there is no penalty for failure to paraphrase.

Candidates who had understood the two texts and who were able to succinctly summarise the salient details fared well. Those who did not fare so well gave answers which were vague and generalised or included their own views or information which had not appeared in the texts.

- (b) There was an interesting range of response to the question of the presence of violence in the candidate's own society. This is the question where the candidate will always have the opportunity to express his or her own opinion. The technique (not an easy one) required is to try and cram as many different ideas as possible into the two or three sentences available. Although there has been an improvement on previous years there were still candidates, including some very good ones, who scored zero for their answer as they had already written in excess of 140 words in their summary.

SPANISH

Paper 8685/03

Essay

General comments

Once again, examiners can report with considerable satisfaction that the majority of candidates performed well in this particular paper. Most essays were relevant to the title set and followed a clear line of thought. The level of linguistic ability on display was, if anything, slightly more impressive during this session than in previous ones.

There were, thankfully, fewer examples this year of candidates writing pre-learnt essays that were clearly not a response to the title set. It would appear therefore that the overwhelming number of candidates do now understand the importance of responding to the actual title set and not just the general topic from which the title comes.

Those few essays that went way above the word count lost marks for language on the grounds that the longer the essay went on, the more likely they were to make language errors. Candidates will inevitably be penalized if they insist on writing more than the rubric allows. Centres would do well to pass this information on to all their students.

The overall quality of Spanish used by candidates was very good indeed. Where problems occurred, they were predictable in their nature. Inconsistent, and sometimes non-existent, use of accents continues to be a common problem for too many candidates. One can only repeat yet again the advice given in so many previous reports, namely that '...candidates must accept the fact that accents are an important part of the Spanish language. Failing to use them appropriately is destined to result in a loss of marks for grammatical accuracy'. Another trend in a number of essays this year was to treat all 'if' clauses in the same way by injecting the subjunctive into almost every verb, regardless of the tense. This resulted in utterances such as *...si el problema siga de esta manera, sea difícil resolverlo...* (sic.). Correct application of the rules governing the formulation of such sentences will impress examiners and it is worth bringing this to the attention of candidates for appropriate use in their essays. One final point worthy of note is the phenomenon, not seen previously in this paper, of candidates incorrectly ending sentences with *creo que* or *opino que* or *pienso que* leading to statements such as *...este tema es de suma importancia, creo que*.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1

This title was by far the most popular with candidates. Perceived possibly as the most accessible title on the paper, it did indeed produce many outstanding pieces of writing. Strong personal opinions were very much in evidence from many candidates and yet for some this caused a few problems given that long-winded references to personal family history sometimes ended up with the candidate losing the thread of the actual essay.

Question 2

A popular title on this paper. Nearly all responses argued that smoking is not a human right and that the smoking bans now being imposed in many countries were indeed the appropriate courses of action given the health risks involved in passive smoking. There was evidence of detailed research into this topic from a good number of candidates probably because of the topical nature of the issue.

Question 3

A less attractive title for many candidates. Many of those that attempted this title, however, managed to produce a piece of coherent writing, arguing with great conviction that unemployment is indeed the main cause of many of today's problems. Nevertheless, many essays simply described the problems caused by unemployment and failed to develop any real argument for or against the statement in the title.

Question 4

Quite a popular title. Many candidates elected to refer to the war in Iraq, understandably, to illustrate their unanimously held view that war does undoubtedly represent the worst aspect of the human race.

Question 5

This title was avoided by the majority of candidates, possibly due to the perception that the other titles on the paper were less demanding. The essays that were produced took the line that energy conservation is the responsibility of each and every individual but that the support of national governments is most desirable.