

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/01

Speaking

General

The majority of tests were carried out in full accordance with the requirements. Centres are now generally familiar with the procedure to be followed in the conduct of the tests and with the examination techniques which are appropriate for this level and which are likely to be in the best interests of the candidates. Teachers/Examiners involved with the tests in the Centres are thanked for their part in this exercise.

Previous reports have outlined problems involving aspects of administration that have caused difficulties for the moderation process. Although relatively few, a small number of Centres – regrettably slightly more this session – did not send the necessary documentation, or did not complete mark sheets or wrote only a total percentage mark, or, in isolated cases, awarded marks above the maxima. Working mark sheets *must* show a mark for each of the criteria for each section of the test, i.e. thirteen columns: three for part one, five each for parts two and three, not just a section total, or the overall total. Without this information, the Centre's marks cannot be confirmed.

Recording quality was generally good, but please check that candidates are clearly audible, and please re-wind tapes to the start before sending.

Topic presentation and discussion

There were very few examples this session of a topic being offered that was not in some way related to the Spanish-speaking context. Problems were sometimes encountered, however, when a candidate would deal with this context by implication rather than making it very clear how the topic was particularly relevant to the country or area concerned. In preparing for the topic, candidates should be encouraged, for example, to include some concrete reference, statistics, opinions and analysis, etc., which will make quite clear what the cultural link is. It was fairly common for a number of introductory presentations to fail to mention concretely the name of a Spanish-speaking country and the Moderator was left to wonder where exactly the candidate was talking about. Even when the tests are being conducted in a Centre within a Spanish-speaking country, care must be taken to show that the topic is in fact being specifically focused on and relevant to that Hispanic viewpoint or cultural environment. Candidates who insist on dealing with the topic at a very general level only cannot score a high mark for their presentation.

Teachers/Examiners are important in their role to probe and question information given by candidates – candidates should be given an opportunity to counter an argument or substantiate a point of view in the discussion. In a few cases the topic conversation tended to take the form of a trigger question inviting the candidate to give a prepared answer, or another short presentation; in such cases the candidate will again not achieve the highest marks for fluency and responsiveness. Similarly, to gain access to the highest marks for linguistic range and maturity, candidates must be encouraged – and given the opportunity – to respond to higher-level language in terms of syntax and register.

We reiterate that the presentation is a formal exercise. As a coherent introduction to the topic, candidates should show relevant knowledge with evidence of preparation and organisation, an appropriate level of language, and delivery that will communicate effectively with clear diction, accurate pronunciation and intonation.

General Conversation

Many Centres had acted on previous reminders that the general conversation should be at an advanced-level standard, both linguistically and contextually. This part of the test allowed candidates to deal with topics in an informed but non-specialist way, and frequently included discussion of issues related to education, society, political events, a news item, and so on. Candidates are assessed on their ability to use an appropriate range of linguistic skills, including grammar, accuracy, range and register, when dealing with factual or hypothetical matters. The Examiner will, of course, adjust the level and topic according to the performance or ability of the individual candidate, but it is important to give all candidates the opportunity and expectation to go beyond everyday, predictable areas and language, and to operate at their best.

Questions asked by the candidate

Most candidates managed to ask the Examiner questions and obtain information. The Examiner should remind candidates to do so, if such questioning has not arisen naturally in the course of the conversations. Centres are reminded that high marks should not be awarded for rhetorical, all-purpose or one-word questions. Please be reminded that candidates should be offered the opportunity to seek information from the Examiner in both the topic and the general conversations in order to be assessed fully (marks out of five in each section) – there were occasions when this was done only at one stage in the test, though marks had erroneously been credited for both.

SPANISH

Paper 8685/02
Reading and Writing

General comments

The level of difficulty in the November 2007 Spanish Reading and Writing examination was fairly evenly spread throughout the paper. No single question proved to be more challenging or accessible than the others. Although a few less able candidates had difficulty finishing within the allocated time, the vast majority had no such problems. There were encouraging signs that Centres are coaching their candidates in the techniques which can enhance performance in this component. Familiarity with test types and the skills required can often boost outcomes by a grade or so. As always, candidates' performances covered the complete range of ability and there were many pleasing pieces of work submitted at all levels.

Comments on specific questions

SECCIÓN PRIMERA

Question 1

A good technique for tackling this type of question (a test type which is in very regular use) is to copy out the phrase for which the equivalent is being sought. If the equivalent is then written alongside it is then possible to see how good a match has been found and, importantly, to see whether it contains surplus or insufficient material. On far too many occasions candidates successfully spotted the correct target but failed to pick up the mark when they added or omitted words. The **exact** equivalent is required to gain the mark.

Generally speaking, however, this question proved to be a fairly gentle, familiar start to the paper with none of the targeted phrases appearing to be more elusive than its fellows.

Question 2

As with **Question 1**, it is a good idea to write the phrase down before attempting the required manipulation. Candidates can then see at a glance whether their answer contains all the elements of the original. The best way to check if the task has been accomplished is to try to fit the answer into the original text and see if the original meaning is retained.

- (a) This was not the first time that candidates have been asked to convert *al + infinitive* to *cuando + indicative* and many correct answers were received. The commonest error was the use of the preterite tense, which would not fit in the original text.
- (b) A wide variety of versions was offered, with the two most acceptable being *los juegos se suceden uno tras otro* and *a este juego le sucede uno tras otro*. Some candidates spoiled an otherwise correct answer by adding an unnecessary *y luego otro*.
- (c) There were many possible ways to answer this question, using either the subjunctive or the indicative forms of *tener*, *cumplir*, *alcanzar* or *llegar a*. A not uncommon error was to make the verb plural, which again would not fit back into the original text.

- (d) This was another question which allowed for many variations of answers, with *falta* being permissible as either a verb or a noun form. The essential requirement was to retain the idea of 'they lack', and this could be successfully rendered by: *les falta / les hace falta* or *tienen / sufren (de) (una) falta* etc.
- (e) By contrast, this manipulation offered very few alternatives and they all hinged on recognising that *sueña* was a verb form and it must take the preposition *con*. The simplest answer was *sueña con validar...*, although some admirable subjunctive versions were also submitted, for example, *sueña con que se validen...*

Question 3

The text was fairly accessible to candidates and few appeared to encounter difficulties in locating the information being sought. Most seemed to be aware that 'lifting' chunks of text for their answers would not score marks and there were many noteworthy attempts at paraphrase. Several candidates quite legitimately made use of the phrases offered for manipulation in the previous exercise.

- (a) Most candidates picked up a comfortable two marks here by successfully defining the 'baby test'. Only a few scored the third mark available for attempting to rephrase '*nombre casero*'. Among the better attempts at this were: *común, vulgar, no científico, informal* and *más conocido*.
- (b) The fact that other tests only measure the results whereas this test measures the processes seemed to be widely understood. As long as four consecutive words were not 'lifted' from the text in answering, then another two marks were readily available.
- (c) (i) Again, the reference material in the text proved easy to locate. A few candidates failed to pick up the maximum two marks available, with lack of elaboration on *razones orgánicas y socioambientales* being the principal cause.
- (ii) This question proved more of a challenge, requiring candidates to identify the causes of *retrasos* and to link them to all three social classes. Lack of attention amongst the upper classes was commonly noted although malnutrition amongst the poor was often not so clearly picked out. Premature birth among the middle classes was very frequently ignored.
- (d) As was to be expected, this question attracted a wide variety of answers. Provided that candidates did not panic when confronted by the perhaps unfamiliar word *hipoteca*, the idea behind the remark should have been reasonably accessible. Answers containing the idea that the authorities should act now to protect children for the future's sake collected both marks. A not uncommon misinterpretation was that more than half the children of Venezuela are malnourished.
- (e) Only a very few candidates successfully identified the three elements needed to pick up full marks for this question. If correctly paraphrased, 'all Venezuelan children should have the same opportunities' gave at least one mark. Only rarely did candidates note both the other elements: 'the test should be adopted as a measure of development' and 'the authorities should respond'.

SECCIÓN SEGUNDA

Question 4

The passages from the text needed to answer the questions were quickly identified by the majority of candidates. However, it should be remembered that if a question is worth five marks it is unlikely that a two line answer will suffice.

- (a) Most candidates correctly identified the increase in the number of caesarean operations although not so many claimed the extra mark by noting the declining birth rate in Spain or the recommendations of the WHO.
- (b) As long as the original text was successfully paraphrased, doctors' explanations were readily identified and many candidates scored well on this question.

- (c) This question turned out to be more of a challenge. Many candidates, including not a few native speakers, appeared blissfully unaware that *innecesáreas* was a misspelling of *innecesarias* and therefore a play on words. Those who did spot this and linked it to the theme of the text of whether caesarean operations are necessary or not scored both marks.
- (d) Of a similar nature to **Question (b)**, marks were readily available for successful paraphrasing. As stated earlier, some candidates need to be reminded that questions worth five marks require longer answers than questions worth two.
- (e) This was generally answered well, despite the presence of some irrelevant material taken from the first sentence of the paragraph.

Question 5

Although the rubric clearly states that answers should not exceed 140 words, there are still candidates who choose to disregard this and, as a result, end up scoring zero for their Personal Response. The ideal balance for this question should be 90-100 words for the Summary and the remainder for the Response.

- (a) Marks should be easy to come by in this exercise for those who can write concisely and to the point. No penalties for 'lifting' are applied, and all that is required is for the candidate to note succinctly the key points of the texts – many of which will have come up earlier as answers to **Questions 3 and 4**. This is not the place to offer personal opinions, nor is there room for any generalised introduction or indeed, any generalisation whatsoever. Words are at a premium. Lines such as 'the first text tells us about the causes of *retrasos*' or 'the second text gives lots of reasons for caesareans' will score no marks. What is needed are the causes and the reasons. On far too many occasions, candidates who had performed well in other parts of the paper failed to do themselves justice here.
- (b) In this exercise candidates need to try to introduce more than one idea or opinion into two or three sentences. This is not an easy task. However, it is not a good idea to begin by saying something like '*No sé mucho del cuidado de los niños en mi país!*' If bereft of in-depth knowledge, it is far more profitable to invent a point of view.

SPANISH LANGUAGE AND SPANISH

Paper 8685/03

Essay

General comments

It is always pleasing when Examiners can report that the majority of candidates performed well in this particular paper. This has, indeed, been the case now for several consecutive years and for this both candidates and teachers can feel a real and justified sense of satisfaction. The relevance of the essays written to the titles set was a top priority for the overwhelming number of candidates. The high level of grammatical control was once again impressive and many candidates were able to produce essays that showed an unequivocal understanding of the topic under discussion. It is often a pleasure to read such carefully crafted pieces of writing.

Again during this session, there were thankfully few examples of candidates writing pre-learnt essays that failed to respond to the title set. Understanding the importance of giving a personal response to the actual title set and not just thinking aloud about the general topic from which the title comes is something which comes naturally to the majority of candidates.

Some candidates, however, lost marks for insisting on the production of an essay hugely in excess of the 400 maximum word limit allowed by the rubric. Those that exceeded the word count lost marks for content and also language, given that the longer the essay went on, the more likely they were to make language errors. It remains the case that Centres would do well to ensure that they pass this information on to all their candidates.

Examiners were very pleased with the overall quality of Spanish used by many candidates. The majority of essays showed a confident use of complex sentence patterns coupled with an extensive range of vocabulary appropriate to the topic being discussed.

The problems that did manifest themselves were the 'usual suspects', so to speak. The widespread belief (of epidemic proportions amongst many candidates) appears to be that accents have no place in a piece of Spanish writing. Not so, however fashionable it may be to write in clipped, text-message style Spanish. The incorrect application of the rules governing accentuation in Spanish will lead to a loss of marks in the language element of the mark scheme. Equally, substituting an English word for a Spanish one in the middle of a sentence does not exactly endear the essay to the Examiner with examples such as "...la conservación es, en mi opinión, un tema muy 'scary' en el mundo de hoy..." [sic], and "...limitar el número de hijos en una familia parece ser un poco 'random' a mi modo de ver..." causing considerable vexation. Similarly, for quite a few candidates, the correct use of the subjunctive mood continues to cause problems even in the simplest of statements such as "...no creo que es muy importante..." [sic] and "...todo el mundo quiere que el planeta es limpio..." [sic] and so perhaps Centres might consider guiding their candidates through the basics of the subjunctive rather than the more esoteric elements of what is, after all, a source of difficulty for many budding Hispanists.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1

A very popular title indeed. Most essays argued that limiting the number of children in families would represent an attack on the most fundamental of human rights although some could appreciate the importance of educating couples more realistically with regard to the need to provide adequately for their young.

Question 2

Another popular title on this paper. There seemed to be a consensus view that mental and physical health have an equal importance in the life of an individual and that ignoring one in favour of the other was not to be recommended.

Question 3

A slightly less attractive title for many candidates in comparison with the previous two questions. The majority of essays, however, argued very clearly that the state does indeed have a responsibility to those citizens who find themselves unemployed. The provision of long-term unemployment benefit was not deemed to be a sensible notion with most candidates preferring some form of training being provided instead.

Question 4

The least popular title by a considerable margin. Nevertheless, many of those who elected to write on this issue managed to produce essays worthy of high marks both for quality of language and content. There was unanimous agreement that the United Nations should be flexing its muscles much more in the face of international conflicts.

Question 5

This title was avoided by many candidates. This came as a slight surprise to Examiners given the popularity of environmental issues as an Advanced Level topic generally over the last few years. Those candidates who responded to the title were clearly passionate in their belief that areas of natural beauty should be protected at all costs by governments all over the world.