

SPANISH

Paper 8685/01
Speaking

General comments

Moderation of tapes from centres proceeded without major difficulty in most cases. Again Teacher/Examiners and examination officers should be thanked for ensuring that the tests are carried out according to the regulations. As in previous sessions, however, the principal causes for concern affecting a minority of centres are listed below:

- Failure to send the correct documentation with the tapes – Moderators need the centre’s working mark sheet as well as a copy of the computer mark sheet.
- Incomplete details on the working mark sheets. Each relevant column must be completed to show the mark awarded for each of the constituent criteria for each section of the test, i.e. thirteen columns, three for part 1, five each for parts 2 and 3, not just a section total, or the overall total. An overall total on its own cannot be accepted and will require further investigation by the Moderators.
- Some centres are still awarding a candidate up to 5 marks in both topic conversation and general conversation for having obtained information from the Examiner even when no questions were asked.
- Problems with the tapes, including omission of the name and index number of each candidate on the cassette and case; some very poor recording quality.

Part 1: Topic presentation

Candidates were frequently inventive and imaginative in their choice of topic, though some continue to offer topics that were only marginally relevant to syllabus requirements. To gain a high mark in the speech/presentation, candidates must ensure that their topic is clearly related to a Spanish-speaking context and show relevance to that area; the information should go beyond general knowledge and the everyday and the issues raised should be appropriate to advanced level. Moderators will expect evidence of organisation, planning and specific detail, together with clear delivery and an appropriate level of language for a high mark.

Parts 2 and 3: Topic Discussion and General Conversation

In the topic conversation candidates should be encouraged to relate discussion as far as possible to the Spanish-speaking context, though it is acceptable to make contrasts with other situations as long as the main issue is clearly kept in focus. The Moderators are looking for evidence of real discussion and debate at this level, and candidates who were prepared to re-state issues, give supporting detail or counter an argument or point of view were given appropriate credit. Weaker candidates tended to make mini-statements and were unable (or not asked by teachers) to justify or amplify their answers.

Apart from in a minority of centres, there was evidence in the general conversation of an attempt by Examiners to raise the level of the discussion and to go beyond the subjects which would be more appropriate to Ordinary level or IGCSE and cover an appropriate level of issues. This provided candidates with the necessary opportunity to seek to raise the register of language and to show competence in higher-level structures and vocabulary.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/02
Reading and Writing

General comments

The exam provided a good opportunity for candidates across the ability range to display their writing and reading comprehension skills in Spanish. Based upon two texts about issues which have a worldwide relevance, the questions explored notions which were not unfamiliar to candidates. The time allocated for this paper appeared to be adequate and, if candidates omitted parts of questions, the reason appeared to be difficulty of task, or oversight, rather than the clock.

Comments on specific questions

SECCIÓN PRIMERA

Question 1

A different question type was used for this session. It posed no problems for most candidates who followed the instructions given. There were, however, a very small minority who appeared not to have read the rubric and who offered duplicate or triplicate definitions for the words from the text.

The key to this type of exercise is not to attempt it in isolation from the text. A line number reference is given for each of the five expressions being tested and candidates should first look at how these are used in the context of the passage and then proceed to look for the equivalent definitions.

Full marks were not uncommon, although scores of one or two errors were more the norm. A discernible pattern in wrong answers offered was in **5(b)** where *asunto*, *cuestión* was often suggested instead of *aspecto* and **5(e)** where *estar situado* was frequently offered for *conseguir empleo*.

Question 2

Candidates were familiar with the requirements of this question type and it produced a predictable range of answers.

- (a) This was generally answered well with most candidates producing an acceptable variation of *cada vez más*.
- (b) Many permutations were possible here to gain the mark and candidates used this to their advantage. There was occasional carelessness with *más* and *menos* which gave a contrary, incorrect answer.
- (c) Again, there were several different routes taken by candidates to produce a correct answer, with the key to most of them involving the correct use of an imperfect tense. However, *la gente ahora coge el ascensor antes de subir un piso* was also a very acceptable answer.
- (d) This part question gave more difficulty than the other four, frequently because many candidates tried to treat *preciso* as a first person verb. Those who correctly used it with its adjectival meaning of 'necessary' often invalidated their answers by omitting *a esto*. (The correct answers should replace the original words from the text to give exactly the same meaning.)
- (e) The conversion of the passive agent to the subject of an active verb is a familiar device in this test type and was recognised by most candidates, although sometimes invalidated by the omission of an introductory *que*.

Question 3

The text and the questions asked on it proved to be very accessible to the majority of candidates. Whether by accident or design, answers were sometimes invalidated by 'lifting' too many words of original text. (The rubric clearly states *sin copiar frases completas del texto* and, as a general rule, examiners interpreted this as '4 words or more'.)

In both **Question 3** and **Question 4** marks were occasionally lost carelessly when candidates attempted to seek answers in paragraphs other than those given as reference.

- (a) This two-part question gave most candidates a comfortable start. Failure to score maximum marks was usually due to: failure to stress that obesity causes most deaths in the developed world; a 'lift' of *en los países desarrollados*; no mention of the two halves of the world dying from food-related issues; a 'lift' of *se muere de hambre*.
- (b) Many good answers were offered here. The question asked for an explanation of words from the text and those candidates who merely repeated *estética* and *un problema de salud* needed to find alternative expressions in their answers. Some candidates lost a mark by omitting to explain *con prevalencia creciente*.
- (c) Marks were freely available here and most candidates took full advantage. Not only did the mark scheme allow for up to six possible reasons, explanations of expressions such as *factores genéticos*, *ambientales* or *sedentarismo* were not being sought and therefore, being fewer than four words, could be taken directly from the text.
- (d) The more open-ended nature of this question produced many interesting and thoughtful answers. Two distinct ideas were needed in order to score both marks. Many candidates seized upon the text's suggestion that there is insufficient time for formal meals nowadays and then added further ideas of their own about how meals used to be a valuable part of daily routine when families could sit down together and talk.
- (e) Answers to this question were fairly readily identified although commonly invalidated by lifting *tienen una serie de frustraciones* or *problemas para conseguir empleo* directly from the text.

SECCIÓN SEGUNDA

Question 4

Although the text on which this question was based was of comparable difficulty to that of the preceding one, candidates did not appear so comfortable in their responses. The exploitation of the subject matter proved to be much more demanding and very high marks were not nearly so common.

- (a) Not all candidates managed to identify the apparent contradiction between what Spaniards say and what they do. A few misinterpreted *ambas* to mean that there were also Mediterranean diet fast food outlets and others considered *cola* to be a form of beverage.
- (b) This question generally produced good scores provided that answers were drawn from the text and not home-grown theories of globalisation. Typical barriers to achieving full marks were omitting to mention that the food is identical in every outlet or lifting *como si se estuviera* and *en el del barrio*.
- (c) A fairly easy mark was available for a mention of *ensaladas*, although not all candidates went on to collect the second one by mentioning either that these were offered alongside the hamburgers or that criticism of the latter had prompted the appearance of the former.
- (d) Surprisingly, very few candidates knew the meaning of the word *opulencia*, with the result that marks for this question were very hard to come by. The most common misunderstanding was that opulence was another particularly nasty illness.
- (e) Three marks were offered for mentioning that the hamburger itself is not harmful although it should be consumed in moderation in the context of a varied diet. Not many candidates scored the maximum.

Question 5(a)

Good technique is crucial to scoring well on this question and there is still evidence of under-achievement because of a lack of it. The candidate has just under 100 words in which to answer the question, (in this case, summarise what the texts say about how forms of eating affect health). What is required, therefore, is a succinct reproduction of the relevant facts from the texts for which marks are awarded. (Lifting of expressions is not penalised in this exercise.)

Stylistic devices such as lengthy introductions may influence the 5 language marks available for this and the following question but in practical terms openings such as *Los dos textos hacen alusión de como la forma de comer afecta la salud de las personas* waste nearly one fifth of the words and score nil for content. A more appropriate, point-scoring opening might be: *La comida basura es una causa de la obesidad que afecta a muchas personas viviendo en países desarrollados...*

Personal opinions should not be included in **5(a)** and should be held back for **5(b)**. However, if the candidate uses up the full 140 words for the former there is little point in attempting the latter exercise, because, apart from possibly influencing the language mark, it will not score.

A few candidates chose to offer about 100 words for **5(b)** and only about 40 words for **5(a)**. Even though the maximum word count was observed the mark allocation still remained the same. (5 out of 5 for the personal opinion is scant compensation for marks of 2 or 3 out of 10 for the summary.)

Question 5(b)

This final part of the exam was handled fairly competently. Most candidates were aware that they had just two or three sentences with which to respond to issues raised by the texts. Those who managed to include some variety in their response scored well.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/03

Essay

General comments

The overall impression gained by examiners during this session was a very positive one indeed. The majority of candidates were able to produce essays that were relevant to the title set and, equally importantly, were well argued. The level of linguistic ability shown by many candidates was very pleasing and both teachers and students involved in this process can feel a sense of satisfaction with the results of their labours.

Nevertheless, some candidates again lost marks for content by writing pre-learnt essays that were clearly not a response to the title set but more a generalized set of formulaic ruminations on the topic. As was mentioned in the previous session's report, it is good technique on the candidate's part to refer to the title as often as necessary throughout the essay in order to maintain relevance and reach coherent conclusions. The majority of candidates who do understand the importance of this are most likely to score good marks for content.

It is with unfettered delight that examiners can once again report that only a small number of candidates failed during this session to take heed of the word count for the paper. Those that exceeded the word count (a couple of essays weighed in at approximately 750 words!) lost marks heavily for content and also language, given that the longer the essay went on, the more likely they were to make language errors. It would be unfair on those candidates who manage to stay within the word limit not to penalize those that flout this regulation. Examiners, therefore, are given no choice by candidates who write far more than they need to.

Again this session, the overall quality of Spanish used by candidates was very good indeed. It would appear that the 'usual suspects' yet again caused most concern. Inconsistent, and sometimes non-existent, use of accents was a common problem for candidates. It is worth repeating here exactly what was mentioned in the previous session's report, 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". The differences between *por* and *para* were, as always, a source of some considerable confusion. A newcomer this year was the inappropriate use of the present subjunctive in utterances such as "...creo que este problema sea complicado..." and "...diria que el tema tenga gran importancia...". Naturally, the competent application of the rules for the use of the subjunctive mood will always impress examiners but putting all subordinate clause verbs in the subjunctive will not.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1.

This title was by far the least popular with candidates. Those few candidates who attempted the title wrote essays that produced convincing conclusions, in particular that Latin America actually has its own particular identity which, in only a very small way, owes its existence to Spain and Spanish culture.

Question 2.

As expected, an extremely popular title on this paper. The overwhelming majority of essays argued forcefully that youth is, indeed, the best stage of life. There were also a few notable pieces that argued passionately that there are more pressures placed upon young people today than ever before, thus rendering the teenage years extremely difficult to endure successfully.

Question 3.

This title was another attractive one for many candidates. Surprisingly, perhaps, the majority argued in favour of capital punishment for serious crimes such as murder or terrorist activity, whilst also acknowledging the part to be played in the criminal justice system by sentences of life imprisonment.

Question 4.

A moderately popular title. Opinions, rather like in the previous session, were clearly divided on the issue of urban or rural dwelling. The main conclusion reached by most candidates who attempted this title was that city dwellers have no real idea of the comparative difficulties involved in living in a rural setting. Some essays, perfectly understandably, sat on the fence and argued that both lifestyles have their own fair share of advantages and disadvantages.

Question 5.

This title was very popular with many candidates. Most bemoaned the lack of sportsmanship and fair play in contemporary sporting endeavour and criticized the obsession with winning at all costs. Some, in particular footballing aficionados, argued that money actually has a positive effect on the professional game in that it attracts the very best talents in a global context and fans can therefore benefit from the spectacle of seeing such talent perform every week.

Question 6.

This proved to be quite a popular title for a good number of candidates. The thrust of many of the essays written in response to the question asked was that improving our daily lives is, or should indeed be, the primary aim of all new technology. There was plenty of concern expressed at the proliferation of weapons-related technology but, in general terms, most candidates looked favourably upon the technological advances apparent in modern society.