



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

Spanish

SPA4TV

(Specification 2695)

Unit 4: Speaking Test

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

On the whole, tests were well-conducted, paperwork filled in correctly and files labelled appropriately. It was unusual to hear tests conducted by teachers who were unfamiliar with the format but there were a few and, as a result, potentially very good students were seriously disadvantaged. Visiting examiners generally reported a positive experience in the centres they visited. Nevertheless, some difficulties arose due to a lack of communication between centres and visiting examiners prior to the tests. Centres are strongly advised to make sure that the examiner knows well in advance which Cultural topics they will be discussing, particularly in the case of less well known topics. It is a good idea to email these to the Visiting examiner at an early stage rather than leave it until the STMSs are sent through the post. Examiners are frequently away from home during the examining period. Paperwork received at the last minute does not allow for thorough preparation and ultimately is not in the best interest of the students.

The clearest recordings were those made using hand-held voice recorders and saved as mp3 files. It was more noticeable this year that examiners were making notes, especially in the first minute, and this was sometimes more audible than the student. Recordings on audio cassette are often unsatisfactory even when new cassettes are used because the recording equipment is old.

Part 1: Discussion of the Stimulus Card

It was pleasing to see that this task, introduced last summer, was tackled much more confidently by examiners and students this time. The Environment and The Multicultural Society again proved the most popular topics. The third topic, Contemporary Social Issues, which covers **Wealth and poverty**, **Law and order** and the **Impact of scientific and technological progress** tends to be less popular and is often not done as well. It is worth remembering that two out of the six cards set in each series will always be on aspects of this topic. There were some excellent performances by students who produced thoughtful and well-informed arguments, clearly enjoying the challenge. At the lower end, the discussions tended to be superficial, relying on pre-learnt material relating to the general topic area with little reference to the opinion they were defending.

Students have two choices to make during their 20 minute preparation time. First they must choose which of the two cards, each on a different topic, they wish to discuss. Second, they must decide which of the two opinions printed on the card they wish to defend. They are advised to think carefully about the title of the card as this will encapsulate the main issue to be debated. Visiting examiners in their initial briefing to students have stressed that they will not be marked on the political correctness of the opinions they choose to express. It might be helpful therefore to think of this exercise as a role play in which they may adopt a posture that does not necessarily reflect their personal beliefs. Some students were held back by a well-intentioned desire to show “balance” and a respect for the opposite point of view. Marks are awarded for the ability to take a more robust and single-minded approach.

Examiners should begin the test by asking which is the chosen card and which is the chosen opinion. They should then invite the student to outline their point of view and start the timer. Teacher-examiners need to make it quite clear how they intend to start Part 1 and remove any element of uncertainty which may unsettle the student at the start of their test.

Response to the stimulus material (1 minute - 5 marks)

Timing in this section should be strictly observed. It is therefore essential that student, examiner and marker are clear about which card and which opinion the student has chosen before the timing of the one minute begins. The *Instructions for the conduct of the examinations* page 34 paragraph 16 should be studied and applied. In some cases, students lost marks because teacher-examiners intervened too soon or allowed students to go on too long, sometimes for up to two minutes.

There were many well-prepared students who were able to make four or five points with some development in the form of exemplification or brief elaboration in their first minute. Some successful strategies were employed to structure their initial outline e.g. numbering their points or using certain words and phrases to separate out their points: *En primer lugar; también; además; es más; otra cosa es que; y encima...* While such techniques are useful, however, it is best to avoid lengthy and over-complex phrases that take up time and either add nothing to the substance or occasionally cloud the meaning. Points to note:

- Students must choose **one** point of view to defend
- Reading out the words in the bubble wastes 10-15 seconds and gains no marks
- There is no time for a general introduction to the topic
- Simple, clear sentences are preferable to complex, over-elaborate language
- Points should address the specific issue on the card, not the general topic area
- Challenges to the points made should be anticipated and arguments prepared
- There are no marks for political correctness
- Strong, well-expressed arguments will always gain marks, irrespective of the nature of the arguments

Response to challenges by the examiner (4 minutes – 10 marks)

Markers reported some outstanding discussions in which students defended their points confidently and enthusiastically in the face of rigorous challenges by the examiner. Less able students tended to repeat points made in their initial outline with no real development or to rely on lengthy pre-learned speeches that missed the point. Some students still think they must be conciliatory and start each response with *Sí, es verdad*, or *Entiendo tu punto de vista...* They should be aware that no specific marks are awarded for appreciating the other point of view.

Markers highlighted a number of teacher-examiner practices that disadvantaged the students:

- failing to listen and respond to specific points made by the student
- using set questions to elicit rehearsed answers
- departing from the issue presented on the card
- conducting a discussion of the wider topic area
- excessive “heckling”, preventing students from developing their ideas
- asking questions that were too lengthy, unclear and confusing

Tarjeta A - ¿Cómo reducir la polución en las ciudades?

This was a popular card in most centres and good arguments were heard on both sides. It was disappointing however that many teachers and students ignored *en los centros urbanos* in *Opinión 1* and interpreted it as advocating the more extreme measure of banning cars altogether. Surprisingly few mentioned Park and Ride schemes which would seem to be the most obvious way of reducing traffic in town centres. Little sympathy was expressed for anyone who might find it difficult to use public transport or ride bicycles such as the elderly or disabled.

Tarjeta B - Los refugiados, ¿son todos iguales?

This was perhaps the most popular card and it was disappointing that some students took the opportunity to offer stereotypical views about immigration in general rather than focussing on the issue of refugees. Many students appeared to be unfamiliar with the idea of *asilo político* and failed to understand what is meant by *inmigrantes económicos*. Those who defended *Opinión 1* had given little thought as to how genuine asylum seekers might be identified. Students who defended *Opinión 2* concentrated on the humanitarian situation and were often unable to counter challenges as to the practicality of their suggestions. The pronunciation of *refugiados* proved a problem for many.

Tarjeta C - La seguridad del ciudadano. ¿Quién va a protegernos?

Relatively few students chose this card and many of those who did concentrated on the right to possess weapons rather than the right to defend oneself. This was an excellent opportunity to explore hypothetical situations asking “What would you do if....” However, students defending *Opinión 2* had few ideas ready other than to wait for the police to arrive. On the other hand, there were students who said, (in the spirit of the exam), that it was quite acceptable to shoot a burglar which led to the emphatic response of examiners who insisted that it was not.

Tarjeta D - ¿Quién va a producir nuestra energía?

This was another popular card and *Opinión 1* was the more popular choice. Many students failed to concentrate on the *autosuficiente* aspect but took the opportunity to deliver everything they knew about renewable energy. Responses to challenges about inefficiency, high investment costs and the downright ugliness of *turbinas eólicas* were often weak and unconvincing. Nuclear power was ruled out because of the recent disaster in Japan. On the other hand, some students did recognise the danger of depending on energy sources supplied by countries with unpredictable governments. Others believed that buying energy from other countries amounted to exploitation.

Tarjeta E - La discriminación positiva: ¿una ayuda hacia la integración?

This was the least successful card and it revealed that some students are not familiar with the concept of positive discrimination and did not understand the word *cuota*. Some muddled conversations were heard suggesting a careless reading of the two opinions. *Minorías étnicas* was interpreted by many as synonymous with *inmigrantes* so that immigration rather than integration became the focus of arguments in favour of *Opinión 1*. There were, however, many who defended *Opinión 2*, convincingly arguing that positive discrimination can cause resentment and encourage racist attitudes.

Tarjeta F - La medicina, ¿lo puede remediar todo?

Although this was the least popular card it produced some interesting arguments. What was lacking was total commitment to either *Opinión*. Some students who were against cosmetic surgery, except for restorative work after an accident, and unhappy with the idea of designer babies, were nevertheless in favour of non-controversial medical developments such as transplants and undecided on the issue of *in vitro* fertilisation. Students who make too many concessions to the opposing view are not fulfilling the task set and therefore risk losing marks.

Part 2: Conversation on Cultural Topics

Marks were lost in the Conversation for a number of reasons. Some Cultural topics had to be ruled inadmissible because they were either too narrow, too broad or simply did not fall within any of the five categories given in the Specification. Centres who are in doubt about their choice of Cultural topics should refer to the Cultural topics FAQs in the Teacher Resource Bank at www.aqa.org.uk or contact AQA through mfl@aqa.org.uk with an email headed *Cultural topic query for Spanish*.

If Centres choose two topics with similar themes, then it is important that students do not confuse them during the examination. An obvious example is the novel *Como agua para chocolate* and the play *La casa de Bernarda Alba* which deal with very similar themes and situations. Students were often heard to confuse Bernarda with Mamá Elena or the Spanish Civil War with the Mexican revolution. In the interests of standardisation, each topic should be treated separately and comparisons between the two should be avoided.

Failure to observe the following points may also cause the student to lose marks:

- The 10 minutes should be divided evenly between the 2 Cultural topics
- Examiners must challenge the student's views (See Mark scheme for Interaction)
- Students must be given the opportunity to react spontaneously
- Factual information alone will limit the Interaction mark to 6.

A target language-speaking region/community

In Spain, Cataluña, Galicia and Andalucía were the most popular, along with South American countries: Chile, Colombia and Peru in particular. Teachers who decide to study a region or community should give some thought as to how their students are to be challenged on the topic. The question of whether it is healthy for the economy of Andalucía to be so dependent on tourism; the likelihood of a region such as Cataluña gaining independence; whether the regional government of Castilla y León is doing enough to combat unemployment are the kind of issues that will produce the appropriate level of discussion rather than facts and figures about the geography and the climate.

A period of 20th century history

La Guerra Civil, el régimen franquista and *la Transición a la democracia* were the most common areas of study and a number of centres did *La Guerra sucia* in Argentina 1976 – 1983. Again, the main weakness was a tendency to be rather too factual at the expense of evaluation and personal reaction.

An author

Esquivel, García Márquez, and Sender were the most commonly chosen authors, although Lazarillo de Tormes and Unamuno's *San Manuel Bueno, Mártir* had been studied in some centres providing a refreshing variation from the usual favourites.

A dramatist or poet

Lorca's "trilogy", especially *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, retain their appeal for students who like to discuss freedom, passion and repression. Examiners also reported having enjoyed discussions of less popular choices such as Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna* and *La Muerte y la Doncella* by Ariel Dorfman. Poets studied included Bécquer and Machado.

A director, architect, musician, or painter

Almodóvar again was the most popular director. Students talked knowledgeably about a range of his films but the most frequently discussed were *Volver*, *Todo Sobre mi Madre* and *Hable con Ella*. Guillermo del Toro's *Laberinto del Fauno*, Alejandro Aménabar's *Mar Adentro* and José Luis Cuerda's *La lengua de las Mariposas* were also frequent choices.

Pronunciation/Intonation

Most students were awarded 4 (Good) or 5 (Very good) for pronunciation. There were a few performances that suggested a lack of effort or even a lack of interest in sounding authentically Hispanic. Some students could not avoid betraying the fact that they also studied French or Italian.

Knowledge of Grammar

Most students who take this test are at least of middle ability and many are extremely competent, fluent speakers able to use a variety of tenses and moods and a wide range of vocabulary and idiomatic expressions. However, even the more able students sometimes failed to achieve a mark in the top band. Examiners again reported that many students learn answers containing complex structures by heart and are then unable to manipulate them appropriately to suit the question asked. All of the basic errors reported in the SPA2 Examiner's report were mentioned again at SPA4. These included:

Gender: *problema; sistema; tema*

Ser/estar e.g. *es prohibido; soy de acuerdo*

Stem changing verbs: *empezar, pensar, mostrar, preferir*

Irregular past participles: *ponido; escrito; roto; morido*

Confusion of noun and adjective: *fuerza/fuerte; muerte/muerto; turista/turístico; peligro/peligroso*

Adjectival agreements

Es necesito; es depende; es vale

Porque de

No creo que; no pienso que without a subjunctive

False friends: *soportar; ordinario; los factos*

Anglicisms: *realístico; hipocrítico*

Nevertheless, these shortcomings seldom prevented students from communicating their knowledge of relevant issues and expressing their views and opinions. The overall impression of this year's performances reflect an impressive amount of hard work and enthusiasm from both teachers and students.

Annual Teacher Support Meetings

Centres are reminded that language-specific Teacher Support Meetings for the Conduct of the Speaking Tests will be held in Autumn 2011 covering both Unit 2 and Unit 4. These meetings will be full day meetings and free of charge. Further details can be obtained from the Events page of the AQA website (www.aqa.org.uk) in due course.

Web Pages

Centres are reminded that a wealth of support documents can be found on our web pages (http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/languages/spanish_materials.php?id=09&prev=09). These include the latest version of the specification, past papers, Reports on the Examination, Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations and the Teacher Resource Bank (TRB). The TRB includes advice to teachers conducting your own tests and the materials from the most recent set of Teacher Support Meetings for the Conduct of the Speaking Tests; this is an invaluable resource for preparing students for future examinations.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw or scaled marks into marks on the Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) by using the link below.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion.