

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback Summer 2010

GCE

GCE Italian (6IN03) Unit 3: Understanding and Spoken Response in Italian

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Unit 3: Understanding and Spoken Response in Italian (6IN03)

Unit description

This unit requires students to use the language of debate and argument to discuss the issue of their choice; to defend their views and sustain discussion as the teacher moves the conversation away from their chosen issue. Students will also be assessed for understanding as well as communication and quality of language

Assessment Principles

A maximum of 50 marks will be awarded positively using the assessment criteria for each of the following categories:

- response (initiative, development and abstract language) - 20 marks
- quality of language (pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary) - 7 marks
- reading and research (knowledge of issue and other topics) - 7 marks
- comprehension and development (understanding and ability to deal with questioning) - 16 marks

Candidates are required to choose and prepare an issue, on which they must adopt a stance. They must complete the oral chosen issue form with a brief statement, in Italian, of their issue to debate. It is therefore advisable to choose a confrontational issue, to which a stance can be taken. There is **no** requirement to relate the initial issue to the culture and society of the target language and/or any of the general topic areas for this specification. Candidates may select any viable issue to debate.

Timing is crucial. It is difficult for candidates to access the highest marks if the correct timing is not adhered to. The test begins with the candidate outlining his/her stance for about 1 minute. The examiner then challenges it and the candidate must defend it in discussion for 3-4 minutes. For the remaining 8 minutes the examiner (TE) initiates a spontaneous discussion on **TWO** further issues, moving away from the chosen one onto unpredictable areas. Candidates are expected to express and justify opinions, argue a case, discuss problems or current controversies as they arise naturally in spontaneous conversation.

It is possible for candidates to gain high marks in the first part of the test, because they are on familiar ground.

The unpredictable areas are more complex; these should be really unforeseen topics; rehearsed and recited quantities of material cannot gain high marks. This should be a spontaneous discussion, not just a question and answer session covering a wide variety of topics.

Candidates' Responses

In this summer examination candidates were thoroughly prepared with few exceptions. The majority of candidates showed genuine interest in their chosen issue and were motivated to discuss it intelligently. Unfortunately there were still a number of stage-managed conversations in which candidates' performances suffered as a result. At worst native speakers were restricted in their responses and denied the opportunity to explore further topics. In a small number of cases teachers did not challenge the initial issue adequately, asked irrelevant personal questions or reverted to the AS format for the second part of the

examination. Occasionally too much time was spent on the chosen issue and consequently there was no evidence of further unpredictable areas being explored.

Similarly most teachers were excellent in opposing the candidates' views and eliciting good debate.

A wider range of issues was chosen and it was interesting to listen to discussions concerning current issues such as:

- La moda è causa delle disoressie
- Il cambiamento climatico è causato dall'uomo
- I siti di socialnet working sono pericolosi
- La punizione corporale dovrebbe essere abolita
- La povertà mondiale è responsabilità dell'Occidente
- A favore del servizio militare obbligatorio
- A favore della legge contro il burka in Italia
- Contro la costruzione di nuove moschee in Italia
- A favore del ritiro dell'esercito dalla guerra in Afganistan
- Le donne sono più intelligenti degli uomini
- A favore della carta d'identità
- In base ai sondaggi I matrimoni scompariranno in Italia
- Gli italiani si stanno americanizzando
- Il testamento biologico
- Chiudere gli zoo
- L'unificazione d'Italia ed il federalismo
- Il ruolo della Chiesa nella società e il bisogno di cambiamenti

The most popular topics were:

- Alcolismo
- Divorzio
- Adozione
- Cibo biologico
- Legalizzazione delle droghe leggere
- Emigrazione
- Eutanasia

On the topic of Euthanasia, the candidates were most successful when they were able to explore both scientific and moral issues and showed an acute awareness of the social implications of ending life and society changing views. Another very popular topic was related to the changing views on the benefits of organic food. Candidates were able to offer alternative arguments in favour of buying organic food and to support its inclusion in government manifestos. Immigration was another popular topic where candidates formulated well-balanced arguments, steering away from stereotypical views and at the same time exemplifying their position through recent developments in Europe.

Candidates who did not do so well as they could have, did so because of teachers' misinterpretation in conducting the exam rather their own inability or lack of preparation. Unfortunately for the candidates, some teachers moved too much into the candidate's personal life, asking questions not appropriate for this exam. For example, when talking

about holidays, there have been questions like *"dove sei andata in vacanza lo scorso anno?"* - *"Dove andrai quest'anno?"*.

It was seldom the case that candidates were entered for an examination too difficult for them.

Quality of language

Although in some cases accuracy was variable, many students achieved at least 5 marks. There were also examples of candidates without an Italian background whose oral performance was highly accurate.

Pronunciation was generally good although intonation was often rather less convincing.

With respect to the use of language, the most common errors were:

- to affect - colpire, interessare (wrongly translated as 'affettare')
- to solve - risolvere (not 'solvere/risolvere')
- problem/system - il problema, il sistema (not 'la')
- to bring, lead to - portare ('menare' used instead)
- offended - offeso (often translated as 'offensato')
- serious - serio/grave (not 'serioso')
- rape - stupro (not 'struppo')
- confusion between "lavare and lavorare"

Subjunctives were mostly remembered at the beginning of the exam, then they were forgotten and the present tense was used instead.

A recurring odd word was *"umani"*.

Reading and research

Candidates were, in many cases, through reference to articles, books, and internet sources, often able to achieve 5 to 6 marks - offering detail and convincing opinion.

Many candidates' responses showed extensive reading of newspaper articles on current affairs within topic areas like politics, environmental issues, emigration, euthanasia, and nuclear power.

Comprehension and development

Many students deserved at least 11 marks here.

Some very interesting and challenging questions on:

dialetti: conservazione e diffusione; bioetica e cellule staminali; ricerca, benefici e problemi; testamento biologico-questione morale; religione - diversità e tolleranza; patrimonio artistico - conservazione e sostenibilità; lavoro minorile; Comunità Europea - quali problemi comporta l'annessione della Turchia; energia nucleare - difficoltà a trovare un accordo.

Teacher Examiners (TE)

Candidates' success in Unit 3 is reliant on a good conduct of exam as the quality of debate depends very much on TE counterarguments for the chosen issue and the nature of the questions asked for the further issues. Whilst thanking many examiners who were good in

conducting the exams bringing out the best from their candidates, it could be useful to highlight examples of less successful conduct for the benefit of future TE or those in need to improve their skills.

Centres that employ Italian native speakers (and not teachers) to conduct the exam, should make sure that all the important information on the conduct of the test are understood, to avoid later disappointments.

The TE should get sight of the oral form before undertaking the conduct of the oral and should prepare valid counterarguments to avoid awkward silences and/or to be stuck for issues to discuss. For the debate to be interesting the counterarguments must be well focused. The all too frequent "*Cosa ne pensi?- Perchè sei interessato?- Dimmi cosa hai studiato?- Dove hai fatto le ricerche? - Sei a favore o contro?*" are likely to produce nothing more than a wishy-washy debate. After about 5 minutes the TE should initiate a SPONTANEOUS discussion covering two further issues.

A significant number of examiners completely ignored the requirements to explore at least TWO further unpredictable issues. If a TE covers just one issue then the mark for Response, Reading & Research and Comprehension & development are reduced. Although examiners are not required to take the opposite view in the unpredictable areas, inputs like "*Adesso cambiamo argomento; che cosa sai su...?*" will not prompt a high level of debate or be considered a complex and challenging question; complexity can be linguistic (language and structure) and/or conceptual (abstraction).

A small number of TE still not aware of the requirements, treating the second part of the test more as a conversation rather than a discussion and causing candidates to lose marks. The role of TE is not to ask questions to elicit factual information, although the candidate might well refer to some factual information to help to support and justify a point of view.

Some TE made the mistake to introduce too many issues without allowing any in depth discussion. It is acceptable to move on if a candidate is really floundering and might handle another issue better, but a string of issues only just touched upon is not likely to show the candidate's ability to sustain the discussion.

TE must remember that a good debate depends very much on the challenge that he/she puts to the candidates, both for the chosen and unpredictable issues. If candidates are trained regularly in the art of debate and discussion, they will almost certainly do well.

The most frequent problems were:

- Initial issue was not always arguable
- Stance was not challenged enough by the TE
- Some question on summer holidays or personal life were totally inappropriate
- Too many factual questions not designed to elicit opinions;
- Difficulty to establish which were the two unpredictable areas as questions were all within the topic area chosen by the candidate.

Administration

Some problems arising from the administration of the test can be recap as follow:

- Recording equipment tested and in good working order, but microphone moved away from the candidate during the test, resulting in almost inaudible recording

- no name of candidates on the box or cassette
- title of topic on Oral Form in English;
- stance not clear
- exam either too long or too short.

Advice and Guidance

Teacher's examiners should:

- make sure that the issue is clearly stated and a stance is taken;
- prepare challenging counterarguments;
- debate the chosen issue for the time required, but no longer;
- introduce two further issues
- exploit all the potential of subsequent issues;
- keep the debate going;
- remember that eliciting knowledge or chatting about personal experiences is a waste of time and opportunity.

Candidates should:

- select an issue that is of genuine personal interest;
- adopt a stance and be ready to defend it;
- be prepared to be engaged in a free-ranging discussion of further issues for the remaining 8 minutes.

In the interest of candidates, teacher examiners are advised to scrupulously adhere to administrative procedures.

Grade Boundaries

Grade	Max Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	N	U
Raw mark boundary	50	45	40	35	30	26	22	18	0
Uniform mark scale boundary	70	63	56	49	42	35	28	21	0

a* is only used in conversion from raw to uniform marks. It is not a published unit grade.

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