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Edexcel

Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In A Level Russian (9RU0/02)

Paper 2: Written response to works and
translation:

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Examiners' Report 9RU0/02

Purpose of the paper

This paper is designed to test candidates' ability to write accurately in Russian, structure their responses and demonstrate their knowledge of the target-language culture and / or society through the study and critical and analytical response to two literary texts or a literary text and a film.

This was the first year of the A Level specification. Very many candidates had been well prepared for this first paper, clearly having referenced the specification and sample materials, and studied their chosen texts or films in detail over the two-year A Level course. There were examples of both heritage / native speaker candidates and learner candidates whose lessons had clearly focused on how to translate accurately from English and how to write a structured essay which makes critical and analytical points about the chosen works.

Unfortunately, there were also examples of candidates who had clearly not been prepared at all, and who simply retold the story of their chosen work or were not able to offer any coherent essay. Centres must be reminded that it is not possible for a candidate to be entered for this examination without having studied two of the texts from the specification in detail. Simply having read the texts or seen the films is not enough for candidates to perform well.

Structure of the examination

The paper requires candidates to complete a translation into Russian and then write two essays. Their essays must either be on two literary texts or on one literary text and one film. The two texts or text and film offered for examination must be from the list set out on page 51 of the specification.

The translation (section A) is worth 20 of the available 120 marks, and the two essays (section B for texts and section C for films) are worth the remaining 100 marks, with 50 marks for each essay. The essay marks consist of 20 marks for Critical and Analytical Response (AO4), 20 marks for Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary (AO3) and 10 marks for Accuracy (AO3).

The time allowed for the examination is two hours and 40 minutes. An appropriate division of time would be for candidates to spend about 30 minutes on the translation and about an hour on each of the essays, including spending time planning their response carefully.

Advice to centres

In contrast with the legacy A Level specification essays, there is no longer any penalty applied for essays that are overlong, although teachers and candidates are encouraged to produce essays that fall within the suggested 250-word limit for A Level. Part of the skill at this level is to marshal material appropriately and be selective about what to include and what not to include. Quotations from texts or films are not counted as part of any word count.

Centres are advised to ensure that they choose works for examination carefully. Candidates should be well prepared for both their chosen works. This includes studying features such as characterisation, the form and the technique of presentation, key concepts and issues, and the social and cultural context, as appropriate to the work studied. Candidates must have a critical and analytical appreciation of the works. This means they must be able to offer points of view and support them with evidence from the text or film. Knowing the plot and retelling it will not score highly, and neither will irrelevant information or points of view offered without evidence.

Based on their performance in this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- Ensure that you prepare thoroughly for the translation task by studying the prescribed grammar list on page 52 of the specification;

- Divide your time carefully and do not spend too much time on the translation task;
- Check that you have not omitted any word from the translation task;
- Learn your grammatical endings carefully, focusing particularly on the cases required after prepositions and some common verbs;
- Ensure you know a range of essay phrases that will help you to write a critical response to the work you have studied;
- Ensure that you have a range of words and structures that are considered terminology appropriate for literary or cinematic analysis, such as 'plot', 'metaphor', 'first person narrative', 'the reader is given the impression that' or 'the audience can see that'.
- Seek to use more complex grammatical structures in your essay, such as passives, conditionals, relative pronouns in cases other than the nominative, extended sentences to express abstract ideas (e.g. sentences requiring conjunctions and pronouns), synonyms for more common vocabulary, correct use of verbal aspects, correct use of verbs of motion, use of the subjunctive with verbs of commanding, etc.;
- Ensure that you know your text or film well and have a good range of quotations to back up your points, and ensure you do not make points without reference to the text;
- Plan your essay carefully, thinking about what your conclusion will be and ensuring that your points lead up to it – decide what you want to say before you say it;
- Use a 'Point, Evidence, Explain, Link' approach to writing your essay, ensuring that you make a critical point and then back it up using evidence, explain your point in more depth and then link it to your overall argument;
- Write your essay in paragraphs so that the examiner can follow your points;
- Keep to the suggested word limit and select your material carefully;
- Ensure that your handwriting is legible.

The examining team would like to take this opportunity to thank those teachers of Russian who present excellent candidates and have prepared them thoroughly for the first year of this examination, many taking careful note of the advice from last year's report.

Section A: Translation

Section A of this paper required candidates to translate a short passage of English into Russian. The passage will always be based on one of the sub-themes from Theme 1, 2, 3 or 4 from pages 8-9 of the specification. The translation is split into 20 'assessable elements' (see the markscheme) and one mark is awarded for each correct element. For an element to be considered correct, it must have all the details contained in the English original (i.e. no word omitted) and the grammatical endings must all be completely correct (including noun, verb and adjective

endings). Spelling errors are tolerated, provided they are not part of the grammatical ending.

Overall, the majority of candidates performed well in this task. As they had studied the topic of the translation, they knew the relevant vocabulary and were able to deploy their knowledge of grammar. Many learner candidates were able to score around 6-10 marks out of 20, although the number of learner candidates scoring above this was low. Some native speaker candidates lost marks due to omission of parts of elements (e.g. 'very' in element 1 or 'also' in element 19) or due to confusion over the use of tenses. Native speakers also sometimes failed to offer correct specialist vocabulary, such as not knowing the word for 'charity'. As with the legacy A Level specification, those with little ability to manipulate the grammar of the language scored very low marks in this task, even when they knew every word of the required vocabulary. Some candidates scored only 1 or 2 marks for this reason, although they had translated every word of the English.

Candidates faced the most difficulty with the following elements:

- 'Winter in Moscow can be very cold' was occasionally translated without the instrumental case where this was required. Many learner candidates confused 'зима' and 'зимой' and therefore lost the mark for the element.
- 'living on the capital's streets' caused some problems for candidates who did not know 'столица'. Repetition of 'Москва' here was accepted, but 'капитал', offered by many native speakers, was not.
- 'and every night' was often translated without the accusative case.
- 'it is difficult for them to survive' often caused learner candidates to lose marks because they did not know how to translate 'for them', or they did not know 'survive'.
- Many learner candidates translated 'but you can find help' as 'но можно найти помощь' and this could not be accepted.
- 'said 29-year old Vera' proved difficult for candidates who did not know about soft adjective endings. It was also often translated into the present tense in Russian, which was not accepted.
- 'hot food and a place to sleep' led to a wide range of different translations. 'Hot' in this context was often incorrectly translated, or the adjective endings were wrong.
- 'Some people were glad last year' led to some varying translations of 'glad'. Many were accepted, such as 'довольны' and 'счастливы'. Learner candidates often got the wrong short adjective ending and therefore lost marks.
- 'Charity' in 'when one charity began' caused a number of problems. Some native speakers did not know the word and tried to improvise, and some learners misremembered it. 'Благотворительная организация / компания /-ый фонд' were all accepted, but 'чарити' was not.
- 'to offer new services' caused issues where candidates did not know 'to offer'.

- 'for example, a cinema showing classic comedies' caused issues for lots of learner candidates where they were not able to create an appropriate relative clause to render the English 'showing'. Some candidates omitted the idea of a cinema, causing their translation not to be accepted. The endings on 'классические комедии' also caused issues, as candidates did not know whether they needed 'и' or 'й'.
- 'most of us can watch a film' was very often translated as 'много из нас могут смотреть фильм' and this was not accepted because there is a change in meaning. Learner candidates often knew 'большинство' and knew they needed it here, but wrote 'большинство нас' and so lost the mark.
- 'but homeless people want' was usually translated correctly, but omission of 'but' caused candidates to lose marks unnecessarily.
- Lots of candidates spotted that they needed the subjective after 'but homeless people want' and translated 'Russians to know' as 'чтобы россияне знали', however 'Russian' did cause some problems with incorrect endings, especially where 'россияне' was used instead of 'русские'.
- 'that they have the right to enjoy themselves too' was not often correctly translated by learner candidates. Lots of variations of 'enjoy themselves' were accepted, but issues arose with the use of instrumental in phrases such as 'наслаждаться жизнью'. 'Развлекаться' and 'веселиться' were common accepted translations, but many candidates added things like 'собой' unnecessarily. The omission of 'too' caused some to lose marks, and learner candidates often made the mistake of translating 'the right' as 'правило' or 'правда'.

Sections B and C: Written Response to Works or Films

In section B or C candidates were required to write an essay on two of the texts or one text and one film that they have studied. They had to present a critical and analytical response to access the highest mark bands.

Critical and Analytical Response (AO4)

A critical and analytical response is defined in the specification as selecting relevant material from the works, presenting and justifying points of view, developing arguments, drawing conclusions based on understanding, and evaluating issues, themes and cultural and social contexts related to the works studied. In order to access the highest mark bands (9-12, 13-16 and 17-20) for 'Critical and Analytical Response' (AO4), essays must partly or wholly address this requirement for a critical and analytical response.

Accordingly, essays that simply re-presented the story from the text or film scored very low marks, usually in the 5-8 mark band unless there are some elements of critical or analytical response, where they may be placed on the 9-12 mark band. A critical and analytical response always involves the candidate using the essay to make points about the question being asked and using evidence to back up these points. Many non-taught candidates did not read the top half of the 13-16 mark band because they had not considered how to structure their essay coherently, or planned its content before starting.

Essays that scored the highest marks (17-20) in the 'Critical and Analytical Response' (AO4) mark grid were relevant, succinct, carefully planned and focused on giving a critical response throughout. Examples (usually in the form of targeted quotations or short descriptions of events or actions) were used consistently to back up the points being made, and the points were linked to an overall argument.

Structure was fully coherent and the examiner could follow the sophisticated points being made throughout. In most cases, every paragraph took a 'point-evidence-explain-link' approach, with links being made to the wider thread of the essay and leading to the overall conclusion. There was no retelling of the story or lack of focus on the specific question being asked. There was invariably a very detailed knowledge of the text amongst those candidates scoring the highest marks for AO4. Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary (AO3)

Essays that scored the highest marks (17-20) in the 'Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary' (AO3) mark grid had a range of complex structures, such as passives, conditionals, relative pronouns in cases other than the nominative, extended sentences to express abstract ideas (e.g. sentences requiring conjunctions and pronouns), synonyms for more common vocabulary, correct use of verbal aspects, correct use of verbs of motion, use of the subjunctive with verbs of commanding, etc.

The highest scoring essays also contained regular use of terminology and structures appropriate for literary and cinematic analysis, with a good command of specialist vocabulary such as 'director', 'character', 'plot', and also frequent structures allowing for appropriate critical and analytical response (such as 'the reader can see that...', 'from this it can be concluded that...' or 'this quotation shows that...'). Learner candidates often scored in the 13-16 band due to their ability to use essay phrases and specialist literary vocabulary. Weaker non-learner candidates often scored in the 13-16 mark band because the register of their essay was not appropriate, even though their language was completely accurate and they made relevant points. Addition of literary terms and more formal essay structures would have enabled these candidates to access the 17-20 mark band for 'Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary'.

'Accuracy of Language' (AO3)

For 'Accuracy of Language' (AO3), most native speaker candidates scored 10. To score the highest marks, writing does not have to be error free, but the general impression does have to be of accurate language with errors likely to be in more unusual or irregular forms. Learner candidates whose communication was clear and where the reader can always understand what is being said, even if not entirely accurate, can score in the 7-8 band. For the highest band, 9-10, learner candidates had to demonstrate that they were able to apply their knowledge of case and verb endings consistently, with errors not occurring from a lack of understanding but instead from lack of knowledge of a more complex situations or from how to apply their understanding in a particular context. The overall impression is of a candidate who has been taught their grammar and knows it well.

Popularity of Questions

Around 60% of candidates answered on one texts and one film, and the remaining 40% answered on two texts.

Over half of the candidates chose *Пиковая дама* as their literary text, including the majority of learner candidates entered for the examination. These candidates invariably then chose *Утомлённые солнцем* as their other work. The works are given below in order of popularity:

Пиковая дама

Ревизор

Утомлённые солнцем

Вишнёвый сад

Левиафан

Кавказский пленник

Сонечка
Неделя как неделя
Один день Ивана Денисовича
Крылья

There are individual comments set out below on the different texts and films.

Question 2 - Пиковая дама (Pushkin)

There were a number of successful answers to question 2(a), but some candidates had trouble deciding what was meant in the question by 'realistic depiction'. The best essays focused on reality vs. mysticism, but some candidates tied themselves in knots here and tried to talk about the real-life character that the Countess was based on, or focused on the Countess' character and how it was portrayed by Pushkin, but struggled to address the idea of 'realistic'. Some essays included analysis of the Countess' life as a realistic representation of someone of her social class at the time. They also then referred to her appearance after her death to Germann, winking at him from the Queen of Spades card, as evidence of a lack of realism, and weighed up the two sides of this argument effectively.

The most popular essay choice for this text was 2(b). Many candidates wrote excellent essays on the theme of greed in the story. Learner candidate centres who have studied this work have clearly covered the theme, and helped candidates to understand how to structure an essay around it. The best essays looked at how greed changed and directed Germann's life and led to his loss of sanity with direct reference to events in the story, quotes and analysis. They also referred to other themes such as gambling, exploitation and social climbing through marriage, and they made a critical judgement of the importance of 'greed' in relation to contemporary society or other themes in the story. Given the question's request to analyse the importance of the theme, it seems appropriate that this should be done with brief reference to other potential themes. Some referred to Pushkin's own experience of gambling at cards, or were able to bring in the wider historical context. Some candidates related the theme to other characters as well as Germann, such as Lizaveta Ivanovna or the Countess. As in all the essay questions, less successful answers failed to talk about the importance of the theme or what Pushkin may be trying to tell us, but instead simply stated when Germann had been greedy whilst retelling the plot.

Question 3 - Ревизор (Gogol)

Question 3(a) was the most popular option on Gogol's *Ревизор* by a significant margin, including many answers from learner candidates. A good knowledge of the social and historical setting of the play was required to answer the question effectively, and those that understood the setting produced good essays. They knew when the play was written and about Gogol's intentions to show town "N" as representative of all that was bad in Russia at that time. They also commented on how the play was received when first performed. They gave quotes of characters giving and accepting bribes, reading letters in the post office, not giving sick people in hospital any medicine and made close reference to scenes in the play. Some less successful essays here didn't focus on the Russian of the 'beginning of the 19th Century' but instead discussed portrayals of Russia in general or corruption in general, or misplaced the historical setting of the play.

Question 3(b) was much less popular than 3(a), but when it was answered, it was usually done very well. This is likely to be because candidates who understood the term 'пошлость' would have been likely to have studied the play in detail. In the best essays, quotes were well used to illustrate each point and reference made to Gogol's use of satire and comedy to make serious criticism of provincial officials. Some likened this corruption to the situation in present day Russia.

Question 4 - Вишнёвый сад (Chekhov)

Question 4(a) was less popular than 4(b), and answers did not always focus on the requirement to pick out specific scenes which tell us something about Lopakhin's character. In order to do this, candidates had to know the play very well and refer to Lopakhin's role and significance by linking his words and actions in relevant scenes. Better marks were gained when quotes were used and scenes discussed and analysed in a clear structure with a conclusion.

Question 4(b) seemed to be better answered than 4(a), and many candidates were able to debate the merits of the play as a tragedy or a comedy by analysing key characters and scenes. They referred to Chekhov's own declared intentions and drew a clear conclusion at the end to the sound of trees being felled in the cherry orchard. Lots of quotes were used and some identified it as a tragi-comedy with clear justification. Less successful responses often did not include appropriate examples from the text, or did not mention the cherry orchard itself at all.

Question 5 - Один день Ивана Денисовича (Solzhenitsyn)

Question 5(a) was more popular than 5(b), although overall this text remained the least popular choice for candidates. Answers to 5(a) were occasionally excellent, showing detailed knowledge of the text, but it seemed that some candidates could not identify enough details that had been used to depict Shukhov's character when the book is absolutely all about the small details of his life on one day in prison camp. Without the details which show Shukhov's character and analysis, candidates could not access the top marks.

Question 5(b) was rarely answered, again perhaps because to do so successfully required a detailed knowledge of the text. Better essays referred to the exact temperatures and its effects on the prisoners, and wrote about the cruelty of the guards making them take off clothes for a search or counting them standing outside with their boots off.

Question 6 - Неделя как неделя (Varanskaya)

Answers to question 6(a) tended to show good knowledge of the text but would have benefitted from tighter planning to enable candidates to address the requirements of the question. Some stronger answers gave a balanced view but others dwelt solely on the negative sides and wrote that Olga did all the housework and child care which is not entirely true. Some referred to her happy memories of their honeymoon, but others forgot to mention this passage. Weaker candidates did not present a balanced view, instead simply saying that the relationship was a 'happy' or 'unhappy' one, or they came to a conclusion at all.

Question 6(b) was well answered by a number of candidates who referred to the survey as the trigger to Olga's reflections on her life and had close knowledge of the text. They wrote about the transport, accommodation and shopping difficulties which made all women's lives harder in addition to patriarchal attitudes at work and at home. The use of abortion as birth control and the burden of childcare which fell mostly on women despite the provision of state nurseries were referenced. Olga's children were often ill and it was she rather than her husband who usually had to take days off to care for them.

Question 7 - Сонечка (Ulitskaya)

There were some excellent, perceptive essays on this text, with interesting views on how it portrays women. Question 7(a), which focused on whether we can consider Robert Viktorovich a 'good' person was mostly answered negatively, with many candidates concluding that he was not 'good'. The best essays used examples from the text about how quickly he proposed to Sonechka, how he was selfishly absorbed in his art and how he betrayed Sonechka with Yasya, but weighed these up with details of his early success in Paris, his loyalty to Sonechka and his support of the family.

Question 7(b) was sometimes answered with reference to the three main female protagonists and sometimes focussing just on Sonechka herself and the various phases of her life – both routes led to successful essays. Weaker essays had little reference to the major event of the Great Patriotic War in Soviet Russia and the problems that faced Sonechka who came from a Jewish family. Other candidates showed a some understanding about why she stayed with Robert and looked after Yasya as her own. They compared Tanya and Yasya as representatives of modern women to Sonechka.

Question 8 – Крылья (Shepitko)

There were very few essays on this film, with neither 8(a) or 8(b) proving significantly more popular. For question 8(a), candidates needed a good understanding of what might have been expected of Soviet women, and a close knowledge of the film. The best candidates referred to scenes that helped us to understand the character of Nadezhda Stepanovna and were able to use evidence to show she could be described as a 'real Soviet woman'.

For 8(b), good candidates were able to show how the theme of love, marriage and personal relationships is juxtaposed to the expectations of Soviet life in the film, but how we see that in the 1960s this was begin to unravel. Contrasts were effectively drawn between the attitudes of Nadezhda Stepanovna and those of her daughter towards relationships, love and marriage. Weaker candidates retold the story, describing each character's love interest, and compared Nadezhda's current boyfriend with her lover during the war.

Question 9 – Утомлённые солнцем (Mikhalkov)

Question 9(a) was more popular than 9(b), with most learner candidates who had chosen to answer on this film (the majority) choosing this option. Very many candidates had a sound understanding of Mikhalkov's use of symbolism in the film, and this made this the most successfully answered question of all, perhaps due to the detailed and excellent teaching which learner candidates have had in centres teaching Russian in the curriculum, and their experience of teaching this film from the previous specifications. Many learner candidates offered some very original and perceptive interpretations. The most successful essays focused on what really were symbols (e.g. water, mirrors, masks, colours, ball lightning) whereas some took characters as a symbol (e.g. Nadya or Mitya) and this approach didn't really work. The best essays described key scenes, used quotes and showed a very good knowledge of both the film and its background of the Revolution, and Stalin's 'Great Terror'. They had a clear structure, lots of analysis and criticism, and a good understanding of the characters and their fates.

In question 9(b) the best essays described several scenes from across the film to demonstrate how Mikhalkov developed the character of Kotov (e.g. the very opening scenes in the *banya*, him riding out bareback to stop the tanks from destroying crops, the meeting with Mitya when he arrives disguised and tells a fairy story, the scene in the boat with Nadya on the river, the football game in the woods and the final denouement when he is in the NKVD car), whereas less successful essays took only one or two scenes (sometimes only from the beginning of the film). The most successful essays also showed the different facets of Kotov's character but picked out scenes in which he plays very different roles – loving father, Mitya's adversary etc., and mentioned these specific different roles. Some less successful essays just referred to Kotov in general and not to specific scenes, or failed to give enough detail about the specific character traits that we can draw out from the scenes in question.

Overall for question 9, learner centres and candidates are to be congratulated for some outstanding essays, and some of the best analytical responses that the examining team have seen at A Level for many years. It is clearly the case that there is much expert teaching of this film in centres across the UK, and that candidates have a very good knowledge of the social and historical context of the Stalin's Soviet Union of the 1930s.

Question 10 – Кавказский пленник (Vodrov)

There were very few answers to 10(a). Some candidates were able to accurately pinpoint scenes where we learn about Sasha and understand his character, e.g. referring to the scene where Sasha and Vanya are captured, the scene where they discuss their sexual conquests, and the scene where they escape. Others simply told the story and therefore scored low marks.

Question 10(b) was more popular and better answered than 10(a). There were a some good essays that concluded that the Chechens are depicted in a positive light from the way they treated their prisoners, befriending them and even letting them take part in festivities. They used specific examples of how some characters act in the film to back up the points being made.

Question 11 – Левиафан (Zvyagintsev)

Question 11(a) was more popular than 11(b), but was not often answered as well. The contrasts made between the lives of Kolya and Dima were often simplistic and not always accurate. There was also quite a lot of conjecture regarding Dima's life in Moscow rather than a focus on what information we are given in the film, and the specifics of his words and actions. The best essays were able to draw a clear comparison between the two men's lives – one a married mechanic with a son living in the place that he has always lived, the other a rich lawyer, a new Russian man, without a family. They referred to key events and Dima being unable to stop the compulsory purchase of Kolya's house and sleeping with Kolya's wife who is subsequently found dead. Kolya's life is ruined, he loses his home and his son and is imprisoned for his wife's murder, but Dima returns to Moscow.

There were some very good answers to question 11(b), and some excellent ones from learner candidates who have studied the film. In less successful examples, essays ended up being a bit of a personal reaction to the Russian Orthodox Church and its power in modern-day Russia rather than a response to its depiction in the film. The more successful essays highlighted specific scenes in the film that showed the hypocrisy of the Church. Some implication of the question were missed by some candidates, such as the contract between the (arch)bishop's character and that of the local priest, or reference to Kolya as Job, or the significance of his house being destroyed in order to build a church in its place.

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