

Examiners' Report Summer 2007

AEA

AEA Spanish (9881)

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Candidates are required to complete a single three-hour written examination. This year's paper had the central theme of Spanish cities. All the texts and listening material contained in the paper related to that theme and the options for the extended writing tasks were based around it. There were several texts, of different styles, with a variety of register.

Assessment Principles

Candidates' performance is assessed positively, with the following weighting: 15% Reading comprehension, 10% Transfer of meaning into English, 15% Linguistic tests, including 5% for a cloze test, 10% Listening comprehension and 50% Extended Writing.

Candidates' Responses

In general, the candidates' performance reflected a positive response to this Advanced Extension Award examination. There were some excellent answers, centres had clearly prepared candidates well and most scripts reflected an appropriate level of competence and knowledge. The majority of the candidates were able to finish the paper within the allotted time and there were few examples of unfinished scripts. Only a small number of candidates were inappropriately entered for this examination.

Primera Sección

Texto A was an extract from a novel *Nada* describing a young girl's arrival in Barcelona in the 1940s after the Spanish Civil War and her excitement at being in the big city for the first time. Two linguistic exercises were set on the passage. The first required an explanation in Spanish of words or phrases taken from the passage. Several candidates gave excellent, full definitions, with others scoring partial marks because they did not give the full meaning or wrote in inaccurate Spanish. The phrases *entumecidas* and *lo tomé sin vacilar* caused the most difficulty. The second exercise required the identification of synonyms from the text. This was done very well with most candidates scoring high marks here.

Texto B featured a further extract from the same novel. Andrea gets a horse-drawn cab to her relatives' house and the nightmare begins. This required a transfer of meaning exercise. Whilst the examiners were not seeking a highly-polished piece of English prose, they were looking for a high standard of transfer of meaning. Most candidates clearly understood the material and wrote a sound version in English. However, candidates needed to follow the story and understand what was happening, so *bajé* was "I got down/out", not "I looked down". Some of the more difficult phrases to transfer into English were *me acometió un súbito temor*, *estuve un rato titubeando*, *se empezaron a apretar los latidos de mi corazón*, *oprimí de nuevo el timbre* and *unas manos torpes recorriendo cerrojos*. Many candidates entered into the spirit of the text and produced some excellent English renderings leading up well to the final cliff-hanger 'nightmare'.

Texto C involved a short passage giving a politician's view of the present public transport policy in Madrid, with a cloze test set on it. The passage seemed to be well understood and candidates generally scored well. Candidates need to show comprehension as well as grammatical skills here and many were successful in doing so.

Texto D was a journalistic piece about the plans for a new development project in Valencia. The comprehension questions in Spanish required inference, analysis and evaluation, not merely identification of information within the text. The instructions stated that responses in full sentences were required and candidates should use their own words, rather than copy whole sentences or parts of sentences from the text. Most candidates had an understanding of the text and many gave full answers. This comprehension exercise required candidates to explain the meaning, but a few were too reliant on 'lifting' from the text without explaining. Expressions such as *urbanismo sostenible*, *depredador de territorio*, *el encarecimiento de los inmuebles*, *el autoconsumo*, etc, were often not explained. Misunderstanding of the phrase *matar varios pájaros de un tiro* led some weaker candidates to imagine the authorities were killing off wildlife and the phrase *han encandilado a los especialistas* was rarely understood. Sadly, very few candidates made a good attempt at the final question (worth 4 marks) about the Valencian *huerta*. Even some very good candidates left the section blank. Nevertheless, the overall standard of comprehension was very high and most candidates were able to provide full answers.

Once the answers were assessed for comprehension, an overall mark for the quality of the language was applied, in accordance with the published grid. Although there was some weak language, the quality was generally good, with some excellent language used by some. Several of the questions gave candidates the opportunity to use complicated verb forms.

Segunda sección

In the Listening comprehension text candidates are required to listen to the interview and to retrieve and convey information in their own words. Candidates have individual control of the recording: they may stop, rewind and replay the recording at will, and they may make notes and write their answers at any point. It is not necessary to write in full sentences and there are no extra marks awarded for quality of language in this task. Marks are awarded for answers that show comprehension and which contain facts and information.

Texto E featured an interview with a local politician from Seville, explaining the city's traffic problems and attempts to deal with it. Most candidates gave a pleasing performance and exhibited a high level of comprehension skills. Few lexical items caused problems. Most candidates understood the gist of the material and few failed to score on any of the questions, but it was necessary to give full information to gain the full marks each time. It was pleasing to see that fewer candidates relied on transcribing the whole interview this year and that there was a better attempt to use their own words. Even so, an explanation was required and no marks could be awarded for simply repeating such phrases as *dar un desahogo vial*, *han primado la supremacía del vehículo sobre el peatón*, *la conquista de la ciudad para el disfrute de las personas* or for a straight dictation of the final paragraph. Overall, the standard of Listening comprehension skills displayed was very high, with candidates understanding both the gist and the detail of this passage with its quite demanding lexis and register.

Tercera sección

The Extended Writing question carries half the total marks for the examination and draws on the other parts of the paper. Candidates are expected to devote half of the time to this task, about 90 minutes, and ensure that they plan it carefully. Candidates are required to write about 450-500 words. There was a choice of two tasks. This year, the discursive essay was the more popular of the two, but there were some highly successful essays written for both.

Question (a) is a creative essay. Candidates are expected to continue the story in Texts A and B from the point where B finishes. It is expected that candidates should continue the story in the first person narrative, following the tone and register of the original. There should be references to the city of Barcelona and the information previously given. It is the 1940s, a young girl arrives in the large city of Barcelona for the first time to study and to stay with relatives she does not know. She arrives at the apartment and the nightmare begins. More candidates chose this creative essay option than in previous years and the results varied widely. Weaker candidates did not succeed in using the first-person narrative successfully and several started off from the wrong point, by saying that Andrea's parents lived in the house, rather than unknown relatives. It was absolutely necessary to have understood the stimulus texts properly before embarking on continuing the story. Some candidates made no reference to the *pesadilla* and others had anachronisms, including euros and mobile phones (in the 1940s). However, there were many very strong essays, where candidates continued with a story of suspense, often involving ghosts, blood and gore, terrorism and fearful situations for the young student to be in. The language was often sophisticated and imaginative, with excellent lexis and structures. Without doubt, this year the Examiners saw some of the best creative essays so far at this level.

Question (b) was a discursive essay discussing the challenges that face Spanish cities in the 21st century. Candidates are expected to make reference to the material contained in the different texts in the paper and to use the vocabulary and ideas expressed therein. Although some mention of global city development might well be made, it is expected that the bulk of the essay should refer specifically to Spain and include names, places, events, etc. A thorough discussion of the issues is expected and the essay should be written in the appropriate register of a discursive essay, with the language of argument and debate. The essay should be structured in a logical way, hopefully with a balance discussion of both economic development and the protection of the environment, leading to a conclusion summing up the situation. Generally there was a high level of performance in this essay. In all events, it was essential for candidates to refer to the ideas and opinions expressed in the earlier texts, as well as giving their own opinions. Whilst most candidates succeeded in writing organised essays which fulfilled the tasks with an appropriate level of accuracy and range of lexis and structures, unfortunately, some candidates produced essays that concentrated more on general environmental issues and the problem of immigration in Spain (covered in previous AEA examinations), rather than focusing their writing on the actual question set. There was, however, a clear indication that the majority of candidates had followed advice and made pertinent references to the other texts. There were some excellent essays, full of knowledge, well-argued and using accurate, skilful language and a wide range of lexis and structures.

Advice and Guidance for Candidates

In the sixth year of the Advanced Extension Award in Spanish, there were some very good performances across the range of questions. Nevertheless, some points of guidance could be made to enable centres to improve candidates' performance.

- Time management. This is a long paper (3 hours). Candidates are recommended to spread their time carefully and to follow the recommendations as regards the time to be spent on each section.
- Where to start? It is recommended that candidates should look at the last question first. As they work through the earlier sections, they should consider points of information that they might later be able to incorporate in the Extended Writing essay.
- Vocabulary knowledge. Dictionaries are not allowed in this examination. Although the most difficult lexical items will always be glossed, it is essential that candidates should build up their vocabulary knowledge over a wide range of topics.
- Knowledge of Spain and Spanish-speaking countries. The examination requires a widespread knowledge of Hispanic life and culture. Candidates are recommended to study the Guidance for Students document and read widely across a variety of registers when preparing for this examination.

Statistics

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Grade	Max mark	Distinction	Merit
Boundary Mark	200	145	116

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