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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel GCSE
In Japanese (1JA0) Paper 4F: Writing in Japanese

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Introduction

This being the first time that the 'new' writing exam was sat by GCSE candidates in Japanese, there was doubtless considerable concern as to which tier candidates should be entered for. Whilst there were some responses which indicated that the candidate could safely have been entered for the Higher tier, generally the decision to 'play it safe' seems to have been the correct one. Unlike the previous specification, having an entire paper aimed at the lower end of the ability range meant that the tasks set allowed everyone to write something and to achieve a grade. No access to a dictionary was doubtless more of a problem for those at Foundation tier than it was at Higher; at this level, the support of a dictionary with a kana chart would have been useful for some. It is, therefore, essential that Foundation candidates not only know key vocabulary, but can also write those words from memory in the appropriate kana. (Teachers should note that the mark scheme specifically mentions the use of hiragana for Question 1 and of hiragana and katakana for Question 2. Kanji are not expected until Question 3.)

Question 1 (12 marks)

The first task asks candidates to describe a photo and to then give an opinion on a related area. In many cases the latter part of the task was much better addressed than the first. It was necessary to tackle BOTH parts of the task to achieve top marks for Communication and Content (CC).

More successful responses included a good range of useful adjectives (たのしい、おもしろい、にぎやか、たかい、おおきい), many also managing to use から correctly to give a reason, e.g. とうきょうはにぎやかですから、好きです. Examiners were slightly surprised to find, however, that candidates often failed to use even simple sentence patterns to describe the photo. Candidates need to practise this more in the classroom so that they can write about at least one aspect of the photo. (This is also, of course, useful practice for picture-based task in the Speaking test.)

Of course candidates are going to be restricted by the vocabulary that they have memorised, but there should always be something for each student to talk about. In this particular case, suggested phrases might have included: しゃしんにみせがあります。日本人がいます。かわいいです。かばんとスカートがあります。To ensure success in this first task, hiragana needs to be known well; combination sounds (しゃ、きよ、etc) and the long う need extra focus as it was often here that

clarity of the writing was lost. As noted above, the mark scheme for Question 1 only refers to hiragana, so it may be better for candidates to use hiragana rather than katakana if it is going to avoid misleading errors.

Question 2 (16 marks)

This task requires candidates to write a short note to an individual or an organisation, giving information about a planned activity. Although it is not necessary to address all four bullet points (BP), it is advisable for candidates to do so as it will helpfully limit how much needs to be said for each point.

This year the task required candidates to write a short note, booking accommodation at a Kyoto hostel.

BP1 was addressed successfully by most candidates, as it only needed a time expression as the most basic form of response. A verb was not needed to achieve basic communication.

BP2, however, needed a verb to make the answer clear. Better responses included phrases such as 。 。 がほしいです、ください、おねがいします。 It was surprising how few candidates appeared to know the word へや and had to rely on katakana, which in itself is not a problem here as Japanese often uses this (e.g. ツインルーム), but many then failed to write the word accurately in katakana.

BP 3 and 4 were often dealt with better than 1 and 2, as candidates had clearly been well trained to give an opinion about an activity, linking with から in the best cases; this allowed them to access the top 7-8 band for Linguistic Knowledge and Accuracy (LKA), whilst inclusion of なぜなら or でも generally meant that examiners felt able to award 5-6 for this aspect of the task. Many candidates also managed with little difficulty to produce a たい sentence, thus addressing the mark scheme's insistence on 'successful reference to....future events'.

Question 3 (20 marks)

For this task, candidates are given two tasks from which they have to choose one. Of the two options, 3a was by far the more popular choice, since it appeared to be more approachable, allowing candidates the opportunity to use a possibly pre-learnt description for BP1. It is important that teachers point out to candidates that for this task they must deal (however briefly) with EACH BP for top marks to be accessible.

(This is in contrast to Question 2, for which the mark scheme makes no such demands.)

Question 3a

Understandably, it was in this task, where there is a need to write more with less guidance, that less successful candidates struggled to complete the task. However, many did still give a description of their friend as 楽しくておもしろい, with some adding further description phrases.

For BP2, most managed to convey 'where' and 'when' they had met the friend, even if use of the past tense was not totally clear. However, the number of candidates who used に with the verb あいます was quite small; this is one 'exception' that teachers would do well to address in class.

BPs 3 and 4 (why friends are important/how you can make friends in the future) were always going to be more of a challenge as they need a degree of abstract language and, ideally, some form of future tense. More successful candidates knew the word たいせつ and were able to give a reason for this, even if the link was not made explicit in the language. At this level, comments about, for example, talking together or doing sport together were interpreted as reasons for the importance of friendship.

In BP4 the phrase 'after leaving school' in the task was often misunderstood as meaning simply after the last bell of the day; examiners were expecting to see answers which referred to 'work' or 'university' as signs of life 'after [...] school'.

Question 3b

As stated above, this task was not the preferred option of most candidates, but examiners agreed that those who did choose it often performed relatively better than those who chose 3a, possibly because either they are interested in environmental issues, or had learnt the relevant vocabulary, which is certainly more 'specialist' than that needed for 3a.

Obviously at this level, there was little expectation that candidates would know 'difficult' vocabulary such as 'public transport' or 'good/bad for the environment' in Japanese, but many candidates managed to produce good answers without using these. Thus, relatively simple sentences such as 車が好きです answered BP1, きのう車でまちに行きました dealt with BP2, and バスはたかいです gave a reason for preferring the car. The final BP was conceptually and linguistically the most demanding, but again

there was no need for complex language to give a clear, relevant answer: 私はまちでじてんしゃにのります, whilst not explicitly answering the question (there is no idea of the future, it does not talk about transport options for all) still conveys the right idea, and would have been interpreted by examiners as giving an answer to this BP.

Question 4 (12 marks)

This task was the biggest 'unknown' and probable cause of most anxiety, and whilst there was a fair number of totally blank responses, those candidates who attempted the sentences managed to gain valuable marks.

This task consists of five sentences of increasing difficulty, linked by theme and marked individually, as described in the mark scheme.

Sentence (a)

For many candidates, the location structure (がっこうはロンドンにあります) was quite challenging. がっこう and ロンドン were also often poorly spelled, although the place name was accepted if written in hiragana.

Sentence (b)

The word 'uniform' was the biggest challenge here; many did not know the word せいふく and tried to write it in katakana. Whilst this was a perfectly acceptable strategy, it is a difficult word to write in katakana if basic knowledge of the script is limited.

Sentence (c)

Again, vocabulary (すうがく) was the problem, although the 'but' was generally expressed successfully either by joining with が or using でも.

Sentence (d)

A good number of candidates dealt well with this sentence; the necessary vocabulary was generally known (and does not need any 'awkward' long sounds or small 'tsu') and word order was correct. It was clear that candidates had been well drilled in producing sentences with particles linking the nouns.

Sentence (e)

This was the most demanding part of the task and relatively few candidates were able to deal with all the difficulties. Although the basic

structure was often correct, with a から to link the two parts of the sentence and the verb in final position, much of the vocabulary (apart from おべんとう) was either unknown or wrong; many candidates failed to write 'yesterday' or 'made' in hiragana, and whilst many attempted to write 'sports day' in katakana (again, acceptable, even though examiners were expecting うんどうかい in hiragana), it was quite often unrecognisable to even the most sympathetic eye.

Final remarks

Overall it would be fair to say that many candidates coped well with the demands of the different types of question. The main advice for teachers, drawn from the comments above, would be:

- practise spelling of key words in both hiragana and katakana, especially words that include a long vowel or a 'chiisai tsu'
- using the list of grammar structures, practise simple sentences to help with the translation task
- advise candidates to 'have a go' and use the language they can use (in some cases, a word or phrase is enough, as long as it is clear) rather than what they want to say, e.g. use ましょう rather than ほうがいい
- use a variety of photos to practise description for Question 1
- stress to candidates that they choose ONE option for Question 3 and indicate that by putting the cross in the box. A good many candidates tried to answer both options.