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FIRST LANGUAGE CZECH

Paper 0514/02

Reading and Directed Writing

General comments

In general, candidates performed well. They did best in **Section A**, where they asked to work with material from two texts. **Question 3**, in which they were asked to write a letter of complaint to a public authority, proved to be more difficult.

In general, candidates are reminded to read through the questions more carefully, as some omitted to carry out certain tasks.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Answers to all the four sub-questions were mostly exhaustive. On the whole, candidates were aware of the fact that Seifert's narration was that of a poet; moreover, specifically a poet reminiscing about his youth. Nevertheless, most neglected to mention the fact that it was his poetic/artistic view of the world that saw beauty in the ordinary and that idealized many things, such as his childhood.

A frequent mistake in interpreting the text by Ota Gregor was to explain his interest in nutrition by making assertions about the author's private life, which were not supported by the text. Consequently, credit could not be given for assertions such as: "Ota Gregor has diabetes, therefore he may have eaten too much as a child, therefore...".

On the other hand, some candidates made the correct observation that Gregor's view on the excessive consumption of carbohydrates and fat was an objective, scientific view, not one arising from an aesthetic or psychological opinion.

Question 2

The task was to describe a shop and its goods. A number of candidates deviated from the task in hand and concentrated on other topics to their detriment, as credit could not be given for e.g. stories of candidates' experiences which happened to occur in various shops. On the other hand, it was entirely appropriate for candidates to use colourful descriptions of a shop and its goods, which evoked clear and vivid images of what a shop looked like.

Some of the more frequent linguistic errors that were made included the following:

- Neglect of the conventions for recording direct speech
- Mistakes in combining verbs and prepositions (often, English verb/preposition combinations were used)
- Incorrect use of possessives such as *jeho/její* instead of the correct reflexive form *svůj*
- Incorrect use of adjectival forms when placed after a noun.

Question 3

- (a) In this task, the candidates were asked to use all relevant information from the text to write a complaint addressed to the Ministry of Agriculture. This task represented the greatest difficulty for the candidates. In particular, the candidates rarely fully mastered the style of formal correspondence.

A formal letter of complaint should at least comprise the following details: addresses of the recipient and the originator, date, place, an appropriate salutation, a (complimentary) closing and a signature. A salutation such as 'Dear Ladies and Gentlemen' is inappropriate in this situation, since it is more suitable for oral forms of address (e.g. at the start of a speech), rather than written ones. It is also not customary to start off a letter in Czech with a capital after the salutation. Date and address of the originator were also often missing.

As mentioned before, a formal letter should also include a courteous closing - a complimentary sentence in which the writer thanks the addressee, possibly tries to share his/her expectations or seek agreement with the addressee, and says goodbye. It is appropriate to write this concluding sentence as a new paragraph and to leave a space of one line before and after this paragraph to separate it from the preceding text and the signature. Many candidates, however, failed to observe this layout.

There were also quite a few shortcomings in the content of the letter. It should contain all the relevant information, but the form in which it was presented was of at least equal importance. In spoken communication, the narration of events is often lengthy and unedited and will include many details. An official letter, however, requires statements to be concise and to the point and presentation to be in an urgent, yet courteous style.

- (b) Most candidates managed to complete this task successfully.

Paper 0514/03

Continuous Writing

General comments

Overall, candidates performed better than average. The most frequently selected topics were 2, 3 and 6. Most candidates probably opted for these topics since they were closely related to their daily lives. Nevertheless, even if a topic is familiar to the candidates (e.g. computers), it is necessary that they think properly about their essay before they start writing, in order to establish a structure and allow them to think through the content. Generally, candidates had difficulties with articulating their thoughts, and it happened several times that due to a bad formulation, a passage was incomprehensible or remained vague.

There were also some minor stylistic shortcomings. For instance, the conjunction *co* used to start off minor attributive sentences (*lidé, co dělají sporty*) was overused. Furthermore, there was frequent incorrect use of possessive pronouns (*můj-svůj, jeho-svůj* etc.) Punctuation was often overlooked.

The possible influence of the English language on candidates' Czech shows up in incorrect verb/preposition combinations (e.g. *žádat pro něco*), incorrect cases (e.g. *nazývám to štěstí* instead of *šťestím*), unusual collocations (e.g. *dělat sporty, udělat starch*) and inappropriate terms (e.g. *konektivita*).

Occasionally, colloquial language was used in places where it was not appropriate.

Overall, candidates are recommended to reflect on the content and style as well as on the structure of their essay.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Only a very few chose this topic. On a minor note, it needs to be pointed out that a letter in Czech always starts in lower case (as opposed to English).

Question 2

Roughly a third of the candidates selected this topic. Although many of them frequently work or play with computers, it was difficult for a large number of them to view issues surrounding computers beyond their own experience, in order come to a general conclusion about the role computers play in people's lives.

Question 3

Again, about a third of the candidates selected the topic "You live when you take risks". Here, the main problem was the excessive use of questions which remained unanswered (i.e. "Why do people take risks?" "What is adrenalin?" etc.). Another was the inability of some candidates to formulate their thoughts clearly and intelligibly, and to build a logical structure for the essay.

Question 4

None of the candidates selected this topic.

Question 5

The objective of this assignment was to describe a geographical environment (e.g. a neighbourhood or the countryside). Some candidates used the topic to reminisce about their childhood, which was not the intention behind the essay question.

Question 6

A fairly large number of candidates selected the topic "Life is change", probably because it allowed them to describe their personal experience. Overall, the essays were of a good quality.

Questions 7 and 8

None of the candidates selected these topics.

Question 9

In this case, the assignment was to write a review of a film. Reviews should attempt to evaluate critically the pros and cons of a film, after a brief recapitulation of the story. The few candidates who chose this topic managed to do well, despite the odd bland statement such as "The movie was bad", "The costumes were not nice" or "The cast was disastrous", especially when such statements were presented without reasons to back them up.