

BURMESE

Paper 3249/01

Paper 1

General comments

This year saw another strong group of candidates. The majority demonstrated mature and competent literacy in Burmese, with only a very few cases where writing fluent Burmese appeared difficult. Candidates are strongly advised to read through and check their work in the examination and take the opportunity to eliminate spelling errors which can needlessly spoil good writing.

Reports for previous years have addressed the issue of the difference between colloquial and literary writing styles in Burmese. Most candidates are aware of the difference and choose to use formal literary Burmese except when reporting speech, when they write in the colloquial style. Some candidates, however, mix the two styles, giving an impression of wanting to appear formal while actually producing mixed-register language. Candidates are advised to avoid writing in an over-complicated, over-formal style, since very often this can detract from the clarity of the writing. In fact, clear use of the colloquial style is both acceptable throughout the paper and preferable to the extent that it aids communication.

In general, candidates had clear and legible handwriting.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Composition

Question 1

(a) *What makes people happy?*

Over half of the candidates attempted this question. High marks were scored by those whose compositions had structure and who handled abstract language clearly. More superficial or frivolous treatments of this topic did not score so highly.

(b) *Write a letter complaining about something.*

This was the most popular choice of compositions in **Section A**. Candidates scored well if they wrote a formal letter of complaint which set out clearly the grounds for complaint and the redress sought, resisting the temptation to digress from the topic into general moralising.

(c) *Recount the events in a typical busy day at school or college.*

Few candidates attempted this question. The title asks specifically for a "typical" day, but many candidates selected a particular day or a special, memorable event at school. Nonetheless, this question produced some evocative accounts of school life which scored well.

(d) *Describe how it feels to watch the sun rise.*

This was a popular choice. One or two candidates wrote about sunset rather than sunrise, but by and large the question produced good compositions. Candidates wrote about the circumstances which led them to watch the sunrise, about the memories of watching sunrise in Burma, and there were some fine descriptions of this colourful spectacle.

- (e) *Compose or report a conversation between two teachers who are talking about the students they have taught.*

Not many candidates chose this question, but those who did scored highly for imaginative and often humorous conversations between teachers about the lives and idiosyncrasies of their students, making for very enjoyable reading.

Section B: Translation

Question 2 Translation into English

This passage presented few problems for most candidates, besides minor points of grammar and spelling in English. Where candidates did lose marks, it was for summarising or paraphrasing the content of the passage. Candidates are reminded of the instructions in the rubric to this question: "Aim to produce a translation in natural-sounding English which conveys the sense of every word in the Burmese."

Question 3 Translation into Burmese

This translation was expertly tackled by the majority of candidates. The Examiner was particularly impressed by candidates' ability to render complex sentences into Burmese with great skill and accuracy. Candidates should be reminded that a translation must be exactly that, and not a summary of the content of the passage in the target language.

Section C: Comprehension

Questions 4 - 8

Full marks were awarded to candidates who not only answered questions correctly, but also provided full evidence from the text to support or explain their answers to the questions. Few candidates lost many marks on this section, and this is evidence that the candidates were able to digest the passage and think their way into the situations it describes without difficulty. Candidates are reminded of the need to answer the question set in their own words, and not simply to copy out the relevant passage from the comprehension text.