

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback Summer 2010

GCE

GCE Spanish (6SP03) Unit 3: Understanding and Spoken Response in Spanish

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Unit 3: Understanding and Spoken Response in Spanish (6SP03)

This is the report on the first session of the new specifications for GCE Spanish Unit 3: Understanding and Spoken Response in Spanish (6SP03), introduced in 2008.

Format of the test

The assessment for this unit is divided into two sections and lasts between 11 and 13 minutes.

The first section is a debate and requires candidates to present and take a clear stance on any issue of their choice. The examiner then plays devil's advocate, adopts the opposite view to the candidate and provides strong and meaningful challenges to allow the candidates to defend their views and to use the language of debate and argument.

At the end of this section, the examiner indicates that the exam is moving to the second part of the test and moves away smoothly from the debate in part one to the discussion in part two by asking a link question that leads from the initial issue into an area associated with the initial issue.

In this part of the exam the candidates have to demonstrate their ability to engage in a natural and unpredictable but not unfamiliar meaningful discussion of two or three follow up issues, during which the examiner encourages the candidate to express their views on the issues.

Assessment Principles

The test is assessed positively out of 50.

Tests that are too short

A test is too short if it is less than 10 minutes 30 seconds. Candidates are allowed a 30 second tolerance.

Drop down one mark band to the corresponding mark across the following assessment grids:

- 'Response'
- 'Comprehension and Development'

e.g.

5-8	Limited incidence of spontaneous discourse; limited range of lexis and structures; very little evidence of abstract language.
9-12	Satisfactory incidence of spontaneous discourse; range of lexis and structures adequate with some ability to handle language of abstract concepts.
13-16	Frequent examples of spontaneous discourse; good range of lexis and structures; good use of abstract concepts.

If a candidate would have scored 12, they should be given 8, if they would have scored 9, they should be given 5. The penalty should not be applied to 'Quality of language' or 'Reading and research'

Tests that are too long

Once the 13 minute mark has passed, the examiner stops listening at the end of the next sentence.

Tests that do not move away from initial input

e.g. spontaneous discussion is not initiated/further unpredictable areas of discussion are not covered.

Candidates are limited in the amount of marks they can score. Please see the grids.

Response	
No unpredictable areas discussed	Only one unpredictable area discussed
No more than 8 marks	No more than 12 marks

Reading and research	
No unpredictable areas discussed	Only one unpredictable area discussed
No more than 3 marks	No more than 4 marks

Comprehension and development	
No unpredictable areas discussed	Only one unpredictable area discussed
No more than 7 marks	No more than 10 marks

Tests that are pre-learnt

Candidates are limited in the amount of marks they can score. Please see 'Response' grid.

- 'Response' - cannot score more than 8, irrespective of use of lexis/structure/abstract language.

Response (20 marks)

There are three descriptors in this assessment grid.

- Spontaneity - Is the discourse spontaneous or pre-learnt?
- Abstract concepts - Can the candidate handle abstract concepts not purely concrete exchanges? Is the discussion about ideas not purely narrative or descriptive?
- Range of lexis and structures - Does the candidate have a good range of lexis and sentence structures appropriate to the issues discussed?

Quality of Language (7 marks)

This box assesses accuracy of language, pronunciation and intonation.

Reading and research (7 marks)

This assessment grid assesses the candidate's level of awareness and understanding of both general issues and the chosen issue for debate. There is no requirement for students to demonstrate knowledge related to the Spanish -language culture, nor do they need to have a long list of facts and figures. However students need to have undertaken research into the chosen issue and wide reading of other topics to be able to demonstrate awareness and to be able to formulate and justify their arguments.

Comprehension and development (16 marks)

There are two descriptors in this assessment grid:

- The ability to understand the spoken language. Can the candidate understand all the implications of the questions put to them?
- The ability to develop the responses. Can the candidate respond demonstrating understanding, take the initiative and move the discussion forward?

Candidate's performance

The majority of centres had a good understanding of what was required of this unit and most of the candidates were well prepared. There was a wide range of quality in the performances heard but there were many very competent performances noted. The most successful candidates approached the test with confidence and responded readily and fluently to the questions asked. They were able to develop their replies without too much reliance on or prompting from the examiner.

The debate

The best candidates had researched their chosen issue, had anticipated counter arguments and had enough evidence and knowledge to support their arguments. They also had good command of lexis relevant to their area of debate, weaker candidates simply relied on assertion, generalisations or personal conviction and consequently all too often ran out of material and tended to repeat their arguments.

The discussion

For this part of the exam good candidates were well informed and aware of current issues, could express their opinions clearly, analyse and justify their views with examples or evidence and develop their responses. Some excellent examining was heard from many centres where the examiner asked probing questions in no more than two or three follow up areas to allow the candidate to produce detail and depth in their responses. All these areas were well linked and followed a natural development.

This is an example of a well conducted test:

Chosen issue: A favor de los matrimonios homosexuales

*Follow up areas: La religión
El uso del burka
Igualdad de oportunidades*

This is an example of a badly conducted test:

Chosen issue: En contra de la pena de muerte

*Follow up areas: El Medio Ambiente
La guerra en Irak
El paro
Graffiti*

On rare occasions some examiners forgot that discussion entails interaction between two people and instead they just went through the motions of introducing many topics and asking one question, waiting for an answer and then asking another question which was not always related to the area under discussion.

The follow up areas for this part of the exam can be chosen from Additional General Topic Areas for A2 but also from the General Topic Area for AS. However for a candidate to access the higher marks, the AS topics covered at A2 should be treated at a different level and the answers given to questions should clearly indicate progression from AS to A2.

This is an example of where a candidate gives a good A2 level response to a question that is commonly asked in the AS oral exam.

Cuáles son las desventajas de los usos de la tecnología hoy en día?

- Es difícil imaginar un mundo sin tecnología, todos usamos el Internet, tenemos un teléfono móvil, un Ipod, etc. Sin embargo todos también sabemos que la tecnología y nuestro estilo de vida moderna tiene desventajas, por ejemplo, estamos destruyendo el medio ambiente porque cada vez necesitamos más energía. Otra desventaja es que la tecnología también puede ser la causa del desempleo en algunos sectores como en la producción de coches. También es la causa de la división entre países ricos y pobres.

The examiner continued the discussion asking questions exploring the topics touched on in the candidate's response such as "Explica que es lo que quieres decir con la división de países ricos y pobres debido al uso de la tecnología?"

This is an example of a candidate's answer that did not show any progression from AS:

Cuáles son las desventajas de los usos de la tecnología hoy en día?

- Los jóvenes pasan muchas horas en el ordenador, jugando video juegos o hablando con sus amigos en Internet. Así no hacen mucho ejercicio y pueden tener problemas de obesidad.

In this example, the examiner continued the discussion by asking several simple personal questions such as 'Tu tienes un ordenador?' 'Para que usas el ordenador?' 'Te gustan los videojuegos?'

It was noted by our examiners that there were many native or near native speakers taking this exam, however to score high marks as well as relying on the quality of the spoken language, preparation on the other aspects of the examination is also required. Unfortunately, candidates who relied just on the quality of their language could not be rewarded high marks on the other assessment grids.

Suitability of Topics/ Issues

The range of issues chosen for the debate was fairly wide. The most successful ones were the ones that had a moral and ethical dimension and had several possibilities for development.

The most popular issues were abortion, euthanasia, the death penalty, immigration and same sex marriages.

There were some issues directly associated with Spain or Latin America such as 'A favor de la ley de la memoria histórica', 'En contra de Hugo Chavez' 'A favor del sistema de autonomías en España' 'A favor de la política de Evo Morales'. Some other interesting issues presented were : 'A favor de los bebés a la carta' 'En contra del Trident' 'A favor de la donación obligatoria de órganos'.

Unsuitable issues were those that were not arguable from both sides or ones where the candidate was simply expressing personal opinion, such as "En contra de la descarga ilegal de música" , 'A favor de que los niños coman mejor para combatir la obesidad infantil', 'No creo

que los profesores deben tener acceso a los sitios web privados de los colegiales', 'Estoy a favor de la seguridad del internet', 'A favor del camino de Santiago'.

Popular current follow-up topics for the discussion were: The General Election, The Olympic Games in 2012, The BP disaster in the Gulf of Mexico.

Quality of language

Common errors:

- Confusion of ser, estar and haber
- Wrong verb endings, infinitives and gerunds
- Gender of nouns, agreement of adjectives
- Erratic subject/verb agreement

Good candidates stood out with:

- Complex sentences with relative pronouns
- Use of phrases such as 'ya que', 'entonces', 'por eso', 'por consecuencia'.
- Correct comparatives.
- Correct use of pronouns.
- Correct and appropriate use of the subjunctive.
- Correct verb endings, varied tenses,
- Correct use of the reflexive.
- Correct prepositions following verbs.
- Natural use of conversational joiners like "Lo que pasa es que...." "comprendo lo que dice pero...." "bueno en algunos casos pero en otros es...."

In some cases the pronunciation of some words, especially those close to the English, gave difficulty e.g. difícil.....fácil.....idea....usan....policía.....problema....

At times there was some confusion with muy/mucho, mayor/mejor and menor words like igualdad, mayoría, controversial, suportivo, serio, las medias, los resultados . some expressions such as es depende, es vale, es necesita, es importancia, es ridículo. English verbs giving them a Spanish ending: restringir, afordar, accesar, permitir, suportar, promover.

Teacher Examiner's performance

Conduct of the exam

It is very important to stress here that the outcome of the test for the candidate is closely related to and dependant upon the way the teacher examiner conducts the exam.

Most centres conducted excellent tests. They had carefully read the oral training guide as well as the Teacher-Examiner Handbook and followed all the guidelines. To reward the candidate's ability to understand spoken Spanish these examiners asked clear, uncluttered and yet challenging questions using a variety of structures and lexis. However in a few cases teachers that had not prepared for the exam satisfactorily spoke too much and asked long convoluted questions - this was obviously to the disadvantage of their candidates.

Timing

In the majority of the cases the correct timing was observed.

The specification is clear about the timing required for the Unit 3 exam. In Part 1 - the debate - the candidate should introduce his or her stance for up to 1 minute (it is not essential that the candidate uses the whole minute for this) after which the Examiner should interrupt so the debate continues for a further 4 minutes before the Examiner moves on to the discussion section (Part 2). The whole oral should last between 11 -13 minutes.

It has to be noted here that it would be impossible and most unnatural for any discussion to adhere precisely to the quoted timings as there needs to be a smooth transition from one topic to another however the timings in the exam have to be as close as possible to the ones indicated in the specification.

In the few cases where the tests were short the agreed penalty was applied to the test resulting in a loss of marks. If the tests were too long the examiner stopped listening at the end of the next sentence once the 13 minutes mark had passed.

Centre Administration

Recording

Although the majority of centres recorded their orals on cassettes there is an ever-increasing number of centres submitting their recordings on audio and data CDs. Digital submission on CDs is a welcome addition as it makes assessment of oral exams easier and the quality of recording is often much better. Given the difficulty sourcing cassettes centres are advised to start adopting the use of digital recording.

The quality of recording was, for most candidates, very clear although occasionally the examiners placed the microphone closer to the teacher examiner rather than to the candidate and the recording was so faint that it was difficult to hear. At times there was a lot of external noise on the recording i.e. ticking, bells, doors closing, etc

If centres are recording onto CD in an audio or data format, it would be helpful to examiners if centres indicated which format they were using on the CD. On the whole centres labelled their cassettes and CD cases well. Most centres included correct OR3 forms with their tapes.

Please note that the oral recordings for unit 1 and unit 3 should be submitted on different cassettes/CDs. There were some incidences where centres submitted all recordings on the same tape/CD.

Documentation

Some centres failed to send the Attendance registers. Occasionally the OR3 forms had 'the stance on the issue' expressed in English. Please note this should be written in Spanish.

On some occasions centres sent the wrong oral forms: they used the old/legacy Unit 3 (i.e. AS) forms instead of the new Unit 3 (A2) oral form. Centres are reminded that they can download the correct version of the OR3 form from the GCE Spanish webpage on www.edexcel.com

Advice and Guidance

- Candidates must choose an issue that lends itself to debate and make sure it is phrased correctly 'Estoy a favor de..' 'Estoy en contra de..'
- Candidates need to undertake reading and research to provide supporting evidence for their arguments.
- Examiners should challenge the candidate's views so that they are given suitable opportunities to demonstrate their ability to argue their case and justify their opinion.
- Candidates should not be given advance knowledge of the issues to be raised during the exam or learn their answers by heart as this lack of spontaneity will be reflected in the application of the mark scheme. Such practice will only result in a minimum marks allocation for Response.
- Examiners need to ask sufficiently complex and challenging questions to allow their candidates to access the full range of marks available for Comprehension and Development. It should be noted here that questions can be linguistically challenging or conceptually challenging and complex by the response they require.
- Examiners must make sure that the second part of the exam is not a re-run of the Unit 1 oral test. For candidates to access the higher marks they must show progression from AS to A2
- Examiners should not introduce too many follow up issues to allow the candidate to produce depth of discussion and development of opinions.
- Examiners should not correct, clarify or finish the candidate's responses.
- Centres should not rotate the same two or three issues for all their candidates but rather personalise each examination for each individual candidate.

Conclusion

The outcome of the first exam of this unit was pleasing and the majority of the centres had prepared their candidates thoroughly so they had a good understanding of the requirements of this unit and responded well to its demands.

Grade Boundaries

Grade	Max Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	N	U
Raw mark boundary	50	45	40	35	30	26	22	18	0
Uniform mark scale boundary	70	63	56	49	42	35	28	21	0

a* is only used in conversion from raw to uniform marks. It is not a published unit grade.

The same grade boundary applies for components 1A and 1B

The modern foreign languages specifications share a common design, but the assessments in different languages are not identical. Grade boundaries at unit level reflect these differences in assessments, ensuring that candidate outcomes across these specifications are comparable at specification level.

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