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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Spanish (6SP04) Paper 01

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GCE Spanish (A2) Unit 4 is assessed by means of a two and a half hour examination. During this time, students have to translate a short passage into the target language and write two essays in Spanish, the first either creative or discursive and the second research-based essay. The specification is now very familiar to most students, who show great understanding of what is expected of them.

Creative essays were only chosen by just over a tenth of the students and Q2(a), a conversation, and Q2(b), continuing a story, were the most popular among them. The majority of students opted to write a discursive essay, especially on the topics of the benefits and risks of social media and working abroad given the lack of job opportunities in the home country. Some students failed to consider every aspect of the question, leading to answers that either did not evaluate all the issues presented or ignored some elements of the question.

Regarding the Research Based Essay, many students provided very detailed information, often with carefully selected quotes, examples and statistics; they were, in general, very informative and interesting. The Literature and the Arts question continued to be the one students preferred the most, with an increasing trend towards the study of film. Students found it difficult to identify a particular event in the history of the Spanish-speaking society they had studied in Q3(b).

The standard of written language was generally high and demonstrated a good command of appropriate language. Students and teachers should refer to the Grammar List in the Specifications in order to get enough practice on the use of high level language and structures. It is important that the vocabulary used in the essays is relevant and specific to the topic discussed in order to access the top marks of the language grids (Range and Application of language in Q2 and Quality of Language in Q3).

Section A: Translation

Question 1

The translation exercise tests a variety of grammatical structures with the emphasis on accuracy and no acceptance of paraphrasing or embellishment. Spelling, syntax and grammar must be accurate and there is no reward for creative writing. Only essential accents are penalised, for example "tomo" and "tomó" as there is a change in the tense and therefore it leads to ambiguity.

The content of the translation is firmly based on one of the General Topic Areas as published in the Specification. For instance, the summer 2017 translation related to the theme of National and international events. Finally, the grammatical structures tested also correspond to those listed in the Specification Appendix 6.

This year's translation proved to be both testing and challenging in terms of vocabulary and grammatical structures but many students coped well.

There was a wide range of ability with a few students scoring 0 and a more significant number of students scoring 9 or 10.

The translation is made up of five sentences with some very accessible items, such as 'my parents', 'my mother', 'themes', 'time', 'actors', and 'next year'. Regarding complex structures, students were expected to use the imperfect subjunctive, the impersonal passive voice, the preterit (pretérito indefinido) and the imperfect (pretérito imperfecto) indicative and the present continuous.

The majority of the students successfully translated the first section; the most common mistakes were: 'dieron', many students translated it as 'daron'; and 'fui', a few students used the wrong conjugation 'fue'. The word 'tickets' proved challenging for some students. There were some students who struggled with 'para' and used 'por' instead.

In the second section 'What he liked the most' was a challenging structure for some students. The most common problems were missing the pronoun in 'le gustó', missing the accent, which changed the tense of the verb, and the use of 'lo más' or 'lo mejor' instead of 'más'; some students forgot to put the accent on 'más', which changes the meaning to 'but'. The impersonal passive voice was sometimes translated as a passive voice 'fueron presentados', which was accepted.

The third section was the most challenging section for many reasons: students failed to translate 'popular' using the right adjectival agreement: 'populares'; not everybody remember to use the present subjunctive after the phrase 'No creo que'; the complex structure 'they are becoming' was usually translated without the reflexive pronoun 'se'; the expressions 'un otro' or 'una otra' were not accepted as a translation of 'another'; and finally the lack of accent on 'más' changed the meaning of the word as explained in section 2, however students were penalised only once if they had missed this accent in more than one occasion.

Students showed a great command of the use of the If Clause Type III (Past Perfect and Conditional Perfect) in section 4. Only a few students put an accent on 'si', which changed the meaning of the word. The most common mistakes were: 'tuviera' instead of 'hubiera tenido' and 'había hablado' or 'hablaría' instead of 'habría hablado'.

As in box 3, the most challenging element in section 5 was the use of the present subjunctive, this time after 'Cuando'. A significant number of students forgot to put the accent on 'sería', which changes the meaning of the word to 'serious' instead of 'it would be'.

Students are advised to, especially essential accents as this will affect the meaning and therefore the effectiveness of the translation. It is important to as its usage is very common in Spanish. Students should

Based on the performance of students in this series, teachers and students are advised to:

- avoid periphrasis and stick as closely to the text as possible

- be familiar with Spanish punctuation
- check essential accents e.g. sí, más
- avoid including words in English
- revise cognates and false friends for each topic area studied
- revise the correct spelling of key words for each topic area
- understand when and how to use the present subjunctive
- revise present and imperfect subjunctive set phrases and when (or not) to use them
- revise how to use time expressions effectively, e.g. por, para, durante
- practise the use of pronouns, especially with impersonal verbs and passive voice structures
- check adjectival agreement: it seems that adjectival agreements is still a significant issue for A level students, despite being a grammatical item that is studied since initial stages of the course

It is highly recommended to check the online Diccionario Panhispánico by the Real Academia Española for any doubts on the use of words and phrases.

Section B: The Creative/Discursive Essay

Students have a choice of seven essay titles from which they select one. There are three creative essay titles and four discursive titles and students must write between 240 and 270 words in Spanish. Both creative and discursive essays are marked according to the same assessment grids except for Understanding and Response where the criteria and the descriptors are different.

Range and Application of Language (10 marks)

Students are rewarded for rich and complex language and the ability to handle complex structures. There should be a variety of appropriate and sophisticated vocabulary and successful manipulation of verbs, tenses and complex grammatical structures demonstrating progress beyond the standards of AS. Teachers and students should ensure that they make use of the prescribed list of structures in the specification in order to access higher marks.

Accuracy of the Target Language (5 marks)

Students should demonstrate a high degree of command of the language with minimal errors. At this stage, there should be no basic errors such as would appear at GCSE or, indeed, at AS Level. Students should be fluent and accurate in their written language and write in the appropriate register. If communication breaks down or is impaired, then the student can expect to achieve no more than 2 marks. If there is ambiguity and communication is not immediately clear because of major errors, then a mark of 4 would be the maximum score a student could achieve.

Common errors included: gender of nouns, adjective agreement, verb endings - person/tense, use of subjunctive, omission of personal 'a',

problems with using the definite article, spelling (double 's', 'f', 't'), missing essential accents (sí, él, mí, más, habló), use of impersonal verbs like gustar, confusion of creer, crear, crecer, failed attempts at using present and imperfect subjunctive correctly.

Organisation and Development (15 marks)

The essays should be well planned and structured with a clear, logical development of ideas. Often, but not always, the essay will be paragraphed with each section or paragraph self-contained, but linked to the preceding and to the following paragraphs or sections so that the essay has a clear sequence and development.

Understanding and Response: Creative Essay (15 marks)

Students are rewarded for their understanding of the title and its implications and for the ability to write a coherent and imaginative response. Good essays are interesting to read and fully relevant to the demands of the title.

Understanding and Response: Discursive Essay (15 marks)

Students are rewarded for their understanding of the title and its implications and for the ability to present arguments for or against (or both) the premise outlined in the essay title. They need to explain, justify and substantiate their opinions with logical arguments and should reach an informed, logical conclusion.

Word Count

Students must write between 240 and 270 words in Spanish. If the essay falls short of the minimum 240 words, it will be self-penalising according to the assessment grids. Examiners mark up to 270 words, which includes reading to the end of the sentence where the word count is exceeded. Any writing beyond 270 words is not awarded marks. Students have to be careful not to overuse pre-learnt expressions without adapting them and making them specific to the topic discussed as this would sacrifice their word count.

Q2(a)

Students were expected to write a conversation between Diego and the person who had called him. Students needed to look at the picture and use the elements presented there as part of the stimulus. This conversation proved to be an excellent, accessible challenge and many students created an atmosphere of tension and intrigue. For example, one conversation revolved around when and where Diego and his interlocutor should hide the body of their victim.

Students who wrote a narrative rather than a scripted conversation were penalised under Organisation and Development by a maximum mark of 9.

The best essays used the stimulus picture wisely, achieving a vibrant, dynamic and original dialogue, full of colloquial language and interjections making the telephone call a real one. The best essays introduced were very imaginative and creative.

Weaker students wrote a narrative rather than a scripted conversation or ended rather abruptly with no clear ending to the argument/discussion. Some responses lacked imagination and were a very basic conversation (Diego arranging a night out or Diego describing to someone what he has done that day.)

Some students referred to the stimulus picture. Students did describe a conversation between Diego and someone else, but not many did refer to the fact that he was on the phone and or on a train station.

Q2(b)

Students were expected to write about what happened after Marcela arrived in Felipe's house. Most responses provided a past tense narrative and the best also managed to include a variety of other tenses - conditional, present through the introduction of dialogue. Linguistically, the usual confusion over preterite/imperfect (pretérito perfecto simple/imperfecto) was in evidence in a good many responses.

The best essays were interesting to read, imaginative and full of rich, accurate language. Some of the best did not adhere to the 'beginning, middle, and end' formula but concluded with another cliff-hanger situation. They also presented a good structure, avoiding lengthy flashbacks, and being narratively skilful to move the story forward at each paragraph. Some students managed to successfully explain why Marcela was excited and why Felipe did not want to go to begin with.

In general, there was a very appropriate use of the Past tenses and most able students used a whole range of verbal periphrasis: 'meterse en', 'estar a punto de', 'romper a', 'echarse a', 'acostumbrarse a'.

Weaker students found it difficult to narrate the emotions and mood of the main characters of this story although they drew very imaginative contexts to follow. Some answers were lacking in imagination, a basic description of a day out in the city for example, rather than an interesting event.

Q2(c)

Students were invited to write a letter to the local zoo to win a free membership for a year. The letter should justify the reasons why the student's family deserves or needs the membership.

Some very imaginative ones, mentioned great stories about previous experiences in zoos, safaries or the jungle.

Most students used the correct format of a letter, however the register was not always appropriate, using an informal one despite them writing to a formal organisation.

Q2(d)

The first of the discursive essays asked students to question whether or not social media have more risks than benefits. This question was the most popular one in Section B.

For most students, this topic was the most accessible, giving opportunities to show an excellent topic preparation for A level. This could be seen in the higher vocabulary level used, such as: 'al alcance de desconocidos', 'hacerlo público', 'fuente de entretenimiento', 'estar expuestos', 'utilizarlas con cabeza', 'humillar al prójimo', 'andar con cuidado', 'responsable de tus actos', 'estar en auge', 'a velocidad de vértigo', 'estar al tanto', etc.

Some students failed to explicitly address the question in their introduction or in their conclusion. Some ambiguity with the understanding of the question itself and a tendency to focus on either the risks or the benefits of social media rather than balance both arguments.

Accuracy was very high, although more attention should have been paid to the use of specialist language and proofreading should have been taken more seriously in order to avoid misspellings of minor nature.

Q2(e)

Students had to explore why alternative treatments should be considered to complement conventional medicine.

Most able students supported their ideas tackling the pros and cons of acupuncture, yoga, pilates, homeopathy, herbal remedies, cannabis. There were excellent examples handling complex structures and lexis: 'costar vidas', 'sin dejar de lado', 'hacer la situación más llevadera', 'exceder su toma', 'llevar al público', etc.

Some students failed in pinpointing appropriate alternative treatments. They mentioned the work done by technology, instead of supporting their arguments with a most varied and well known set of alternative treatments.

Q2(f)

Students had to consider whether or not tourism is a threat to the environment. Students who chose this topic were able to show that they had studied issues around environment for a couple of years, introducing clear examples of environmental sustainability in urban and coastal spaces. They even conveyed information on how tourists could reduce their environmental footprint or co-operate with local authorities to improve it while on holiday.

Weaker students focused on threats to the environment other than tourism, and barely acknowledging tourism. 'Turismo' was often misspelled as 'tourismo' despite this being in the title. Some students wandered off topic and mentioned immigration or population growth rather than tourism, or wrote about the positives and negatives of tourism rather than the effect on the environment.

Q2(g)

Students were invited to consider whether working abroad is a good idea if there is not enough work in their home country.

Generally, responses to this question were very well-balanced and logical, with well-informed content and with points that were well developed, but some answers were sometimes less developed.

Some students misunderstood the question and wrote about whether we should allow immigration, the impact of immigration and political law instead of addressing the sociological question proposed.

Section C: The Research Based Essay

For the Research Based Essay students will have prepared and thoroughly researched one of four possible topic areas:

- Geographical Area
- Historical Study
- Aspects of Modern Spanish-speaking Society
- Literature and the Arts

They must write an essay of 240 - 270 words in Spanish. The following are not included in the word count:

- Titles and proper names
- Quotations, numbers and statistical data,
- Bibliographies
- Footnotes - except where they become extensions of the main essay.

Word Count:

If the essay falls short of 240 words it will be self-penalising according to the assessment grids. Examiners mark up to 270 words which includes reading to the end of the sentence where the word count is exceeded. Any writing beyond 270 words is not awarded marks.

Reading, Research and Understanding (30 marks)

This assessment grid carries the most marks by far and is therefore extremely important. Students are rewarded for the in-depth reading and research that informs the essay.

Every point that is made must be relevant to the title and supported by evidence. In the case of geography, history or society, students will

probably refer to specific information gleaned from a variety of sources such as books, articles and the internet. They may produce statistical information or specific data to support the arguments they are presenting. In the case of literature and the arts, a thorough knowledge of the text or film is required in order to address the implications of the essay title. The research carried out will demonstrate the difference between watching a film or reading a book for entertainment and studying the work analytically. Simple story-telling, for example, a narrative account with minimal or no descriptive language or attempts at analysis, will not be rewarded with high marks. Students need to select the information they have researched and ensure that what they write is always relevant and appropriate to the title of the essay. Each point that is made in the essay needs to be supported by specific reference to relevant extracts from the film or text or by appropriate and relevant quotation. Pre-learnt quotations that are included regardless of relevance will not attract high marks.

Organisation and Development (9 marks)

The essay must be well planned, relevant and coherently structured. Students must demonstrate the ability to marshal their material effectively and develop their ideas within a clear framework. There should be a logical development of ideas and a clear, informed conclusion. Paragraphing is helpful although the essay could reveal a planned and organised structure in the absence of paragraphs.

Quality of Language (6 marks)

Although this assessment grid carries fewest marks, it does have an impact on the others since it rewards the ability to communicate information clearly and unambiguously. The key is communication and to what extent linguistic errors affect the ability to understand what the student is trying to express. For full marks, the student needs to write fluent, varied and appropriate language with a wide variety of vocabulary, good handling of complex grammatical structures and a competent use of verbs and tenses. In addition, a high level of linguistic accuracy is needed and a clear, unimpeded communication of ideas. If there is some ambiguity and lack of clarity, the student can only be awarded a maximum of 4 marks. If communication breaks down to such an extent that the essay begins to lack comprehensibility and the student is using only simple, basic language then a maximum of 2 marks would be appropriate.

There were still some students who showed great knowledge of the chosen topic, but who failed to link it to the questions asked; this made some of their answers irrelevant.

Q3(a)

This question focused the attention the impact of religious beliefs on the region or city they have studied.

Most students focussed on festivals for the impact of religious beliefs. The best essays focussed on the religious component of festivals and were able

to describe how these had impacted on the area using facts and figures to back this up whereas many students just described the festivals in general.

Weaker students did not focus on a town or region but the whole country they had studied. Some failed to support their argument with evidences beyond the general knowledge of Christmas or Easter celebrations. Finally, some students' descriptions were too generic and religious celebrations could have applied to any Spanish-speaking country.

Q3(b)

Students must identify a key event from the historical period they have studied and evaluate its consequences.

For this question the political history of Spain was popular, specific events such as el asalto al cuartel de Moncada, la muerte de Franco o las elecciones de 1936 were supported with a good range of evidences that supported student's answers. The best answers focused on the consequences of the events & argued the case very tightly. There were many essays showing in-depth knowledge of the subject studied

Some students dwelt too long on the causes, whilst others selected periods rather than events (e.g. The Spanish Civil War, The Cuban Revolution, The Franco Era).

Q3(c)

This question attracted the fewest number of students. Students were invited to choose a recent problem in the Spanish-speaking society they have studied and analyse the causes of this problem within that modern society. Students should have not referred to more than one problem, as this would not have allowed them to analyse it in enough depth.

There were many essays here where students had clearly not done enough research as a results essays were very general, showing only the most superficial knowledge about the subject at hand. Some students failed to select a 'problem' and chose to write about something else entirely. E.g. 'Los toros' ' La aprobación de matrimonios gays'. Some managed to turn these themes into an acceptable subject by arguing for instance that the ban on bullfighting is dividing Spanish society or that homophobia is still a problem in Spain, but many turned those themes into discursive essays.

Some students' responses were developed around the problem's consequences or impact rather than causes.

Q3(d)

Literature and the Arts was the most popular choice for a research-based essay and an increasing number of centres are choosing film rather than text. From the wide variety of texts and films that had been studied, the following is a selection of the most popular choices made:

Texts

'Como agua para chocolate' - Laura Esquivel
'Crónica de una muerte anunciada' - García Márquez
'El coronel no tiene quien le escriba' - García Márquez
'Bodas de Sangre' - García Lorca
'La casa de Bernarda Alba' - García Lorca
'Las bicicletas son para el verano' - Fernán Gómez
'Réquiem para un campesino español' - Sender

Films

'El laberinto del Fauno' - Guillermo del Toro (2006)
'Volver' - Almodóvar (2006)
'Todo sobre mi madre' - Almodóvar (2009)
'Diarios de Motocicleta' - Salles (2004)
'Mar adentro' - Amenábar (2004)
'El secreto de sus ojos' - Campanella (2009)
'María llena eres de gracia' - Marston (2004)
'La lengua de las matiposas' - Cuerda (1999)

Students were asked to identify a key moment in the life of one of the main characters in the text/film/work they had studied and explain how this moment affected his/her development.

In general, students coped very well with this question. The only problem was that a significant number of students chose an event from the life of the protagonist that happened before the beginning of the film or book, which meant that it was almost impossible to refer to the character before this moment. More damaging were those who chose to write about the protagonist's death - thus leaving the second part of the answer - its effect on the protagonist- unanswerable. However, there are works such as Mar Adentro, Volver, La Casa de Bernarda Alba, where key events clearly do happen before the start. Some students chose these and, whilst weaker ones tended to recount the story, stronger students argued well that this event did effect the character. Some good essays focused on minor characters, such as Martirio, Gertrudis in La casa de Bernarda Alba or Como agua para chocolate.

Some of the issues that examiners have reported on this particular questions are:

- Some students failed to back up their research with sufficient supporting evidence. The use of quotes would have benefitted these students enormously.
- Some students described in detail the characters and their lives without making specific and detailed references to the changes caused by a specific moment.
- Never write pen over pencil; it makes it very hard for the examiner to understand the writing clearly.
- It is advisable that students clearly cross the plan off.

- Students who wrote the question as a title seemed to maintain the focus on the question much better than those who did not.
- Remember the CaRoLiNa rule to avoid spelling errors (i.e. no other consonants can ever double, therefore SS, FF, TT, etc. are never an occurrence in the Spanish language)
- Ensure there are complex structures throughout the essay, not just at the end.
- Passive avoidance strategies like the use of 'se' would help students express themselves more accurately ('se explora' rather than 'son explorados').
- Students would be more accurate if they could identify prepositions and remember that these can only be followed by infinitive forms: 'al salir', 'por volver', 'para saber', etc.

Although it may be tempting to display all the knowledge you have acquired, it is essential that you read the question carefully and ensure that everything you include in your essay is fully relevant to the demands of the title. Beware of inserting quotations simply because you have learnt them regardless of their relevance. Avoid story-telling and concentrate on selecting your material to fit the implications of the question. Finally, plan the essay carefully so that there is a clear structure and development and check the written language for accuracy and clarity.

Paper Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, students are offered the following advice:

- Translation skills from English to Spanish and, for that matter, the other way round, should be practised regularly and should be introduced as early as possible (KS3).
- Read the Specification carefully and follow the guidance when choosing a research based essay topic. Remember that all the sub-headings under the area of research heading should be accessible and studied. For instance, the geographical area requires students to research the following:
 - key people
 - key events
 - key issues (eg demographic, environmental, economic, social, political) that have impacted or are having an impact on the area.
- In addition, students need to have a thorough knowledge of customs, traditions, beliefs and religions. It is essential that each one of these areas of study is covered in the research so that students are thoroughly prepared for anything that may come up on the examination paper.
- Students should plan essays carefully before starting to write. They should try to write in paragraphs with each paragraph self-contained with its own development of ideas, but linked to both the preceding and following paragraphs so that there is a logical connection of ideas.
- Students should always read the questions carefully and make sure that all the implications have been understood and addressed.
- Finally, students should try to write neatly and clearly. It is often helpful to write on alternate lines so that there is space to make corrections above the word or words that have been crossed out.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link: <http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

