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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel GCSE
In German (5GN02)
Paper 2A: Speaking in German

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Summer 2017

Publications Code 5GN02_2A_1706_ER

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GCSE German

Unit 2A: Speaking

Examiners Report

General

In this final session of the Controlled Assessments in Speaking, many candidates were engaged in natural conversations with evidence of interaction and spontaneity, and many were afforded opportunities to use an excellent range of both vocabulary and structures. Teachers are once again to be congratulated on putting their candidates at ease during the assessment.

Tasks

Centres had a choice of 3 tasks:

1. a presentation and discussion (P&D)
2. a picture-based discussion (PBD)
3. an open interaction (OI)

Each candidate had to undertake at least 2 of these 3 task types but only one had to be recorded and submitted. The majority of centres submitted in their moderation sample recordings of at least two different task types for which they were submitting marks across the whole centre cohort.

The majority of centres opted for the P&D and PBD. However, there was a pleasing number of centres whose candidates undertook an OI task.

Approaches to task setting varied with some teachers choosing to provide their candidates with a title only e.g. *Meine Ferien*, whilst others provided a title and 5 or so bullet points to guide and support candidates. The assessment criteria require candidates to demonstrate spontaneity, an ability to interact and to deal with unpredictable elements. Therefore, task sheets with a specified list of questions to prepare did not allow candidates to access the higher mark bands.

Most centres gave all candidates the same task which differentiated by outcome. Unfortunately, this often led to less than positive outcomes for some candidates. It was a pleasure to moderate the tasks which had clearly been chosen by the candidate and were of genuine interest to the candidate. This enthusiasm was usually transmitted into the candidate's performance.

Themes

Centres were free to choose their own themes for the orals. In this final session, holidays, school, healthy lifestyle, media and my town remained popular topics.

Conduct

In general, the orals were well conducted by Teacher-Examiners who afforded candidates opportunities to fulfil their potential in line with the criteria and achieve their best. Moderators commented on how supportive and encouraging

Teacher-Examiners were towards their candidates during these speaking assessments. However, Teacher-Examiners should be mindful of the difference between supporting and prompting – offering a candidate a choice of lexical items to allow the conversation to continue is prompting and will have an impact on the mark which can be awarded for Content & Response. It was clear that many centres had heeded the advice given in previous reports that candidates must demonstrate a degree of genuine interaction and spontaneity to be awarded higher marks for Content & Response.

Unfortunately, despite advice given in previous reports, TEs in some centres asked all candidates the same questions in the same order from a set list, irrespective of candidate responses to the set questions. More able candidates were disadvantaged by this approach - in order for candidates to access the higher mark bands they must speak spontaneously, interact and deal with unpredictable elements (questions they had not already planned to answer). Tailoring questions to candidates' responses is the best way to ensure spontaneity and genuine interaction. Candidates did best when TE questions followed on from what the candidate had just said and the unpredictable questions were frequently those which elicited more information or clarification.

In addition, TEs should ask questions appropriate to the level of the candidate being examined. In this way, more able candidates are given opportunities to express a range of ideas and points of view and to demonstrate a range of more complex structures and vocabulary and weaker candidates have the opportunity to respond to more modest questions using language which they are able to manipulate. Many weaker candidates were asked some challenging questions, often in a range of tenses, where a simpler line of questioning would have enabled them to access higher marks for Content and Response. Candidates fared best then when TEs differentiated their questions in order to give candidates sufficient confidence to talk for longer and tackle later questions which were stretching for them and allowed them to perform well. It also meant that weaker candidates were better able to fulfil the minimum time requirement.

It was particularly disappointing when capable candidates, clearly able to produce extended answers, were repeatedly asked closed questions and consequently, in the stressful environment of the oral, resorted to yes / no answers. Closed questions should be avoided in favour of more open-ended questions which will lead to a better candidate performance.

Some TEs asked repetitive questions e.g. on the theme of holidays: *Wohin fährst du dieses Jahr? Und wohin bist du letztes Jahr gefahren? Und wohin wirst du nächstes Jahr fahren?* This strategy compromises outcomes for candidates.

It is acceptable to give candidates thinking time before rephrasing a question or offering possible answers – if the questioning is spontaneous, then there will be some natural hesitation on the part of the candidate. Where TEs rephrased too readily or suggested possible answers, the criterion *reliant on teacher-examiner prompting* was appropriate.

Presentation and Discussion

In the presentation and discussion task type candidates had to give an **uninterrupted** presentation lasting between **1 minute minimum** and **3 minutes maximum**. (Timing started when the candidate started speaking.) Presentations which fell short of the 1 minute minimum time allocation incurred a 2 mark deduction from the Content and Response grid (please refer to the *Marking Guidance* in the *Administrative support guide*.) The incidence of short presentations this session was lower than in previous series, but some TEs did not allow their candidates to speak for at least 1 minute before interrupting them to ask a question or seek clarification - consequently these presentations were too short. Weaker candidates were often unable to sustain a presentation lasting 1 minute. Some candidates attempted to recite a presentation for the full 3 minutes when a presentation of e.g. 90 seconds might have been more effective. Such long presentations meant less time for the more interactive, spontaneous part of the task.

Many candidates performed well and were a pleasure to listen to. Some candidates had prepared their presentation thoroughly and performed well but then had little left for the discussion. The presentation section allowed candidates to fulfil certain assessment criteria but the discussion section allowed them to fulfil others. It was therefore crucial to ensure that both sections were well represented and accomplished. Sometimes the follow up questions covered exactly the same ground as that in the presentation, which led to candidates simply repeating information rather than taking the conversation forward, expanding on detail and opinion or taking the conversation in a new direction. Where there was no exploration in the discussion of the presentation content, the mark for Context and response was compromised.

Attention is drawn to the statement in paragraph 4 on p16 of the specification: *students can ... give a presentation and then respond to a series of linked, follow-up questions...* If the presentation was on one sub-topic and the discussion on another i.e. there was no linking or progression/follow-up between the 2 parts of this task, this was an omission (Content & Response grid band 8-11) e.g. where the presentation was on *My House* and the discussion on *My town*, and in the discussion the TE did not pick up on anything the candidate said in the presentation or take the subtopic of the presentation further. In some cases, the TE asked questions in the discussion totally unrelated to the focus of the presentation e.g. a presentation on *sport* with follow up questions on *school* or a presentation on *A person I admire* with follow up questions on physical attributes of members of the candidate's own family.

The Picture Based discussion

Over the years, this task type has proven a very popular choice with centres. Candidates have been motivated by being able to bring in their own picture which has led to some very individual performances. Some candidates have preferred to give a presentation (**maximum of 1 minute**) whereas others have chosen not to do so. The intention of the PBD task was that there should be some exploitation of the picture before moving on to a more general discussion around the picture and the topic e.g. *Was/wen sieht man hier auf dem Bild? Was passiert hier?* This session, although there were instances of the picture not

being mentioned at all by either candidate or TE, most centres exploited the picture more and thus allowed it to be a genuine springboard for the ensuing discussion.

The choice of picture has always been important: a picture of the candidate and his/her family on holiday, for example, has tended to work well as there was plenty in the picture to discuss. On the other hand, some images offered little to exploit in a discussion.

In the PBD task, candidates had the flexibility to give a presentation if they wanted but they did not have to. If they chose to start off with a presentation, this could last a maximum of 1 minute (whereby anything up to 1 minute was acceptable).

Open Interaction

Where the task was exploited correctly, candidates of **all** levels were able to engage in a spontaneous role-play type dialogue. Some Open Interaction tasks were of a more imaginative nature, with genuine role play taking place e.g. candidates being interviewed for a job, making a complaint about something to do with their hotel room at Reception, offering German-speaking tourists assistance in the tourist information office. Well-structured Open Interaction tasks encouraged high scores in the Content and Response grid due to the level of genuine interaction, spontaneity and the opportunity to respond to unpredictable elements. The OI task often allowed weaker candidates to achieve better marks, as it could offer more support in the stimulus.

Unfortunately, some open interactions lacked a clear task and scenario and thus functioned less as an unscripted role play and more as a general conversation with no defined outcome to work towards.

Situations such as *you are talking to your German exchange partner about school* could not work well as with no clear role-play situation the conversation developed into general exchange on school. Such practice had a negative impact on the mark awarded for Content and Response, given the limited opportunity for interaction. In the ensuing exchange both candidate and TE had to play their allocated roles. If the task gave the candidate a role to play but the candidate did not assume or maintain it, this represented an omission (Content and Response).

There has always been an expectation in the Open Interaction that candidates ask the TE questions. Some tasks reminded candidates of the need to do so and it was a shame then that some candidates forgot to ask questions and were not prompted by the TE to do so. Where the task required the candidate to ask questions and s/he did so BUT outside the 6 minutes, then these questions did not count and the relevant marking principle applied.

Timings

Each oral task had to last between 4 and 6 minutes – such a range afforded flexibility to suit different candidates. The majority of orals conformed to the timings requirement. Moderators stopped moderating after 6 minutes and any material beyond that was not considered for assessment. For weaker candidates,

four minutes often represented too long a time and consequently orals lasting 3'30" were tolerated. However, anything less than this was considered short and 2 marks were deducted from the candidate's score in the Content and Response grid, as per the *Marking Guidelines*. However, in order to access the full mark range, the oral had to last between 4 and 6 minutes. An oral which lasted only 3'30" was not able to access the full mark range.

Recordings

The quality of recordings was generally good, although the candidates' performances might have been compromised in situations where there was too much extraneous noise. Some TEs had the microphone closer to themselves, rather than to the candidate.

All recordings will be returned to Centres.

Marking

TEs showed a good understanding of the assessment criteria and were able to differentiate performances among their candidates. In many centres with more than one teacher involved in the assessments, there was evidence of internal standardisation which was important since centre as a whole was moderated.

Unfortunately, there were centres whose marks needed adjustment – in both directions. This was sometimes due to centres not having applied the criteria in the marking guidance (referred to elsewhere in this document).

Content and Response:

Assessment criteria are applied holistically on a best-fit basis. Some centres tended to overvalue their candidates' performance here. The ability to interact well with the TE and respond spontaneously to unpredictable questions was necessary here to attain marks in the higher mark bands. Pre-learnt 'conversations' which consisted of a question and answer session but which lacked interaction or did not evidence an ability to expand or take the initiative could not be rewarded with top marks. Thus, marks were incorrectly awarded in the 16 – 18 band in cases where the candidate gave extended, informative answers which had clearly been pre-learnt but where they did not evidence any spontaneity or ability to respond to unpredictable questions. Marks were awarded too generously in the 12 – 15 band for candidates who answered a lot of questions but tended to give short answers or who were too hesitant.

On the other hand, weaker candidates were often under-rewarded in this section. Candidates who had given a decent amount of information albeit it in short simple sentences and were able to maintain the conversation for 4 minutes were still put in the 1-3 band when they deserved to be in the 4 – 7 band.

As already stated in this report, closed questions should be avoided – whereas more able candidates might be able to expand and develop independently, weaker candidates rarely rise to the challenge.

Range of Language and Accuracy:

The Range of Language grid rewarded candidates for the breadth or range of language used. Tenses other than the present had to be used in order to have the opportunity to access the 5 mark band and many candidates were well trained by teachers to include different tenses. Sometimes, however, use of tenses was given priority over the use of a variety of structures and vocabulary: candidates were able to speak in three tenses, but used only short sentences and simple vocabulary. The demonstration of a good grasp of tenses alone does not mean candidates will automatically score well in range of language – they also need to demonstrate use of a wide range of structures and varied vocabulary.

When considering the mark for Accuracy it is important to note that the mere lack of error does not mean a candidate will score highly. Candidate had to attempt to use more complex structures to reach 5 and there had to be generally good pronunciation and intonation.

Marks for all 3 grids are awarded globally across the whole performance.

Administration

Many centres completed the administration admirably. Others had omitted to include vital documents but responded quickly to moderators' requests for material.

CA2 forms

Candidates who used a CA2 form did not always use it to their best advantage, especially weaker candidates. Complex vocabulary items were often listed, but candidates did not know how to pronounce them and communication was impaired. A list of 30 discrete lexical items may not represent the best use of this form. We would recommend candidates do not write full sentences – this quickly uses up 30 words.

Support

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