

CERTIFICATE IN BILINGUAL SKILLS 2010

WRITTEN MARKERS' REPORTS

CANTONESE

Overall Performance of Candidates (compared to last year, where possible) and any Particular Strengths and Weaknesses of the Candidate Group

Task 3B: Since the candidate group taking this paper was very small, it would be very difficult to make any comparisons. The task involved the translation of an information leaflet for people with new dentures. The original English text contained bullet points and itemised topics which required less demand on syntactical constructions and cohesive devices.

Task 4B: A more testing task for candidates and there is a need to incorporate two parts of information into one in the letter.

Both tasks were managed adequately with some inaccuracies in the choice of vocabulary, errors in usage of Chinese characters (equivalent to spelling mistakes) and grammatical weaknesses.

Recommendations to Centres

Please remind candidates to read through the final translation in order to check for errors with Chinese characters and the flow of sentences.

Recommendations to Candidates

Candidates are recommended to:

- avoid creating new terms (e.g. in Cantonese, there is no such thing as “artificial teeth” (Task 3B) in Chinese!).
- double check the vocabulary you have used to establish that it is appropriate for the context of the text (e.g. the order of phrases in a Chinese sentence – Task 3B; the appropriateness of the term “medical report” – Task 4B, as it was obvious that it was simply a “physical examination report”).
- be more accurate (e.g. the term “broken” – Task 3B, translated as “broken into pieces”; “produce” – Task 4B, translated as “process”; “walking” – Task 4B, as “walking along the road”; “upset” – Task 4B, translated as “sad”; “boost” – Task 4B, translated as “encourage”).
- double check the Chinese characters you have used in the translated text as quite a few incorrect Chinese characters were used despite the fact they sounded the same (in both tasks).
construct your text according to Chinese syntax and avoid translating the English text literally as that would make awkward reading in Chinese.

ENGLISH: Tasks 3A and 4A

Overall Performance of Candidates (compared to last year, where possible) and any Particular Strengths and Weaknesses of the Candidate Group

Task 3A TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH

The text for translation was a letter from a woman protesting about a parking ticket, incurred while she was dealing with an emergency situation with her baby. Most candidates managed to produce an adequate translation. Results ranged from Distinction to Fail.

Terms which caused problems were:

“First aid”: rendered as “immediate help” by a Polish candidate, who was translating literally.

An unfortunate spelling error was: "My baby stopped breading" (= breathing)

Another Polish mistake which grated somewhat on the reader was the use of "it" referring to the child, which the mother would not have used. Granted, the Polish word for child is neuter, but it would have been better if the candidate had given the baby one or other gender, even though the text was ambiguous in this respect.

"Consider once again" for "reconsider" was understandable, though somewhat odd-sounding.

Polish candidates also made mistakes with articles, either missing out the definite article or using the indefinite article instead, or vice versa, e.g. "a mouth-to-mouth resuscitation"

Only in one case was this weakness so pervasive that it slowed down communication, having most of the instances of "the" replaced by "a", resulting in a very odd effect:

"I drove a car out of a garage.... there was a traffic....has no a common sense...lost an appetite...fasten a belt "

A Chinese candidate used a plural in the expression: "common senses".

The Type 3 conditional sentence caused problems for some, who used the wrong tense in either or both halves of the sentence: "If I didn't act as quickly as possible, he could had die".

Among the other errors were:

"My son stopped to brief" (=stopped breathing)

"We caught a traffic congestion"

TASK 4A LETTER IN ENGLISH

The task was to write to a job centre, challenging the version of events given by an employer as grounds for dismissal. Some weaker candidates merely translated the other-language stimulus note; this was minimally acceptable in that the letter from the employer was obliquely referred to, so the purpose of the letter was reasonably clear. Better candidates made full use of all the stimulus material, resulting in fully authentic-sounding letters which would be more likely to produce a sympathetic response. One candidate confused the statement of the employer with his own statement, reporting that "I told him I would like to find another job" thought this was what the employer reported. This would confuse the intended reader.

Recommendations to Centres

In the case of the letter writing task, do not simply translate the O/L stimulus note, but make it clear that you have understood the full context of the situation that is being addressed by the letter. This will mean referring to what is said by the other parties, and, if necessary, challenging it.

Recommendations to Candidates

In planning your studies, be constantly aware of your weaknesses. If you are not aware of them, get someone, for example a teacher, to perform an "audit" of your current level, highlighting key areas for you to prioritise e.g. spelling, use of the passive, prepositions, articles (Slavonic Languages), "false friends" (Spanish candidates).

POLISH

Overall Performance of Candidates (compared to last year, where possible) and any Particular Strengths and Weaknesses of the Candidate Group

Given the small number of candidates this year, it is difficult to comment on any trends.

In previous years, generally speaking, the performance of the candidates was good. All candidates had sufficient command of both English and Polish. While the quality of writing in the target language varies and is very good for some candidates and, in one case, just about satisfactory, all candidates understood the English source text well - decoding

mistakes were sporadic. All candidates were also able to communicate fluently in Polish.

Few mistakes were made by more than one candidate. Most of them were individual errors. The only term that more than one candidate had problems with was *plate* in 3A. This was rendered as *palate* or *enamel*, and although it may well be true that hot food can damage these too, it is not what the text says.

Also, a number of candidates had a problem with the expression *the following*. This cannot be simply rendered as “możesz doświadczać następujących” or “następujące jest przydatne”. There must be a noun to go with the participle!

Areas showing room for improvements include (most of them are the same every year):

1. Following English syntax word-for-word in 3B. Word order often seems to be copied from English without any regard for authenticity, e.g.:

“Let the dentist know immediately” should be “natychmiast poinformuj dentystę”, not “poinformuj swojego dentystę natychmiast”.

2. Poor punctuation; one specific point on punctuation is that quotation marks should be „...”, not “...”.

3. Authenticity. This includes the use of possessive pronouns which are used more often in English than in Polish. Just because there is a pronoun in an English sentence does not mean that it must be replaced with a Polish equivalent on a 1-1 basis. E.g.:

“Możesz zauważyć różnice w jamie ustnej”, not „w twojej jamie ustnej” – obviously it will be your mouth, not someone else’s.

„Poinformuj twojego dentystę” - If you want to use a pronoun, use “swojego”, not “twojego”, which is an obvious influence of the English structure.

4. Lack of attention to detail leading to omissions or distortions.

Recommendations to Centres

Overall, the candidates seemed well prepared and handled the tasks well. It was obvious that they had worked on letter-writing conventions, which differ from British standards.

Could centres please remind candidates to write on one side only, leave blank lines between lines of text and leave a margin for markers’ annotations? Not only would this be courteous and easier on markers’ eyesight, but also would save candidates some points - presentation and legibility are covered in marking criteria under 3.

Could centres also emphasise to candidates that writing well in their mother tongue is as important as understanding the foreign language. As mentioned above, most candidates had no problems understanding English source texts; however, the style of some of the candidates implies that they have not written essays in Polish since their school days. The candidates need to work on their writing skills if they wish to work with languages.

Please also stress the importance of accuracy. Candidates must be aware that one meaning-changing mistake could be fatal if it potentially leads the recipient to acting incorrectly.

Equally important is attention to detail. Omitting some of the information that the candidate is asked to render (e.g. one of the key areas of Karolina’s wellbeing in 4A) or distorting a piece of information (e.g. confusing responsibilities of the school and those of parents in 4A) can be fatal, even if the candidate is good at both languages. The end product must not only be linguistically good but also vocationally useful.

Recommendations to Candidates

Please remember that a good translation is not just about conveying the information – it also needs to read well in the target language. If you live in the UK and speak English in your everyday life, you should ensure that you regularly read quality texts in Polish to keep your Polish fresh and correct.

Nevertheless, you also need to ensure that you do cover all of the information that you are asked to render. Any

omission could mean a Fail if it could potentially lead to misunderstanding or cause the recipient of your translation to act incorrectly.

The last bits of advice are obvious, yet many candidates do not adhere to them:

- Pay attention to detail, don't rush; concentrate. A lot of candidates omit bullet points (or even whole sentences or paragraphs), forget dates or signatures on the letter, confuse words that look alike (e.g. *plate* and *palate*, *denture* and *dental*), misinterpret data presented in tables etc. This has nothing to do with your linguistic ability but it does mean that your translation is factually wrong.
- Proofread your text before submitting; as obvious as it sounds, every year there are many candidates who lose marks on trivial mistakes (e.g. repeating the same word twice in a row; lack of consistency between the gender of subject and predicate etc).
- Make sure you are familiar with letter writing conventions in your target language (Where do addresses go? Where does the signature go? How do I write the date? – for some reason many candidates write the date in English although they are producing a letter in Polish, etc).
- It never hurts to revise basic spelling and punctuation rules which we all learnt at school and perhaps have forgotten as time goes by. Punctuation is a weak spot for many candidates.
- Follow the instructions for each task. If you are asked to make a written translation (Task 3B), make a written translation. Do not unleash your imagination to create a text that has little in common with the English source text, even if it reads very well in the target language. In 4B, you can use your creativity but do make sure that you cover all crucial information – some candidates get carried away and forget about the key points!

PORTUGUESE (BRAZILIAN)

Overall Performance of Candidates (compared to last year, where possible) and any Particular Strengths and Weaknesses of the Candidate Group

A very small candidate group this year, but it is my opinion that the level is on a par with last year's. Grammar continues to be a concern, with punctuation and grammar the main areas of concern. It appears that candidates are still struggling to comprehend the text and that manifests itself in incorrect translations due to misunderstanding during the reading of the source text.

Recommendations to Centres

Reading and comprehension exercises are recommended to strengthen candidates' abilities. Grammar and punctuation are areas of concern. Many candidates are taking the exam with very poor grammar and punctuation skills. Practise timed mock exams so that candidates can practise under realistic conditions such as they will find during the examination.

Recommendations to Candidates

Grammar and punctuation are the main areas on which to focus. Many candidates are taking the exam with very poor grammar and punctuation skills. Practice reading and text evaluation are recommended to consolidate learning.

SPANISH

Overall Performance of Candidates (compared to last year, where possible) and any Particular Strengths and Weaknesses of the Candidate Group

Task 3B: Candidates had to translate an information leaflet aimed at dental care patients about coping with dentures.

Task 4B: Candidates had to write a letter to the parents of an overweight child to convey to them the school's nurse's concerns and action plan. The letter should include issues arising from the child's medical examination. A detailed list of the child's problems, the school's action plan and alternative solutions were included in the brief.

Candidates could adequately deal with the general vocabulary and content of Task 3B although most candidates lost marks because of weaknesses in grammar and syntax, particularly regarding the distinctions between transitive and intransitive uses of the same verb; in this case the verbs *sentir* and *sentirse*; *lavar algo* y *lavarse*; *hacer* and *hacerse* and how they should be constructed, including collocation of the reflexive pronoun and verb, especially in cases where the wrong position of the reflexive pronoun **se** could change the meaning of the clause or make it unintelligible: particular attention should be paid when using verbs that imply change as “*hacerse*”. It should be noted that Spanish verbs of change are not interchangeable and “*hacerse*” implies a voluntary effort, so a denture could not “*hacerse floja*”, nor strictly speaking “*ponerse floja*” because this verb implies generally a short-lived change: the pronominal “*aflojarse*” is in this case a much better option. Other problems were the use - and misuse - of the Subjunctive, wrong choice of preposition or its omission after certain verbs; use of “*estar*” instead of “*ser*” in Passive Voice; English interference in the use of the gerund instead of the Infinitive. There were not many technical words in this text but candidates still encountered some difficulties related to general vocabulary, among these the translation of the title “How to cope” which was translated variously but no one produced an idiomatic equivalent. Another examples is “to give confidence” which, wrongly translated as “*confiar*, or “*confiarse*”, altered the meaning of the sentence. Most candidates had difficulty in deciding on the correct preposition to use, even in conventional prepositional phrases as “on behalf of”. In some scripts, cohesion was impaired by the use of incorrect pronouns (reflexive instead of direct object pronoun) or the mixing of verbal forms corresponding to formal and informal forms of address. Candidates should also improve the ability to handle lists when translating them into Spanish. A few candidates could not be awarded a Pass because they omitted information needed for the effectiveness of the translated text.

The completion of Task 4B also presented a few minor challenges to candidates. Some students did not achieve the grade because they failed to include important information and this could jeopardise the reader’s possibility to act appropriately: on this account they could not be awarded a Pass.

Grammar and syntax faults were also present, particularly in verb mood, with a general tendency to misuse the Subjunctive. This year the command of reflexive verbs was particularly weak and also there were some examples of wrong use of the gerund. Candidates should be more aware of relative clause syntax and how this differs from English when the relative pronoun is the object of a preposition. An error in this respect could crucially alter the meaning of the translated sentence. Regarding terminology and general vocabulary, there were some very basic mistakes such as “countryside” translated as “*paisaje*”, i.e. landscape; “*upset*” and “*teased*” very wrongly conveyed in Spanish as “*injured*” and “*abused*”.

Conventions of genre were not always observed: mixing formal and familiar forms in the same text to address the recipient is not acceptable. Also candidates should be able to use an appropriate formal way to end a letter: there were a few examples of too informal or inappropriate endings.

Recommendations to Centres

Candidates should be made aware of the format of this exam and be fully trained in the formalities and conventions of letter, leaflet and report writing. All relevant elements of the brief should be conveyed to the intended reader so that he or she can act appropriately. Centres should provide enough practice material to ensure familiarity with all the vocabulary areas covered by this test and in dealing with titles and other formal aspects of texts. Also they should be reasonably certain that the linguistic standard of the candidates is of the required level to sit the exam.

Recommendations to Candidates

Candidates should check the final script thoroughly; give themselves enough time to correct any omissions they may have incurred when translating the text. This is a very frequent occurrence and if the missing information prevents the intended reader from acting appropriately, points will be deducted and in some cases the candidate will not be awarded a Pass. Candidates should also aim to improve their knowledge of conjunctions and other connectives as well as increase their repertory of ready-made prepositional or adverbial phrases. They would also benefit from learning how to deal with lists appropriately and deciding whether to use Infinitives or adjust the structure of each item in the list so that they relate smoothly to the rubric. Candidates should check whether they are using the correct meaning of a word; they should use the dictionary wisely, although no dictionary is ever a substitute for sound background knowledge of all areas covered by the examination. Candidates need to show they are able to manipulate information and language: the letter is a composition and not a translation of the brief.