

Examiners' Report Summer 2008

GCE

GCE Japanese (8624 / 9624)

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Paper 1 (6661): Reading and Writing

The examination paper performed broadly similarly to those of previous years. The candidates appeared well prepared for all aspects of the examination. It was pleasing that more candidates are tackling the translation fully, and really making an effort to understand the original Japanese correctly, and to render it into good, idiomatic English.

Q1 required the candidates to write the readings of the kanji. Part (a) せつめい seemed to either be known as a compound or not known at all. Many candidates knew the けん on (b), but しけん was a common error. Many candidates wrote おん for (c), presumably because they had learnt おんがく as a compound at GCSE.

Q2 posed no significant problems. The easiest part was probably (b), with even the weakest candidates able to answer this.

The candidates are very familiar now with Q3. Part (a) was surprisingly difficult, with many candidates offering が which was incorrect. The embedded question in (c) was difficult. Parts (d), (e) and (j) were reasonably well answered. Most candidates knew that a te form was required in (f), but getting the correct form, with the little つ was hard. Part (g) also caused a lot of problems. Most candidates did put a plain form for (h), but often missed the fact that it needed to be in the past tense.

Q4 proved a good challenge for the stronger candidates. It was pleasing to see that most of the stronger candidates had a reasonable attempt at these questions, even though it was a new question type, and they would probably not have seen some of these compounds before.

Q5 posed no significant problems.

As usual, Q6, the kanji writing questions, really discriminated the top candidates from the others. Most were able to write 仕事, although often the 事 kanji was quite approximate in terms of the number of lines, where the different components came in relation to each other etc. 去年 proved surprisingly difficult, with many candidates offering 昨年 or even 前年 as answers. The 年 kanji was generally known, even by weaker candidates.

Most candidates attempted Q7, and it was pleasing to see that many candidates got 3 or 4 marks for the content. Candidates need to be reminded that they MUST answer in sentences (particularly native speaker candidates), and that there are 5 marks for the quality of language used in this section, so they should pay attention not only to the content of their answers, but also the language in which it is presented.

As mentioned above, it was pleasing to see that many more candidates are making a really serious attempt at the translation. In particular, the first two sentences on this year's translation were accessible, and gave a "way in" even for the weakest candidates. It was good to see so many candidates really making an effort. A surprising number of candidates muddled up the kanji for "right" and "left". Often, these relatively simple, GCSE kanji seemed to cause difficulty for the candidates at AS, and it may be worth reminding candidates to revise their GCSE kanji as well as their AS kanji. The alternative "Kiss News" (for "Kids News") was extremely common, and needless to say caused the examiners some amusement. Many candidates did not know はじめて, and thus struggled to translate the first sentence

of the second paragraph. A surprising number also read 天気 for the 元気, and thus wrote about how the weather report was going to be presented by Ms. Sakamaki. In the first sentence of the last paragraph, many candidates could not work out who was the subject, and so errors such as “The media has taken a great interest in these two since they have started this job” were common. Again the 始めてから proved difficult, with many candidates taking it as 始めたから and using a “because” in their translation.

The essay question (Q9) is generally well tackled, and this year was no exception. Many candidates were able to write about what hobbies Japanese teenagers have and how they use their money, although many could have got more marks by saying something original of their own rather than just copying out or re-phrasing what was in the stimulus material. Some candidates mistook the task and wrote about their part time jobs and how they earn money. A surprising number of candidates formatted it as a letter, and started it as 姉妹校へ。こんにちは。お元気ですか。 etc. Whilst this was not directly penalised, it would have lost them marks for content, as the 2 - 3 lines taken up with these greetings were not “on task” and thus not contributing to the candidate gaining any extra content marks. There was a slight improvement in candidates’ grammatical and kanji knowledge, which was good. In particular, candidates do seem to be using the grammatical structures they have been taught at AS level more appropriately, even if the weakest candidates are only using one or two of the AS structures.

Paper 2 (6662): Reading and Writing; Topics and Texts

The examination paper was broadly similar to previous years' papers, and posed few problems for candidates.

The weakest candidates seemed to struggle to understand passage 1. Perhaps the unfamiliar hindered their progress, or perhaps the fact that the easiest question were towards the end (Q6 - Q8) put them off.

Q1 was generally well attempted, although a surprising number of candidates put “伝統的とは traditional という意味です” which was not allowed. Most candidates recognized 2 as an “or” question. Q3 was generally well tackled. Many candidate wrote 和服姿を着ていました for Q4, although this was given the mark. Q5 - Q8 posed no particular problems, although many native speaker candidates lost the mark for Q8 as they did not write in a sentence. Q9 proved challenging: although many candidates were able to identify the correct section of the text which contained the answer, they were often not able to reason it through to come to the correct conclusion.

Most candidates attempted passage 2, the translation. In particular, there were a couple of sections in the first paragraph (e.g. I spent four years teaching in Africa and Asia, I work mainly in schools in the west of England) which even the weakest candidates were able to attempt. It is pleasing to see that candidates are acquiring the skills of analysing a sentence, re-casting it, and rendering it into accurate Japanese, paying attention to the grammar and kanji. The first sentence of the second paragraph was hard, and proved challenging even for the strongest candidates. Given that the environment is a set topic for the A2, it was surprising how many candidates did not know the words “environmentally friendly” and / or “rainforest”.

A range of answers were seen to the essay question in Section B, although it was clear that most candidates had done a lot of work to prepare for this section. A new trend emerged this year, in that it seems many candidates had pre-learnt a long “mammoth” essay, which had a paragraph each on all potential aspects of the topic / text. This meant that there was usually a sentence or two which was of relevance, but quite a lot of irrelevance as well. Whilst it is accepted that candidates will pre-learn material, they need to be encouraged to read the question and respond to the question that is posed in the examination if they want to score the highest marks.

Comments will not be made below on every single question, as some questions were not answered by many candidates at all.

Question 1 (イ) was generally very well answered, with candidates offering a variety of answers, eg local tourist spots, the local food, the local industrial products, a festival or history etc. Several candidates wrote very movingly about Hiroshima, including the history as well as the contemporary aspects.

Question 3 (ア) was generally answered quite well by candidates; presumably they only chose this question if they felt they had the detailed and specific knowledge required to answer it.

Question 3 (イ) was answered by a lot of candidates, and generally quite poorly. It seemed that a lot of native speaker candidates tried this question, but generally their responses were of a very personal narrative nature, and hardly any were able to give an intellectual answer incorporating sociological knowledge.

Question 4 (ア) was very popular, but few candidates were able to give a full, detailed and well organised answer. Most candidates concentrated just on the 運動会 and 文化祭, and even then mainly described what happened rather than analysing the aims of these events.

Question 4 (イ) was on the whole well answered by candidates, with many choosing a lesser known festival than some of the main ones. Candidates were generally well able to describe what happens in a festival, although their analysis of the importance of the festival was weaker. Few were able to cover both the religious nature of most festivals, as well as the functions of enjoyment and social cohesion it serves for the community.

Question 5 [ア] was answered more poorly than expected, which was surprising given that a number of candidates had written about these aspects in the 2007 examination.

Question 6 (ア) was well tackled, with most candidates able to recount the story, and elaborate on the thoughts of お釈迦様. On the whole the comments were quite brief, and candidates needed to express themselves more fully and in more detail to obtain the highest marks.

There were one or two outstanding responses to question 6 (イ). Even with the candidates who did not do quite so well, it was pleasing to see how many of them (including taught candidates) were able to quote 2 or 3 Akutagawa texts and use them as examples. This wider reading, beyond the requirements of the syllabus, is greatly to be encouraged.

Question 7 (ア) almost always provoked the answer "The final scene is my favourite", with many candidates recounting the story and commenting on what their interpretation of the message of the story was.

Question 7 (イ) seemed harder for candidates, with candidates limiting themselves to a very narrow selection of characters from the good number offered in the text. Their essays tended to be repetitive, with them making the same comments over and over again about different characters.

By question analysis:

	(ア)	(イ)	Total
1	11	91	102
2	3	6	9
3	13	69	82
4	65	29	94
5	24	88	112
6	69	34	103
7	58	16	74
8	2	4	6

Statistics

Unit 1 (6661) Reading and Writing

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	100	63	53	43	33	23
Uniform boundary mark	300	240	210	180	150	120

Unit 2 (6662) Reading and Writing; Topics and Texts

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	140	90	76	63	50	37
Uniform boundary mark	300	240	210	180	150	120

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