

Oral component

The new format of the oral examination was well understood by students. They were well prepared for the general conversation. Areas covered were school, family, friends, hobbies and interests and future aspirations.

For the second part (Discussion), 90 per cent of students prepared an historical topic (battle of Kosovo in 1389) and sub-topics related to the event while only 10 per cent of students prepared a topic based on the role of men and women in Serbian society in the past and today.

In terms of overall performance, well prepared students showed their ability to extend their vocabulary, to learn more and to share their knowledge with the assessors. They successfully used gap-filling strategies, built on comments made by the assessors and were able to correct themselves and use repair strategies if needed. Less successful students showed that the ability to speak the Serbian language does not mean that they speak it correctly. Some students used lots of colloquialisms and their lack of knowledge in terms of grammar demonstrated their inability to produce correct sentences in the Serbian language.

Section 1 – Conversation

Most students were well prepared and talked about their families, friends, school, future, hobbies and interests. However, bearing in mind that at least one-third of students came from the war-torn region of the former Yugoslavia, topics such as family are not always easy to talk about as some of the personal stories and tragedies. Elaborating on this topic required special care from the assessors who skilfully changed the topic and continued with the examination. Therefore, when preparing students for the examination and being aware of their background, it would be advisable to prepare them to talk more about other topics, as it will enable them to fill in gaps that may occur if the conversation about family falters. Other topics will assist assessors to direct the conversation away from painful memories.

More successful students were able to talk fluently about any area in the general conversation. They connected well with the assessors, used appropriate vocabulary and accurate grammar with little or no need for self-correction. They moved conversation forward, were interesting and showed pride in what they had prepared to talk about.

By contrast, some students came with pre-learnt stories hoping that some of the questions might be based on them. This strategy proved more of a hindrance than a help. Others thought that the first part is a traditional interview with precise questions and answers and were not able to add more information to their answers. Therefore, considerable thought should be given to teaching students how to interact with the assessors, use repair strategies as well as strategies for gap-filling, how to exchange information successfully and build on comments made by the assessors.

Section 2 – Discussion

Capacity to maintain and advance the exchange appropriately and effectively

Choosing a sub-topic for the detailed study is very important. It should reflect the interests of the students and be suited to their language proficiency. An historical theme – such as the battle of Kosovo, which is rich in its many aspects of interpretation, proved to be a very good choice. Students were able to choose a sub-topic which best suited their understanding, knowledge and level of language proficiency. The sub-topics were Heroes of the battle, Women of the time, Heroes versus traitors, Significance of the battle for young people in Australia, Commemoration of the battle – national identification or history of the battle written in verses of folk poems.

Another interesting theme for the Detailed Study was the role of men and women in society in the past and today although only a small number of students chose it for the discussion. The sub-topics were Today is easier to be a woman/man, Traditional and modern jobs, Life of women in the past, Traditional point of view versus modern point of view, Women in Serbian community and within Australian society.

All sub-topics were very interesting and challenging, as they required a high level of proficiency in the language in order to understand the sub-topic chosen, to present it and discuss it appropriately. The sub-topics involved lots of reading and research by students and lots of practice by their teachers.

All students were able to outline the sub-topic chosen within the one-minute time limit. Resources used were good and reflected the resourcefulness of teachers who prepared materials that ranged from written sources such as books, folk poems, legends, stories to reports and historical data from the web, as well as audiovisual material such as documentaries, a movie, recitals performed by renown artists. Students also brought some visual images which helped in their discussion. They referred to them, drew some conclusions or used them as descriptive items to support their opinion.

Of concern was how to really draw the discussion forward and to forget about historical data, which was a burden to many who learnt by heart names of knights and kings which were significant but not relevant in terms of the examination, the aim of which is to test the language not history. Teachers should note this when preparing students for an examination. Despite small emphasis on the historical moment and famous people studied we must not forget that our students need to master language not historical data.

Students whose choice was the second topic were generally more relaxed and more confident with their verbal skills. Even though they had to refer to the resources used and studied, they were also able to draw on their own experience and real life knowledge, which helped them to defend their point of view.

Relevance, breadth and depth of information, opinions and ideas

Students showed that in their choice of texts studied, they had enough to broaden their knowledge and to give them an insight in the chosen sub-topic. More successful students were able to compare and contrast between two types of texts or two different but significant characters in the Kosovo epic – for example, folk poem about Czar Lazar, historical data/biography – and go on to discuss the influence of other people of his time. Students were also able to discuss the influence of the two contrasting figures of the time, one hero and one traitor and how they were portrayed in history and folk literature.

In choosing the second topic, students were not so bound by historical data but had to refer to the resources and interpret them in the light of the past or present. They had to give good reasons for their opinions and to choose carefully among the resources if they wanted to quote and draw upon them. Some students did not perform well as they chose to talk about life of modern women by referring to the novel *Necista krv* by *Bora Stankovic* which describes life in nineteenth-century Serbia and presented the traditional point of view in terms of treatment of women. Even though the main character of the novel may appear to be a rebel in a very traditional society of the time, she succumbed to the pressure and ended her life in misery. This novel therefore was not suited to the topic.

Accuracy, range and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar

The most common mistake and the biggest problem students had, was with the usage of cases and agreement of nouns with adjectives and verbs. Their inability to use them properly showed their reliance on sentence structure of the English language which led to confusion and mistakes. Some students used words which were not part of standard modern Serbian language but colloquialisms which add to the richness of the language but are not a part of the usage in its standard form. Most students were fluent and did not have problems in understanding the questions and responding to them. Those who studied hard and prepared throughout the year, performed well.

Clarity of expression

It should be noted that students must clearly state what their theme, topic and sub-topic are in order to avoid confusion or misinterpretation by the assessors. They should think well ahead how to present their ideas. Students have to discuss the topic prepared, not argue about it. They have to state clearly their opinion and defend it with the help of the resources used to prepare for the examination. No questions would be asked outside their knowledge but incorrect or misleading resources can lead to questions that students do not know or did not cover while studying; for example, when a student stated that he/she listened to a poem *Pusti me da spavam* by *Rade Serbezija*. When asked to compare it with a poem *Strepnja* by *Desanka Maksimovic*, the student said that he/she was absent from school on the day they talked about them.

More successful students had lots of interesting details and opinions to share with the assessors. They were confident and referred to the resources they used while working on the detailed study.

Written component

Teachers and students should be aware that examiners may ask questions that address the syllabus outcomes in a manner that requires students to respond by integrating their knowledge, understanding and skills developed through studying the course. This reflects the fact that the knowledge, understanding and skills developed through the study of individual sections, should accumulate to a more comprehensive understanding than may be described in each section separately.

Section 1 – Listening and responding

Part A

There were five questions phrased in English for responses in English, with a mark range from 1 to 5.

Types of questions included:

- completing a message
- multiple-choice items
- information related to aspects of the language
- comparing and contrasting different points of view.

Question 1

Most students managed to score 2 marks on this question. However, there were some responses with either incomplete messages or the wrong phone numbers. Some students incorrectly converted the analogue 018 to digital 0418.

Questions 2a–b, 3a

Many students had difficulties answering these questions. In particular for Question 3a, a number of students ticked more than one answer.

Questions 3b, 4 and 5

Although there were a number of very good responses, most responses illustrated the students' rather limited ability to analyse the information, to recognise the tone of the text (Question 3b), language and imaging (Question 4) and compare and contrast different points of view (Question 5). Students demonstrated a sound understanding of spoken texts, but tended to retell the texts. On the other hand, some responses illustrated the students' ability to analyse and summarise the information, but contained no references to the texts.

There were two questions phrased in English and Serbian for responses in Serbian.

Marks ranged from 1 to 4.

Types of questions included:

- multiple-choice items
- identifying information
- analysing information.

In general, students' performances were satisfactory. Some students demonstrated a perceptive understanding of the texts, as well as an ability to analyse and convey the information accurately and appropriately. They also demonstrated a very good command of both English and Serbian. A small number of students did not attempt to do part a or part b, attempting only the questions requiring extended responses. Other students demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the texts, as well as a very good command of the language; however, they made little or no reference to the texts. Students tended to score more marks on questions that were content-based as opposed to those that required an ability to analyse the information, language and tone.

Part B

As in Part A, students gave better answers to content-based questions – Questions 6b and 7b – than to questions which required analysis (Question 7c). Some had difficulty answering the multiple choice questions. A few students did not attempt to do questions in this part, especially 7c.

Section 2 – Reading and responding

Part A

This section consisted of two reading passages, i.e. Questions 8 and 9. Types of questions included:

- multiple choice
- questions about language on tone of texts
- questions which targeted general understanding and ability to interpret reading passages, with one question also targeting students' ability to link, compare and contrast information.

Questions had different degrees of difficulty so most students were able to score full marks on earlier questions, while few achieved the same result on some of the later questions. There was a range of answers covering all performance bands. A number of students did not attempt to answer some questions. It was evident that many students experienced difficulties expressing themselves in English, with some students writing translations of the questions.

Teachers should instruct students on how to answer multiple-choice questions so that they indicate only one correct answer. If they make a mistake students need to indicate clearly which is the answer to be considered.

Students should refer to examples from texts whenever possible. Whenever there is any doubt, it is better to refer to the text to support a response. Teachers need to emphasise textual analysis in the class.

Question 10

This question was mandatory and generally students performed well. Many students displayed maturity and higher order skills in dealing with the problems stated in the question. Students were very reflective when writing about family, tradition and everyday life, which indicated their interest in the topic, as well as the depth in treatment of the text. A number of students succeeded in reflecting on both their own and their parents' position, which displayed students' maturity and ability to contribute actively to the resolution of the problem.

The form chosen by most students was satisfactory. Their responses displayed the tone expected in the question. Most exchanged information from the text and gave advice as required and specified by the task.

The number of anglicisms was insignificant, possibly due to the nature of the topic. However, there are a number of grammatical 'details' that need to be focused on by students for improvement:

- negation – joining and separating the negation part from the word
- mixing two orthographies – Cyrillic and Roman
- mixing two/three pronunciations – ekavski, ijekavski and ikavski (the last example is not accepted in the standard language)
- mixing two very close, but different characters, 'c' and 'ć'
- interpunction, especially commas
- the length of sentences – students should use complex grammatical structures, but not at the expense of meaning.

Section 3 – Writing in Serbian

(completed by interstate students)

In this section students were required to write a response of 200–250 words in Serbian on one of three prescribed questions. Each question required a different text type from those in the syllabus. In the 2002 examination these were a diary entry, a letter and an article.

Almost all students responded to Question 11 or 12, while Question 13 was very unpopular.

Question 12, the letter to the tennis coach, was written as an informal letter by some students and as a formal letter by others. This reflected how students imagined their relationship with the coach, either as a friend or as an older respected person.

Some students had problems answering Question 11, the diary entry, using this text type to describe a series of events that happened on one day or over a few days. Because the world trip was a long experience from the past, students were unable to put it into the context of a day by day recount. Their responses showed an unusual mix of text types from an informal letter to a friend, a travel report and a diary entry.

The overall performance of students in this section was good to very good. In general, students had a thorough knowledge and understanding of vocabulary and sentence structures, and organised and manipulated language creatively. Their ability to understand the required text types was less impressive.

Students also demonstrated some problems in grammar and syntax. This is an ongoing problem and there has been little improvement in recent years. The most common error was the incorrect writing of negations, i.e. incorrect rendering of ‘no’, in Serbian Cyrillic script *HE*, together with the verb. The adverb *HE* should always be written separately from the verb, with the exception in just four words: *hehy*, *hemam*, *hncam* and *hemoj*. This is a very simple but mostly ignored rule.

The second most common error was the omission of the letter ‘h’ in Cyrillic *x* at the end of the verb бити. In the first person singular of the verb in the conditional mood ја бих, and also writing the same letter in other forms of singular and plural. Students were often confused about when to use the letter ‘x’. Teachers of Serbian should teach the conditional mood of the verb бити emphasising that ‘x’ only appears in the first person singular.

Students often, perhaps in an attempt to impress, use complex sentences that are very confused grammatically and syntactically. Teachers are advised to demonstrate to students how it is possible to use simple forms to express complex meaning.

Students demonstrated a remarkable improvement in the correct writing of both the *ekavski* and *ijekavski* variant recognised as equal in the modern standard version of Serbian. There was still some minor mixing of both variants in the same text. Attention still needs to be paid to the use of Cyrillic script. A large number of students are mixing both Cyrillic and Roman script.

Recommendations for teachers

- teach separately the adverb *HE* from the corresponding verb
- teach the use of the conditional mood of the verb бити, with emphasis on the first person singular бих and consonant x
- emphasise that the mixing Roman and Cyrillic script in students’ responses is to be avoided
- emphasise recognition of the difference between consonants h and ч
- give more attention to sentence structure and vocabulary building
- use prescribed text types more widely, emphasising differences between the applications
- give more attention to correct punctuation.