

Japanese (continuers)

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Languages Learning Area

JAPANESE (CONTINUERS)

2010 ASSESSMENT REPORT

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 3: ORAL EXAMINATION

General Comments

This year, 198 students presented themselves for the Japanese continuers oral examination. Overall student performance was good, with the average mark similar to that in recent years. Students were generally well-prepared for the conversation section of the oral examination. Approximately 90% of the candidates scored 10/20 or more, of whom fifteen achieved full marks. In the discussion section, students' marks were more heavily distributed towards the lower end, with approximately 15% scoring less than 5/10. Even so, some 23% attained 9/10 or 10/10, and twenty students achieved full marks. Lower scores in the discussion section largely resulted from insufficient or inadequate preparation for the task.

Section 1: Conversation

Overall, students performed well in the conversation section. Most students were able to handle simple questions about family and pastimes with a good degree of confidence and fluency, although less successful conversations only offered 'prepared' responses, typically from the sample questions list, and did not go beyond short, factual responses. Students were more successful when they were able to move comfortably away from prepared answers where relevant, and spontaneously elaborated on their initial responses by giving reasons, opinions, and impressions.

Examiners commented that they were pleased by students' willingness to communicate. Many students were genuinely eager to talk and enjoyed their conversation with the examiners. In some cases, students made more linguistic errors as they tried to say things they had not prepared, but it was very pleasing to see them make the attempt. Other examiners, however, reported that there were also students who persisted with prepared sentences.

It was again evident this year that some students often responded only to a familiar keyword from the question, providing a rote-learned response that was irrelevant to the question asked. For example:

Q: 学校までどうやって行きますか。

A: 私の学校は・・・です。

Good listening skills are essential for success in the oral examination, and it is recommended that students start to practise this as early as possible. It takes time to develop listening skills. Teachers are advised to help students to develop a better understanding of Japanese syntax. Japanese is a SOV language, so, unlike English, which is a SVO language, the meaning of a Japanese utterance is typically determined in the end of the sentence. It is important that students listen carefully right to the end of a question paying particular attention to tense, aspect and mode. Teachers should also help students to avoid relying too much on the sample questions provided in the support material on the SACE website. These give only an indication of the kind of questions that can be asked. Although these questions are useful starting points, they are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. Students should

be prepared for the questions to be asked in different ways and using different vocabulary in the examination situation.

The capacity of students to maintain a conversation varied widely. Students were more successful when they rarely needed assistance in comprehending assessors' questions, and effectively used あいづち and 'fillers', which allowed the natural flow of conversation to continue. Many students were able to ask for assistance or clarification in Japanese, while some asked for help repeatedly in only one fixed way such as “もういちど (in rising tone and incomplete sentence)” and often ended up saying “わかりません”. Quite a few students had been taught to say “...は英語で何ですか” and commonly this strategy was overused.

Students handled basic questions well, although many did not cope well with questions which used more complicated grammar forms (for example, a relative clause). They also showed a lack of confidence with interrogatives, for example, どう、どんな, and どうして.

The most successful students showed a mastery of complicated sentence structures, including a range of subordinating conjunctions (for example, ~から/ので、~たら、~時、~ても). It was very pleasing to see that more students comfortably used a variety of verb forms (for example, ~たことがあります、~つもりです、~たいと思います、~からです) and しか + negative, which had previously been reported as difficult to deal with.

Pronunciation was generally good, and yet common errors from past years also appeared this year. Some examples included confusion between similar vowels, as in えいが/えいご あに/あね おにいさん/おにさん まだ/まで かわいい/こわい; and confusion between similar consonants, as in かもく/かぞく/かがく.

A foreign accent or phonetic interference from the student's background language was often evident in pronunciation and intonation, but it was very rare that a foreign accent by itself seriously impeded clarity of utterance.

Other linguistic features that were often not known or confused in use included:

- particles
- sentences using 'because' (with the conjunction から mistakenly preceding the 'reason-clause')
- days of the week
- numbers and counter suffixes
- tense and time words (きよねん...するつもりです。)
- verbal and adjectival endings
- ほか as in, for example 日本語のほかに..., ほかの日に..., and ほかに何か言いたいことがありますか。

Section 2: Discussion

The choice of topic is the key to a successful performance in the discussion section. Teachers should ensure that their students' topics are manageable, interesting, and sufficiently challenging to discuss in the final examination. It was sad to observe that some students chose topics that were too difficult for them to comfortably discuss in Japanese and so recited memorised sentences from books and other resources without understanding what they were saying. How the main points are presented on

the In-depth Study outline sheet is also very important. The dot points should provide information which enables the examiners to understand instantly the focus points of the study, and so, effectively facilitate the discussion. Teachers are encouraged to supervise and give early feedback to students about the points they might include on their outline sheet, as these are the basis for examiners' questions.

Students and teachers are reminded that the one-minute introduction is not marked and must not exceed the time allowed. It is recommended that students reduce the information given in the introduction, instead including relevant information and expressions in response to examiners' questions, which will allow the student to fully engage in the discussion. Also, students should not give long answers when asked to explain what they have learnt about a dot point listed in their outline. They should say a few relevant things and then pause to allow the discussion to develop naturally.

Most students had researched their topic in some detail if not in depth. Only the most successful students had thought deeply about their topic and were able to give comments and opinions in response to various questions, and often the analysis could have been taken much further. In some cases, students had evidently not practised explaining or defining their dot points. Again, many students relied too much on memorised answers and could not discuss much more than what had been rehearsed.

Examiners commented that some topics were too broad (for example, festivals in Japan) or too 'easy' (for example, home and family life; school life) to allow students to go into depth in discussion or demonstrate their research. It was also noted that students' comments were often stereotypical and only based on limited sources of information or data. Students and teachers should assess the quality of website resources they wish to draw on, and students should undertake some research into what has been written about the topic rather than relying on what others have told them about it.

Grammatical accuracy and range of expressions were generally very good in rehearsed parts of answers, but there was little flexibility when students had to change what they had learned to answer a question.

Generally the use of support objects such as photographs from the Internet and fluffy toys or plastic figures of anime characters did not add to the discussion. To make an impact on their performance, students should be able to provide more than describe what the object is.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 4: WRITTEN EXAMINATION

General Comments

Students achieved a wide range of marks across all sections of the written examination. Overall, students did best with Section 2: Responding and Responding, Part B, and Section 3: Writing in Japanese .

Section 1: Listening and Responding

Text 1

Marks were relatively low for responses to this 'everyday' conversation between friends. Despite the simplicity of the language and content, there was confusion about both times and whether the speakers were going to a restaurant or the movies first. Surprisingly even many stronger students lost marks here.

Text 2

Question 2 (a) was generally answered well. Most students were able to fill in the library card details, and it was good to see that students knew 一日 (ついたち).

In question 2 (b), students identified that the library assistant incorrectly took the girl's name and that he interrupted her to ask for photocopying and to order his lunch. Few students made reference to the plain style of speech (i.e. short and incomplete sentences) and the fact that it was abrupt. Many students failed to pick up the finer details such as times and days of the week, and some students said that he was effective because he asked the right questions and got the information.

Text 3

Question 3 (a) was answered very well, with very few mistakes. Question 3 (b) was also done well.

Text 4

Responses to Text 4 were mixed. In question 4 (a) there was much confusion again with time (i.e. how long Ryo waited for Naomi) and places (i.e. where the speakers are).

For question 4 (b), most students knew that it was an accident, but not all said that the speaker was taken to the doctor with a sore leg.

Some less successful responses to question 4 (c) confused who was going to the hospital and when.

Text 5

This question was the most challenging task. Most successful responses demonstrated good understanding of the speaker's situation, his feelings, and messages for his father on his (i.e. the father's) coming birthday, and his relationships with his family. In less successful responses, students did not understand whose birthday it was and/or who was giving and receiving presents. Some thought that the father had passed away.

In general there was a solid understanding of the texts and the questions/tasks. Students were adequately able to identify and analyse information in a general sense but did not pick up finer details of the texts. Some very basic features, such as days and times, were often misunderstood. In preparing for the listening section of the examination, students should develop a good understanding of basic vocabulary and should be trained to pay careful attention to details in texts. Full understanding of the questions and required tasks is also essential. In more open questions, it is unlikely that students are asked to simply provide a plain translation of a text. They should be

prepared to give more interpretative and/or analytical answers that demonstrate a deeper understanding of the text. It is also recommended that students become familiar with a wide range of spoken text types, including poems and songs.

Section 2: Reading and Responding, Part A

This section clearly clarified the students' performance levels. Those who successfully read the texts and understood the details expressed their understanding clearly and concisely, while those who did not gave vague or incorrect answers based on guess-work, and lost marks. Overall, students demonstrated general understanding well but did not show comprehensive understanding of details in the text.

Text 6

Significantly, there was a broad score distribution for responses to this text. Only 5% achieved full marks, 5% scored no points, and there were great differences among other students. The mean score was 3.5/7.

In Question 6 (a), most students understood that there was an increase in the number of males entering the field of childcare. Many also mentioned that it was strange or inappropriate to call a male childcare worker “保母さん”, but often neglected to explain why (i.e. that the word had a female connotation).

Question 6 (b) was adequately handled. Generally students were able to gain a point for the title in Japanese. Many students' answers reflected that they understood that there had been a shift or change in the workforce. However, many focused only on the changes in female jobs and neglected to include information about the change in males. Many answers lacked specific detail from the text such as statistic figures.

Text 7

Students' scores varied. 20% achieved 7/8 or 8/8, but 5% scored zero. The mean score was 3.6/8. A careful attention to linguistic details was essential to successfully answer the questions in this section.

In question 7 (a), most students understood that Kira was a mother. Many students missed the point that Aoi was a shop-owner who employed a student and thought that Aoi was a student.

Question 7 (b) was generally handled well, but many students did not provide sufficient information from the text to support their answers. For example, most students gathered that Tama 'needed' a part-time job, but often did not say why. Most students understood that Kira believed that study was important, but many neglected to comment on the fact that Kira believed that high school students did not need a lot of money.

Question 7 (c) was not answered very well. Many students missed the point that Aoi employed the boy, who managed to balance study, a part-time job, and a club. A common misunderstanding was that Aoi worked at the shop and was a student. More successful responses established that Aoi was a 'mediator' or 'covered common ground'.

In preparing students for the Reading and Responding section, teachers are encouraged to incorporate a wide range of language texts from various sources so that students can become familiar with texts of different styles, topics, and purposes, and of different linguistic difficulty or complexity. Answering techniques (for example, how to support an answer with relevant information from the text) should also be taught and understood.

Section 2: Reading and Responding, Part B

Most students seemed to fully understand the context in which the text was written. However, some students did not grasp the specific aspects of the text which they are required to respond to. Students' marks were widely distributed. Approximately 20% of the students attained a score of 13 out of 15 (approximately 85%) or higher, while 41% scored below half marks. The mean for this question was 56%.

Capacity to understand general and specific aspects of the text by identifying, analysing, and responding to information

Students needed to present opposing opinions against the proposals. Successful responses appropriately disputed the both points with reference to the three reasons and provided good supporting arguments.

The total ban on mobile phones seemed to be more easily understood than the introduction of Saturday morning classes. Many students did not refer to all three reasons given in the text and wrote more freely outside of the stated context.

Capacity to convey information coherently (structure, sequence, accuracy, and variety of vocabulary and sentence structure)

Most responses had a good structure and sequence, although some students included irrelevant content that was either created or copied straight from the original text.

Students should be taught how to present opposing opinions by using relevant information to support one's argument. Linguistic techniques to refer to or quote the stimulus text are very useful.

Students are advised to be careful about:

- verb and adjective conjugation
- grammatical negative (for example, いいじゃないです)
- から (because) in the complex sentence
- locative particles such as に、で.

Many excellent grammatical structures were used, but as students neglected the original text, much of what was said was irrelevant.

Capacity to convey information appropriately (relevance, use of conventions of text types)

Text type conventions (letter) were observed well. Most responses included a salutation at the beginning (for example, 校長先生へ) and the sender's signature at the end. Although students were expected to write a letter expressing strong opposition, they still needed to observe the formality and appropriateness of style

and language. Most students successfully handled this, but few included less appropriate expressions (for example, language that was too emotional), probably due to limited language skills.

Section 3: Writing in Japanese

Of the three choices offered this year, question 11 was the most popular and was chosen by 77% of the students, followed by question 9 (13%), and question 10 (10%).

Students' performance in this section ranged from outstanding to less than adequate, but many students who chose either question 9 or question 11 coped well with the task. It was unfortunate that many students who chose question 10 did not make the best use of the opportunity to write creatively. It is to be noted, however, that there were some outstanding answers to question 10.

Relevance and depth of treatment of ideas, information, or opinions

Question 9

Most responses were relevant to the question. The mean score for this question (13.5/20) was the highest of the three questions in this section. Successful students wrote a very persuasive article by providing interesting examples from own knowledge and experience. Less successful responses only covered 'healthy diet' or 'playing sport' and did not refer to 'active lifestyle'. The targeted reader of the article was generally well-understood and appropriately incorporated in the answer.

Question 10

Although a number of responses to this question were outstanding, there were also some confused responses where students misunderstood the question. Strong responses provided a very entertaining story about homework, with detailed description. Some responses were excellent, reflecting the writers' sense of humour and creativity, as well as demonstrating strong linguistic skills. Less successful responses also offered humour but, without careful attention to the task requirements, this resulted in a rather irrelevant or confused story.

Question 11

Despite its popularity, responses to this question received lower marks. Many of the less successful responses consisted merely of a recount of a trip to Japan, which did not work as a 'thanks letter' to the host family. Successful answers provided a detailed description of a 'most memorable experience' shared with the host family, discussed why it was so memorable, and said how it affected the writer. It was obvious from some responses that students resorted to their topic for the In-depth Study, and did not make very clear connections to the required task. The intended recipient of the letter (host family) was well-understood.

Accuracy and appropriateness of vocabulary and sentence structures

The most successful students demonstrated a thorough knowledge and understanding of grammatical structures, used a wide range of vocabulary, adopted correct tenses, and used a number of connectives to join phrases and clauses. However, most students relied on very familiar structures that were probably mastered at an earlier stage of study, and did not use the full range of structures that should be available to them at this level.

Errors in particles and the endings of verbs and adjectives were quite noticeable. When less successful responses included complex structures, they often used a direct translation from English, which resulted in use of inappropriate expressions.

Students are asked to take more care with their handwriting. Markers commented that they had difficulty understanding some answers because of poor legibility. For example, い、り、と、て、う、ら、つ were commonly written incorrectly or in a style that is very hard to read. Some errors in script are obviously long-term errors that should have been corrected early in a student's study of Japanese.

Capacity to structure and sequence response

Students did this aspect of the task well. Most students were able to organise their response by using paragraphs appropriately, and attempted an introduction and a conclusion.

Chief Assessor
Japanese (continuers)