

FIRST LANGUAGE CZECH

Paper 0514/01

Reading

General comments

The majority of candidates have coped well with the texts. A number of candidates, although they showed clear understanding of the texts, had some difficulty with comparing them and with finding the appropriate way to formulate their opinions and thoughts.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

- (a) Most candidates answered correctly that the hero of the story is the writer, editor, journalist – or just an author of literary texts.
- (b) Again, correct answers from nearly all candidates, i.e. the hero met Mr. Novák in a café.
- (c) The age of Mr. Novák is specified in the text: he was supposed to retire in a year and a half. Candidates scored a point if they cited this sentence or if they gave an age within the range of normal retirement age (between 55 and 70 years).
- (d) In general candidates characterized the relationship between the protagonist and Mr. Novák quite well. In some cases only one characteristic feature was given, even though the question asks for two.
- (e) The task was to write two adjectives that characterize:
 - (i) the appearance, and
 - (ii) the nature of Mr. Novák.

The adjectives produced by candidates were correct for the majority of cases. However, when an adjective describing *appearance* was given for the question related to the *nature* of Mr. Novák (or vice versa) the point was not scored. A point was also lost when candidates repeated the same adjective for both sub-questions.

- (f) (i) This question was one of the more challenging ones. Candidates were expected to use their inference skills and deduce that Mr. Novák's cousin had let the protagonist (the female author) use her name so that the texts could be published. Correct alternative answers were also accepted, e.g. 'the hero was using the name of Mr. Novák's cousin as a pseudonym'. The answer that the cousin was doing proofreading for the hero of the story was not accepted as correct.
- (ii) The word "pokrejšvač" (literally translated as "the one who provides shelter") meant that the cousin will "shelter" the hero's identity with her name. Many candidates understood this and were able to answer the question. An alternative answer that was accepted as correct was that Mr. Novák had chosen the word "pokrejšvač" because he spoke a conspiratorial or "secret" language, i.e. slang or argot.

The answer that the cousin "sheltered/protected" the author's texts in regards to the language – i.e. that she was doing proofreading – was considered wrong.

- (g) In this question, candidates were supposed to find in the text an example of ungrammatical Czech in the extract, and most candidates found several examples of it. However, candidates stopped at finding the examples and did not provide the required explanation of why they thought they were ungrammatical.
- (h) In this question, candidates were supposed to find two examples of simile in the text and explain their meaning. The vast majority of candidates were successful in finding the similes, but quite often the explanations were too brief and therefore unsuccessful.
- (i) In this last question candidates were asked to explain in their own words why the hero of the story remembered so well the event with the girl and the umbrella. Here, a number of interpretations were accepted as correct. Candidates were expected to present at least two reasons (for the two points offered) and formulate them in an appropriate manner. Unfortunately, again, some candidates answered all too briefly and could not be rewarded all points for this question.

Overall, candidates were successful in answering the questions in the first part of the test.

It is recommended that before starting their answer on any question, candidates read the question very carefully. Most questions include directions or useful details on how to answer them. For example, "two reasons", "two aspects are required", etc.

The quality of language in the first part of the test was on the whole good. Common mistakes included spelling mistakes (for example, double consonants – such as "ochranná ruka"); problems with accusative pronouns (short "i" in the case of "ji", "svoji", etc.); punctuation (especially in complex sentences); and subject-verb agreement.

Question 2

In order to do well on this question, candidates need to read both texts carefully, spend some time thinking about the similarities and differences between the two texts and plan their answer.

Useful phrases to include in the answer are, for example:

Both texts agree that /agree in

Both heroes find themselves

While the hero from the first story ..., the hero in the second story...

Unfortunately a number of candidates chose a rather clumsy way of comparing the two texts: they retold the plot of the first text, then they retold the plot of the second text, but they did not state what the common points and differences between the texts were, although this is what the assignment asks them to do. This approach is not conducive to satisfactory answers and should be discouraged.

- (a) In this question, the candidates were asked to compare the situations in which the heroes of the two stories find themselves. There were several common points: both heroes were artists banned from practicing, their lives were difficult, they were both supported by somebody who was very close to them, they both strived to solve their problem, etc.
- (b) In this question, the candidates were asked to compare the way in which the heroes manage to settle their difficulties. Here the comparison reveals a number of differences: while the sculptor was supported by the whole family, the writer seeks help from just one person. While the sculptor uses open resistance (a public exhibition), the writer stays hidden, under the pseudonym. While the sculptor thinks of the solution on his own, the writer accepts the leadership of Mr. Novák, etc.

Unfortunately candidates often did not split their answers correctly in the two sub-questions and wrote the same answers for **sub-question 2(a)** and **2(b)**. As mentioned above, **sub-question 2(a)** asks about the life situation of the protagonists, while **sub-question 2(b)** asks candidates to explore the way the heroes address their problem. A number of candidates did not perceive this difference and produced the same answer for both sub-questions.

On the whole the language use of candidates was satisfactory. However, in their effort to express themselves in an original way, candidates sometimes generated sentences or word combinations that were much too complicated and in many cases incomprehensible. Writing shorter sentences, expressing the same ideas succinctly is recommended. Repetition and use of foreign words and phrases should be avoided.

The most frequent spelling problems were: adjectival endings, double consonants (*nn*), spelling *mě* versus *mně* (*rozumět, nejrozumnější*), incorrect declinations (mostly in instrumental case – “*lišili se názory*, not *názorama*”), sentence punctuation.

Candidates are reminded that Czech – unlike English – uses the possessive pronouns “*svůj*”, “*svoje*”, therefore the excessive use of “*jeho*”, “*její*” (influence of English) should be avoided as it can lead to confusion. For example “*Chtěla vydat svůj rukopis*” and “*Chtěla vydat její rukopis*” are very different in their meaning.

The hard work and preparation for the exam was evident in many candidates’ answers and Centres are commended for their effort in giving excellent support to their candidates.

FIRST LANGUAGE CZECH

Paper 0514/02

Writing

General comments

For this examination candidates are expected to write two essays: an argumentative one and a descriptive one. They have four titles to choose from for each kind of essay

Many candidates were well-practiced in essay writing and well-prepared for this exam. However, a minority of the candidates, who were obviously fluent Czech speakers, were less successful in this test because they lacked the skills and preparation required for a writing exam.

Candidates are reminded that spoken, colloquial Czech is quite different from the more formal, written Czech. The latter is expected for this exam and therefore it is necessary to study Czech spelling and Czech grammar in order to do well on this paper.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

This part of the examination requires candidates to argue and reason for and against an issue, to formulate their ideas clearly and briefly, to express opinions, to explore different aspects of the topic, and to justify their standpoint. Centres are recommended to focus on these skills when preparing candidates for this part of the examination.

Unfortunately, it was quite often the case that candidates formulated their opinions vaguely and some of their sentences were too complicated or contradictory. In addition, many candidates got stuck with a single simple idea and went around expressing it again and again in different words, without making any effort to think about other aspects of the topic.

Questions 1(b), 1(c), 1(d) were equally popular with candidates, while **1(a)** proved to be the least chosen.

Unfortunately, the most frequent problem was the fact that some candidates did not do what they were supposed to do in an *argumentative* essay: i.e. they did not present arguments for and against the statement in the assignment – they simply described what they knew about the topic, narrated stories or interpreted basic facts.

In **Question 1(b)** a number of candidates explained what ‘adrenalin’ and ‘adrenalin sport’ is and they provided examples of adrenalin sports, but they did not argue for and against the statement that adrenalin sports are a needless danger to health, as required by the question.

In **Question 1(c)** candidates were asked to think about the role of food in the life of people nowadays. Unfortunately, many of them digressed to explanations of a healthy and unhealthy diet, what obesity or anorexia is, etc. The other roles of food in the life of people (the social and cultural role, cooking and food as a fashion trend, etc.) were rarely mentioned.

In **Question 1(d)** candidates were asked to provide arguments for and against the statement that life is the best teacher. Most of the candidates just supported this statement, without any polemic.

It is recommended that candidates read the assignment carefully, and try to meet its requirements as closely as possible. When the question asks for ‘argument / polemic’ it is expected that candidates will bring arguments for and against the issue and to support these arguments.

Despite such imperfections, there were a number of very good papers presenting a balanced and sophisticated language.

Section 2

In this part of the examination candidates demonstrate their ability to write a well constructed, interesting narration (story) or description.

Preparation of candidates should focus on the structure of such essays, as well as stylistic means to render a narrative or description lively. Learning Czech spelling systematically, practicing essay-writing, and reading Czech literary works (both fiction and non-fiction) are also essential parts of the preparation for this examination.

All questions were chosen by about the same number of candidates, with no obvious favourite.

Just like for Section 1, candidates strived to create interesting essays with colourful language and imagery. However it is worth remembering that this exam is testing written Czech language in its grammatical form. It often happens that in the heat of narration candidates slip into spoken, colloquial (and frequently ungrammatical) forms, even when not quoting direct speech. Spoken Czech may be acceptable in direct speech, e.g. as part of a dialogue, but it is not in line with the requirements of this paper to have the whole story written this way.

Again it must be stressed that it is absolutely necessary for candidates to read the assignment carefully. If the assignment asks candidates to "Write a story", then a narration is expected. On the other hand, if the assignment requires candidates to "Describe" something, candidates are expected to offer a depiction of the object, person, etc. in question.

Some of the problematic language areas this session include: subject-verb agreement, cases, punctuation, double consonants, prefixes s/z, use of the pronoun "svůj" (self), "můj" (my), pronoun dative ("ji", "svoji").