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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel GCE
In French (9FR0)

Paper 3A/3B: Speaking

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Paper 3: Speaking

This report will attempt to provide some insight into the various aspects of the Pearson GCE Advanced level French speaking examination, to assist centres and candidates to improve their performances.

Objectives of the Test

This examination tests candidates' ability to demonstrate:

- In Task 1, knowledge and understanding of the social and cultural context of France by providing information, analysis and opinion on one of the 12 prescribed themes and
- In Task 2, the ability to respond to written language in speech by means of a 2-minute presentation of the findings of a research project of their choice, linked to a French or Francophone social and cultural context, followed by a more detailed discussion of between 6 – 10 bullet points, selected by them
- the ability to analyse aspects of the cultural context, present and justify arguments, express opinions and draw conclusions
- the ability to interact and hold a natural, fluent conversation
- skill in manipulating language accurately

These skills are assessed via two distinct tasks conducted entirely in the target language, which are carried out in consecutive order in one session.

(Summary of Pearson Edexcel Level 3 Advanced GCE in French – page 19)

Assessment

4 Assessment Objectives (AO's) are used to judge candidates' ability.

AO1 – Interaction (applied in Part 1 Task 1 and Task 2 Part 2) – assesses candidates' ability to initiate, develop and sustain natural discussion, using language spontaneously and fluently with minimal, or no, hesitation or prompting. **There are a possible 6 marks for this AO.**

Advice to candidates

Candidates should be aware that the main purpose of this AO is to see whether they can produce language spontaneously and develop the topics raised naturally. They should seek to lead the discussion.

Advice to examiners

Examiners should seek to facilitate this by guiding candidates away from pre-learnt material and requiring them to react in a spontaneous manner. This has 2 beneficial outcomes. It ensures that candidates meet the requirement to be spontaneous whilst at the same time allowing them to demonstrate further knowledge on the same subject.

AO3 – Accuracy and range of language (applied in Part 1 Task 1 and Part 2 Task 2) – assesses candidates' ability to communicate effectively and efficiently, demonstrating the extent of their range of the grammatical features of French and their ability to reproduce these accurately. **There are a possible 12 marks for this AO.**

Advice to candidates

Candidates should understand that to score in the upper ranges of the mark scheme, they will need to show a range of complex structures and sophisticated vocabulary. A list of complex structures is available on the Pearson website. Whilst it is possible to succeed in the examination without doing this, the marks obtained will not be as high as for those who demonstrate greater variety.

Candidates should not fear the requirement to be accurate. This is obviously the goal but accurate communication, as opposed to grammatical precision, is what the Mark Scheme rewards. If the message is immediately clear despite mistakes, then a good mark is achievable. The important thing is to produce material that can be assessed and the way to do this is by concentrating on expressing the content rather than the language.

Pronunciation and Intonation are assessed independently, so it is important that candidates pay attention to this area as poor performance here will be reflected in the overall mark. If what is said is rendered unclear by the way it is said, then the message will not be communicated effectively.

Advice to teachers

Teachers need, therefore, to promote the higher level language skills in the classroom – the varied ways of subordinating, the more complex tenses, Mood and Voice for example.

Advice to Examiners

Examiners should devise ways of putting their candidates into situations where these skills may be demonstrated. . A test that remains largely factual will limit their ability to display mastery of the higher cognitive skills and determine the level of language they may use; whereas hypothetical questions of the type “Suppose you had been living in Vichy France, how might you have reacted to some of the edicts?” / “What about the “banlieues” if Marine Le Pen becomes President?” or ones that test complex tenses “What had happened to bring about the signing of the Armistice?” or mood “To bring about wage parity between employees, what has to happen?” allow candidates to access the upper reaches of each mark scheme.

AO4 – Knowledge and understanding of society and culture (applied in Part 1 Task 1 and Part 2 Task 2 – a possible 12 marks) – assesses candidates’ knowledge and understanding of French society and culture gained through study of 4 prescribed themes, which are, in turn, divided into 12 sub-themes. At the exam, candidates are first offered a pre-determined choice between two of the 12 sub-themes, as pre-scribed by Pearson Edexcel, and then, from their chosen card, select one of two statements on different aspects of the sub-theme. Two compulsory questions, for which they have 5 minutes preparation time, constitute the first task they will face. The questions test opinion in the first instance and knowledge in the second.

For AO4, candidates are required to show detailed knowledge of socio-cultural matters which they substantiate through relevant, apposite examples. They are rewarded on their ability to construct an argument, draw convincing conclusions and express and develop opinions.

Advice to candidates

Candidates should take great care to address the questions as set. That is, their answer must provide knowledge and understanding of the points raised by the question. Disappointingly, too many candidates produce responses that relate to the wider topic but fail to answer the question. Unfortunately, un-targeted material cannot be rewarded for the Knowledge and Understanding part of the task. They must also be prepared to go beyond their initial response and develop their answer through well-chosen examples and well-made conclusions. Knowledge and understanding are not the only features rewarded by the Mark Scheme. Candidates are also expected to have opinions on the knowledge they have acquired and the skills to explain these if challenged, through argument. This ability is rewarded specifically by the Mark Scheme.

Advice to examiners

Candidates can only really demonstrate these skills if given the opportunity. Examiners are responsible for seeing that this happens by creating situations where this can happen.

AO2 – (applied only to Part 2 Task 1) – presentation of an Independent Research Project – assesses candidates’ ability to present their findings on a topic freely chosen by themselves and for which they will have consulted at least 2 target language written works, the content of which they must summarise and evaluate within a 2-minute uninterrupted period. It is important to recognise that this task does not assess knowledge and understanding, nor accuracy of language. The mark reflects the candidate’s ability to meet the requirements of the test. **There are 12 possible marks for this task.**

Advice to candidates

There are 3 criteria to be met in this task. Candidates must: -

- clearly identify the sources they have used, ensuring they are original target language written ones and not videos, transcripts or translations.
- summarise each of these succinctly
- make a critical assessment of the relative usefulness of the sources in terms of their understanding of their chosen topic

It is hoped that this explanation of the Assessment Objectives will help to understand how they reflect the Mark Scheme embodies the objectives of Paper 3 which are to assess how well candidates can demonstrate effective inter-personal and presentational skills, by communicating efficiently on important socio-cultural matters at an advanced level, using a range of language that is clear and accurate.

The exam format

For each candidate, overall, the exam lasts for 23 minutes.

This consists of a 5-minute preparation period, followed by an 18-minute examination divided into 3 sections. Examiners should adhere to the timings for each section as closely as possible:

Task 1 – 7/8 minutes IRP – 2 minutes Task 2 Part 2 – 8/9 minutes

Advice to centres

The test is recorded. The most important person in the procedure is the candidate. The recording should primarily convey what the candidate says and, incidentally, the examiner's contribution. All extraneous noises should be avoided as they interfere with the listening process and in extreme cases make assessment impossible.

Too many recordings are difficult to listen to because the microphone is too close to the examiner, picking up their voice to the relative detriment of the candidate's. Too often the room's acoustics are problematic, performing like an echo chamber and producing a "hollow" sound that distorts the candidate's response. Extraneous noises from reversing lorries, passing planes, lawnmowers, school bells and playground fun are a distraction and need to be avoided. Markers may not hear correctly what candidates say and, if they can't, this may have repercussions on the mark awarded.

The exam process

In the preparation stage, the Invigilator offers candidates a choice between 2 sub-themes. The order in which cards are presented is set down by Pearson Edexcel and must be adhered to. Having chosen the sub-theme, candidates are then given the Candidate's Card on which appear two statements. They must now choose which of these they will wish to be examined on. Each statement is accompanied by 2 bullet points. These will give them a steer as to the nature of the questions they will encounter. They will have 5 minutes to prepare their answers.

i.e.:

The candidate has chosen Stimulus card FR 12 from a choice of 2

Thème : L'Occupation et la Résistance

Task 1

La Résistance – the choice now is between

A Le traitement des femmes françaises « amies d'allemands » à la fin de la guerre était injuste.

Vous devez considérer :

- *Les raisons qui expliquent le traitement que les femmes françaises ont subi.*
- *Les punitions infligées aux femmes.*

B Le General de Gaulle n'était pas un vrai résistant.

Vous devez considérer :

- *La description du général de Gaulle comme « résistant ».*
- *Les plus grandes contributions du général de Gaulle à la lutte contre l'invasisseur allemand.*

For illustrative purposes, the following questions were asked in **FR12B**

Q 1 Jusqu'à quel point peut-on décrire le général de Gaulle comme un résistant ?

Q2 Quelles ont été les plus grandes contributions du général de Gaulle à la lutte contre l’envahisseur allemand ?

Once in the examination room, the examiner will check the candidate’s name and which of the two statements – A or B – they have chosen to explore.

The examiner will read the chosen declaration, followed by the first compulsory question. The exam timing starts at this point.

Once candidates have finished the first response the examiner will, without comment, move to the second question. When the initial response to the 2 compulsory questions is complete, the examiner will spend a little more time exploring aspects of the same sub-theme before moving on to one or both, of the remaining sub-themes within the overall theme. For **FR12**, for example, that would be **le Régime de Vichy** and **La France Occupée**.

At the 7/8-minute mark, the examiner will declare that the first part of the exam has come to an end and retrieve the candidate’s card and notes.

The examiner will then announce that the exam is moving on to **Part 2 Task 1** and invite candidates to give their **IRP** presentation, making clear that they have only 2 minutes in which to complete the task and warning that they will be interrupted if they go beyond that point.

Once candidates have concluded their presentation, the examiner will initiate discussion on the bullet points provided by candidates on their **RP3** form, indicating which areas they have prepared to answer questions on.

After a further 8/9 minutes, The examiner will declare that the exam is over and invite the candidate to leave the room.

Advice to centres

Part 1 Task 1

5-minute preparation time

A quiet preparation room should be provided. Candidates should be reminded to study the bullet points on the Candidate Card very carefully. As shown in the example given above, these will provide obvious clues as to the direction the compulsory questions will take and, consequently, help candidates prepare relevant, focused answers.

Compulsory questions

Examiners must identify the candidate by name and number; confirm the stimulus card number and candidate choice. They should read the designated declaration and proceed to the first of the compulsory questions. This is not always done

Examiners must observe the instruction not to re-phrase or re-word the compulsory questions. They may repeat if requested to do so but only once, generally. They should not prompt for further comment from candidates. Material produced in this way is disregarded.

Candidates should avoid pre-prepared all-purpose answers that make only passing reference to the questions being asked, as these will inevitably fail to meet the requirement for relevance and focus.

Too many candidates do this. The result is a response that is not an answer to a precise question and, therefore, may receive only partial reward.

Further questions

Examiners should prepare questions to test candidates' knowledge and understanding of at least one other sub-theme. Failure to move on to these areas may result in candidates not being properly rewarded.

At all times, **examiners** should ensure that they do not lead **candidates** into reminiscences of personal experience or comparisons with the situation in the home country. The object of the paper is to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of socio-cultural matters in France.

Examiners should adhere to the suggested timings. Too often too much time is spent on the first section.

The IRP

Examiners should remind the candidate that the Presentation lasts for 2 minutes only. They should warn that they will halt the proceedings after this time-limit. Any material produced beyond the 2 minutes will not be taken into consideration.

Examiners should not intervene to encourage or prompt. In cases of obvious distress, a decision must be made as to whether this part of the test should be abandoned, halted and re-started once the candidate has recovered his composure, or re-scheduled for later in the day or another day.

Candidates should ensure that they meet the 3 necessary requirements, as set out above – clear identification of sources / effective summary of both / a personal reaction to the sources and their relative usefulness. It is worth re-iterating the advice that candidates should not give a personal reaction to the topic they have researched but to the usefulness of the sources they consulted that helped them form a view on the overall topic. Giving a personal reaction to the topic, as opposed to the sources, will adversely affect the final mark as only two of the three requirements will have been fulfilled.

On a point of clarification, use of non-French sources, translations or transcripts of interviews render the test void, as does the use of non-written sources such as videos or TV programmes; referring to only one source limits the total mark to 3.

The Presentation offers candidates a relatively easy way of boosting their score. Many full marks are awarded for this task. It is all the more disappointing, therefore, to see marks being lost through non-observance of the rules.

The major failings of **candidates** in this exercise are:

- not citing sources
- using only one source
- not summarising the sources effectively
- concluding with a personal opinion on the topic and not their reaction to the sources
- running out of time and not making a conclusion
- failing to complete in time

The Discussion

Although this part of the task is described as a discussion, in fact this is not quite true. It is more like an interview, where one person, the **examiner**, seeks to encourage the other, the **candidate**, to talk, whilst remaining in the background.

Advice to candidates

Candidates should be aware that this is a discussion that they should seek to dominate, by offering appropriate ideas and opinions unprompted. Providing the correct answer is only part of it. The oral examination is a test of the extent of a person's knowledge and views and the ease with which they can impart this knowledge. Holding back for fear of making a mistake is not the right tactic.

Advice to examiners

The examiner's role will be crucial. She should recognise that the main purpose is to maximise the opportunities afforded candidates to show what they know and think about aspects of their research project. Interrupting candidates before they have had time to formulate their responses adequately or expounding on their own views, does not work in the candidate's favour. To this end, examiners should prepare "follow-up" techniques, such as a simple request for more information on a precise point, or for clarification of a particular statement, or for re-phrasing of an idea on the grounds that it has not been understood, or challenging an assumption, because this requires the candidate to react spontaneously and go further in a given aspect, thus allowing them not only the opportunity to show greater knowledge and understanding but also the ability to create language spontaneously, as opposed to rehearsing pre-learnt material.

The bullet points

The danger with this task is that it becomes a "cue and response" exercise with candidates producing rehearsed material in response to expected questions. Such a lack of spontaneity will impact adversely on the marks.

Candidates should be aware that regurgitation is to be avoided. Naturally, having studied the themes, they will have learned what to say in answer to the initial question on a given topic but they must also show that they are capable of responding to further questions on other aspects of the sub-theme or on things they may have said, by adapting their resources to fit the new situation. At all times, **candidates** should endeavour to answer the question as put and not be content to produce material that is only vaguely related to it.

Candidate performance

AO4 – Knowledge and understanding of society and culture

The combination of stimulus material and the order in which they were presented, compounded by the relatively small numbers of candidates per centre meant that Themes 2 and 3 were the ones most often encountered.

Stimulus FR1

Les changements dans les structures familiales

This theme was generally well done. Question B was the more popular choice.

In the main, candidates were aware that there has been some progress made regarding equality of the sexes within the wider world and especially the world of work, with a small reduction in the wage gap and more women in executive roles. However, they were conscious that harassment was still a problem, both at work and elsewhere and that within the domestic sphere there was some way to go before domestic chores were shared equally, although they did seem to think that younger couples were moving in this direction

Most candidates were aware that although marriage rates are in decline, it is still the preferred initial mode of living together. They subscribed to the idea that most French people adhere to the traditional definition of the family even if they were not confident about its long-term future. They also knew that the divorce rate in France is rising and that the causes of this are many; greater opportunities for women; a reduced need for men through education and independent working; changing societal attitudes; loss of stigma attached to relationship failure; a fall in the influence of the Church.

They were well informed on the other forms of joint living despite some uncertainty over what PACS-ed homosexual couples are allowed to do in terms of adoption and the appeal of PACS after the Taubira law, which most of them knew about in some detail.

FR2

Education

Candidates were aware that bullying is a problem in French schools but were less sure what steps the authorities were taking to combat it.

They were clear that “drop-out” rates were a problem in France, ascribing this to many causes – COVID, long school days, exam pressure, lack of motivation stemming from a worsening employment situation, race-related issues, to name but a few.

FR3

The world of work.

Candidates did surprisingly well on proposed changes to the working week. They showed that they understood what the motivation for bringing it in in the first place was and that it had failed in its purpose to create 600,000 new jobs. They knew too that many French people were not happy at being recompensed with “rest time” for hours worked overtime. They also thought that in the modern world it was going to be necessary to work longer hours to offset the rise in the cost of living. Nevertheless, they were conscious that the “work/life” balance would be adversely affected by any changes and accepted that many others preferred the current system.

The topic of strikes brought some good answers with candidates knowing that it was a constitutional right originating in the Revolution. Few of them subscribed to the caricatural view of the French as a nation of strikers but most acknowledged that taking to the streets was a favourite tactic when they were dissatisfied with their leaders, as with the “gilets jaunes” who were often “jeunes” as well, apparently.

FR4

Music

True to tradition, very few candidates addressed remarks to countries other than France. In the main they agreed with the statement that Anglo-Saxon music was a sort of threat, in that it forced Francophone artists to record in English if they wanted to reach wider audiences and meant that these artists were under pressure to produce similar sounding music in French, which they did not, in the main, approve of. They were very well informed on the “loi Toubon” and had interesting things to say about the efficacy of this attempt to shore up French music, suggesting it was observed more in the breach than anything else. They were less sure of their music festivals and “La Fete de la Musique” was a somewhat vague concept for many of them who failed to see that it is a government backed project which is enacted, free, all over France

Very few candidates chose option B. It was designed to offer them several choices – sharing with friends, making music together, going to concerts and festivals on one level and on another, addressing social and political questions that might, in fact, tend to divide rather than unite as with “rap” music. The response was patchy but candidates were much more secure in their knowledge of what French people like to listen to, although for many, traditional music would appear to be Edith Piaf and Johnny Halliday!

FR5

Medias

Candidates showed good awareness of the benefits of social media in politics, citing President Macron’s use of it and approving of the fact that it was a good way of reaching people, especially

the young. They were not blind to the fact that it was also fraught with danger and worried about the dangers of cyber-warfare and fake news.

The threat of multi-nationals like Netflix to national television was, in the main, not really appreciated. Rather the ability to access what one wanted when and where one wanted to was seen as a distinct advantage. Only a few worried that issues of national importance might not get a hearing and saw in that a potential loss of social cohesion.

FR6

Festivals and traditions

Most candidates failed to see that this question asked for their views on the popularity of regional as opposed to national traditions and correspondingly spoke about Christmas and Bastille Day when what was required was knowledge of events such as the Celtic and Basque Festivals. This would then have led them to a discussion of an increasing sense of regional identity, common to many countries, allied to the realisation that these events are good for the local economy.

There was general agreement that traditional fêtes were less well observed not just by the young but also the wider population and this was ascribed to a decline of religion over the years and the realisation that things like “la Sainte Catherine” and “la crémaillère” were not appropriate for today’s society.

The best known fêtes were connected to music and especially La Fête de la Musique which was mentioned by all but often with little detail of what it was exactly and how it operated.

FR7

The positive impact of immigration on French society

Candidates performed very well in the main on this theme. They knew the importance of immigrants to the construction, agriculture, food and drink and health sectors but they also knew that many of the latest arrivals were highly educated and skilled in areas like computing and business. Many also pointed out the benefits that accrue to the economy from having a young working population making few if any, demands on the country’s health system whilst contributing to tax take. They knew that often the explanation for the presence of immigrants in many of the sectors of the economy itemised above, was the extent to which a mastery of the language was a requirement.

The question as to which person from an immigrant background had made the biggest contribution to French society revealed a little, somewhat patchy knowledge. It is disappointing that the excellent Omar Sy, should be cited more often than Marie Curie, Simone Weil and Christiane Taubira.

FR8

Meeting the challenges of immigration and integration in France

This is not an easy topic but candidates showed good knowledge of what the French government has tried to do. They pointed to programmes, such as language and culture classes, anti-discrimination

laws, special educational provision, improved housing stock and cultural facilities but this was sometimes patchy and they were not sure how successful they were.

Notions such as “assimilation”, “integration”, “communitarianism” “living side by side” are sophisticated and only the best show a real understanding of the various approaches. That did not stop most of them from pointing to the unrest in the “banlieues” and claiming that clearly these policies are not working.

FR9

The Far Right

Candidates were, not unsurprisingly, well informed about the political situation in France, pointing to the success of the RN at the European elections and quoting the projections of the pollsters for the imminent legislative ones, as proof that many French people support the party’s views.

There was good knowledge of the policies Marine LePen has jettisoned in an attempt to detoxify her party. There was also a strong current of scepticism as to her sincerity in this regard, which would indicate that the topic had been well aired in many centres.

Detailed knowledge of which policies in particular the French find seductive was too often reduced to stopping immigration whilst ignoring others such as reverting to a retirement age of 60, increasing the SMIC and giving preference to French nationals. But as subsequent events have shown, they were not alone in having a weak grasp of what the RN planned to do.

10

Occupied France

This theme is the one that appeals the most to candidates. It is rich in possibilities. Consequently, there were many good performances. Candidates cited a belief that the Nazis were bound to win and so resistance was pointless, better prepare a better life for yourself by being on the winning side, as reasons explaining collaboration. Antisemitism was brought forward as an explanation for the behaviour of the authorities and many French people. Fear of their own authorities was another who had, after all, agreed to implement Nazi policies and help their war effort. Resisting was seen as the most obvious way of reacting to the Occupation but many said that just doing nothing and waiting for it all to pass was a common reaction, which is almost certainly true.

The question of antisemitism was well understood as not being a uniquely French problem but a European one that, nevertheless, had infected French society and led them to accept the repressive measures and persecution carried out by the Vichy government, in the beginning.

Candidates were well informed on the various ways Vichy pursued the Jews – propaganda, exhibitions, sanctions on work opportunities and ultimately deportation. Many pointed out that this conduct and the take-over of the “zone libre” by the Nazis was what turned the population against the regime.

FR11

The Vichy government

For most candidates, knowledge of the terms obtained by Petain in the Armistice agreement was vague. The most frequent explanation was that he was “saving the furniture” but detail on what would be the fate of French colonies, the Navy and the extent of Petain’s freedom to govern was lacking.

Candidates correctly identified the treatment of the Jews, the collaboration with the Nazis through the STO, the creation of an undemocratic state and nostalgic yearning for a time long past, especially for women as reasons for the Vichy regime having such a poor reputation.

They were less clear about how initiatives taken by Vichy – economic planning, “comités d’entreprise”, ethical ordering of the professions for example, are central to life in France today.

FR12

The Resistance

Candidates showed good knowledge of the role played by women in the Resistance from the well-documented exploits of such as Lucy Albrecht and, suddenly this year, Josephine Baker, to the more mundane activities undertaken by those of a less glorious profile.

The role played by the Communist party in the Resistance was chosen by a very few candidates and the response to it would suggest that it received peripheral treatment in centres. The obedience to Russia, the non-aggression pact between Germany and Russia and the underlying desire that the outcome of the war should see the end of capitalism, were rarely mentioned. Hitler’s invasion of Russia was not often advanced as the reason for the PCF’s change of position.

Language skills

As explained above, AO3 assesses the degree to which candidates communicate effectively. Broadly speaking, there are two features that define effective communication. Primarily, clarity of thought; secondly the means available to present ideas. Expressing thoughts in a more nuanced way requires more nuanced structures and refined vocabulary. Thus, a distinction is created between basic and complex language. A list of expected Advanced level grammatical items is set out in the syllabus specifications, available on-line.

Roughly speaking, basic language is what would be expected from a good GCSE candidate and complex language is what would have been learnt in years 12 and 13.

The consequences of this are that candidates who use a limited range of structures will not score highly even if the language produced is accurate. To access the upper reaches of the mark scheme, candidates must show knowledge of complex tenses, mood, voice, relative pronouns other than

“qui” and “que” and idiom. In addition, they should show an ability to sustain their contribution to the discussion with no drop in performance levels. Most candidates fall into the category of performance expressed in the mark range 5 – 8. That means they are generally able to communicate what they want to say but the more subtle the idea, the more flawed is the performance.

Colleagues report that the disruption of the last few years is still to be seen in the overall level of accuracy.

Too many candidates have not mastered even basic notions such as gender, number, agreement, concord and conjugation.

Areas of concern

Attribution of gender is often both inaccurate and erratic, with the same noun being given different genders in the same sentence.

Agreement of noun and adjective is more successful when the qualifier is next to the noun. Intervening words appear to wipe out gender memory. A common example of this would be :-

- Les femmes ont obtenu une certaine égalité avec les hommes, mais ils veulent en avoir d'avantage

Adjectives are usually put in their right place but candidates routinely revert to mother-tongue preference.

Whilst the comparative use of adjectives is quite well understood, the superlative is rare; but this may just be the nature of the type of exchanges encountered in oral examinations where comparing multiple items is not common.

Adverbs, when they are used, often follow the English pattern of splitting subject pronoun and verb

– il souvent allait en France

With the **Article**, there are two major problems for candidates. The first is whether there should be one or not:

- France réclame argent de gouvernement
- L'année dernière je suis allée à le Paris

and the second is contraction. Examples of “à les” “de le” etc. occur all too frequently.

The use of **personal pronouns** is an area that would benefit from greater attention.

Subject pronouns, when used as part of the verb group, are nearly always correctly used. The place of the **Object personal pronoun** within the verb group, especially when a negative or an auxiliary verb are involved is a feature that defeats more than a few candidates.

Disjunctive personal pronouns are frequently replaced by subject pronouns:

Ils ont discuté de ça avec il

The relative pronouns “qui” and “que”, when used, are often interchangeable. Too often they are missing :-

Pétain pensait il faisait bien signant l'Armistice

Subordination is considered a complex language skill and partially explains why most candidates achieve a creditable mark for this AO. Most candidates will, at some point, use phrases such as “je pense que ...” or “il est vrai que ...” and this will allow them to access the “use of complex language ...” section of the mark scheme. Nevertheless, it is clear that many candidates do not appreciate that French is a “linked language” and as such, the various clauses and phrases require the use of a linking device, such as a relative pronoun, for example, and that English syntax cannot be adopted blindly. Utterances such as:

Ils veulent le gouvernement arrêter les immigrés venir en France

are common. To reach the upper ranges of the mark scheme, candidates need to show that they have a sound understanding of this principle. The « linked » nature of the composite parts of the sentence is what separates the French and English languages and achieving authentic speech requires that this feature is observed.

“**Celui** etc”, “**lequel** etc” are very rarely encountered and yet

“ la raison pour laquelle de Gaulle a quitté la France ... » is an elegant variation on “pourquoi”.

“**Dont**” and “**en**” are almost never encountered.

In general, subordination, because it is considered to be “complex language” in the specifications, is an area that would benefit from closer study, especially the finer expressions of it.

The **personal adjective** is frequently given the gender of the owner of the item rather than the correct one:

Il a pris son bicyclette pour aller voir son mère

Verb manipulation is problematic. The **infinitive** is frequently used with a personal subject pronoun, especially in the subordinate clause. **Pronoun** and **verb endings** frequently do not agree. This is particularly the case after an attempt at subordination has been made, when the subordinate verb often appears in the infinitive.

Candidates use the Present, Perfect and Imperfect tenses competently, if erratically. Uncertainty over which of the past tenses to use is common. When should it be the **Imperfect or the Perfect?** The tendency to use the **Present when talking about the past**, for instance, is widespread, again particularly where subordination is involved.

The **Future** is much rarer but, as recorded in previous reports this may be the result of the topics being discussed and the type of questions being used. Candidates generally talk about what is happening or what did happen. They may know the Future and other tenses but if they are not given the opportunity to demonstrate this knowledge, they can earn no reward.

At the risk of being repetitive, it is worth re-stating that the art of good examining is to provide opportunities for candidates to display, not just knowledge and opinion, but also the extent of their mastery of the language. Examiners should bear this in mind when deciding how they will expand discussion into areas that will allow candidates to display their linguistic range.

Other tenses appear rarely. Again, this is often the result of candidates not being invited to show what they can do in more speculative, hypothetical or philosophical areas.

Correct use of Mood is the reserve of the best candidates. Many candidates use the phrases “autant que je sache” and “je ne crois pas que ce soit ...” with aplomb but whether they are aware that they are using the subjunctive is often called into doubt by their subsequent failure to use it when required. The **Subjunctive** remains a mystery to the majority and this compromises the authenticity of their performance.

Voice continues to mystify both candidates and examiners. Fundamentally, the construction of the **Passive** is the same in both languages and so should not be a cause of error – but correct construction is rare.

Conclusions

This year, candidates again showed good knowledge and reasonable understanding of the themes. **Laïcité** remains the most problematic.

The **referential/pronominal** aspects of French are not well understood and would profit from more attention.

Subordination is a function that, because it works in such a different way from English, requires greater attention if candidates are to produce authentic French.

The role of the examiner needs reviewing. Intelligent preparation, not only of which areas to develop but how to do that whilst offering candidates opportunities to demonstrate mastery of high-level complex language structures, is perhaps the greatest contribution teachers and examiners can make to improving a candidate’s mark.

Reports such as this run the risk of appearing very negative. It is therefore worthwhile stating that the great majority of candidates are able to communicate in French on topics that are intellectually demanding in language that is mostly accurate in so far as communicating information and opinion is concerned. The number of truly outstanding performances easily outweighs that of the ones it might be kinder to forget. Colleagues are to be congratulated on their contribution to the success of their pupils, not only in terms of language but also, perhaps more importantly, in respect of acquainting them with certain socio-cultural notions and, thereby, broadening their horizons and enriching their lives.