

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel GCSE
in Arabic (5AR02/01)
Paper 2: Speaking in Arabic

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GCSE Arabic
Unit 2 Speaking in Arabic
Examiners' Report

I would like to start by saying that my team of examiners, Team Leaders and I are pleased to observe that many of the UK and international centres have improved significantly in the way they conduct the Speaking test, especially regarding choice of tasks, questioning, timing and accuracy issues. Many of the centres we have looked at this year have followed the correct procedures, test rules and guidelines when administering the test. Many of the teachers and exam conductors are using appropriate questioning methods and techniques, eliciting from the candidates the right amount of talk which is necessary for the final assessment.

Unfortunately, however, there are still many centres that are not following the basic examination guidelines and regulations, thus putting the examiners and moderators in a very difficult position. **Exam conductors and teachers should realise that inaccurate application of examination rules and regulations affect negatively the test outcomes and may cause loss of invaluable marks. This in effect means that the candidates are penalised through no fault of their own.**

Erroneous application of exam rules and regulations that may affect the outcome of the test varied considerably this year, but they could safely be classified under three headings: Content of test talk, Techniques of exam conduct and Cases of Malpractice.

1. Content of talk

- A considerable number of centres still teach their candidates a whole set of similar questions and answers which they repeat with every candidate, without change, variation or differentiation. Examination rules clearly indicate that candidates should not be given a set of questions in advance and they should certainly not rehearse any answers which would then be recorded in the examination. **Many centres are thereby violating the examination rules.**
- A considerable number of teacher examiners have used a strict order of questions (mostly adopted from the specifications booklet) without any change or variation, which though acceptable, may still fail to show the candidate's real performance and linguistics competence.
- Some teachers are happy to accept monologues or presentations throughout the tests, without any attempt at interrupting to offer follow-up questions that would show the candidate's ability to speak Arabic. Considerable marks are lost when the whole of the candidate's performance is solely monologues.
- Oral presentations, (OP), if chosen as a technique, this should be for one task not for the two tasks. When chosen, the OP should not be more than 2 minutes long and should be followed by 2 to 3 minutes

of discussion and questions relating to the theme of the presentation. **The follow-up discussion is compulsory for the completion of the task and should certainly not repeat questions that the candidates have already rehearsed and said in the oral presentation.**

- Another issue that has been fairly common in the examination series this year is the types of questions asked by some teachers. Some native speakers who were fluent Arabic speakers find some questions very hard to answer. This is because some of these questions are information seeking rather than testing the candidates' knowledge and ability to speak and interact in Arabic. It is important that teachers avoid asking questions that are knowledge-based; they should focus their questions on ways that would help to elicit enough language that would show the candidate's understanding and communication in Arabic.
- This year we have noticed an increase in the number and quality of depressing questions asked to candidates who come from war-affected areas and countries (e.g. Syria). Teachers should avoid asking questions related to war experiences and conditions which raise the level of emotional status during the exam time.
- There were many instances where the teachers did only one task of less than 5 minutes with no boundary at task differentiation. Such cases are taken as one task only and would thus be given half the total mark.
- Some teachers did not allocate enough time for the pupils to say what they wanted to say; they interrupt them with new questions before the pupils have had time to complete their points.
- Many teachers use their own dialects, rather than Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), thus causing considerable confusion for their candidates. Some paraphrased the questions in the dialects of the pupils, thus affecting the quality of spoken language produced by the candidates.
- **Many centres neglect sending the Mark Record Sheets (MRS). This is a major problem and a clear violation of guidance and exam rules. Teacher examiners should realise that MRS provide examiners/markers with details of the task, signatures of the teachers and their candidates (proof of authenticity) and other important information, for example, the centre and candidate number and details.**
- Many teachers use English to clarify the questions for the candidates when the latter seem to misunderstand the questions asked.
- Many centres did not complete the MRSs fully, leaving some important parts incomplete (e.g. the order of topics, centre details, name of the examiners and so on). Topics must be recorded clearly

on the MRSs by the teachers conducting the examinations. Teachers should **NOT** mark the test and record marks on the MRS.

2. Techniques of Exam Conduct

- Many centres sent blank disks with no recording audible on them.
- Many centres did not wrap their envelopes securely, thus some tapes/covers were damaged during posting.
- Many teachers did not favour or use the microphone close to the examinees, thus getting their own voices clearer and louder than those of their pupils. In some cases the pupil voices were hardly audible.
- Some centres did not send the Attendance Registers or have added names to the registers that are not registered by Pearson Edexcel and have not appeared in the allocations.
- **Many centres are still using the old cassette tapes and many were not rewound to the beginning. Others were badly labelled, causing a lot of confusion. Also many tapes were stopped half way through and turned over for new recordings. This is confusing to the examiners/markers who assume that any new recording should naturally start at the beginning of the tape. One particular centre missed recording one of the candidates as the cassette tape stopped whilst the test still running. To avoid these problems teachers are advised to adopt a more digital recording using Dictaphones, PCs or CD players. The majority of centres in the UK and abroad are doing that anyway.**

3. Cases of Malpractice

- There were clear cases of exam conductors trying to give help to the candidates. Background noise in some of the recordings was quite audible and showed exam teachers trying somehow to utter certain words and phrases that the candidates repeated.
- Many candidates were heard saying something erroneous, but then change to say something else after being prompted by the teachers.
- Background noise in some of the recordings and nature of answers indicated that the candidates were reading from scripts that had been pre-planned.

To ensure consistency, assurance quality and accuracy of the GCSE examinations, all teachers conducting the examination across centres, MUST follow a similar pattern of application of approach and methodology. The exam instructions on how to conduct the test are very clear and straightforward and there is no reason why centre teachers fail to get the test right. Tests that are not conducted properly may lose the candidates marks.

Suggestions and Recommendations

- An important reason for many of the problems above is the employment of incapable examiners who are not fully trained native speakers of Arabic. Many teachers lacked basic knowledge of Arabic. Some centres had candidates which were far better linguistically than their teachers.
- Teachers should be advised to put the microphone closer to the candidate and as far away from the teachers as possible.
- Teachers should conduct the test in a quiet environment, avoiding all background noise and interruptions.
- It is essential the Mark Record Sheets filled in and signed by both the teachers and candidates.

Acknowledgements

Despite the above mentioned-problems and concerns, it is important that we acknowledge centres that do the test properly. There were a great number of centres that conducted the test and recordings brilliantly, adhering accurately to the correct order of tasks, timing and instructions. Such centres had highly trained and professional teachers. These should be complimented, acknowledged and congratulated in the final report.

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