

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2014

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

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GCSE Arabic

Paper 2 Speaking in Arabic

Examiner 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 national and international centres have improved significantly in the way they conduct the Speaking test, especially regarding 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 speaking which is necessary for the final assessment.

Unfortunately, however, there are still many centres which are not following the basic examination guidelines and regulations. Centre examiners and teachers should realise that inaccurate application of examination rules and regulations affect negatively the test outcomes and may cause loss of invaluable marks that the candidates need to score Grade A and A*. 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, Techniques of exam conduct and Cases of Malpractice.

1. Content of test

- A considerable number of centres have taught their candidates a whole set of similar questions and answers which they used in the examination setting, 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 repeated and recorded in the examination. Many centres are obviously violating the examination rules.
- A considerable number of teacher examiners have used a strict order of questions (mostly adopted from the specification) without any change or variation, which though acceptable, may still not show the candidate's real performance abilities.
- 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. There needs to be interaction.
- Oral presentations, if chosen as a technique for one task only, should not take more than two minutes in length, 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 included in the presentation.**
- Another issue that has been fairly common in this examination series is the suitability of questions asked by some teachers. Some native speakers who were fluent found some questions very hard to answer. This is because some of the questions were information seeking rather than testing their

knowledge and ability to speak and interact in Arabic. It is important for teachers to avoid asking their candidates questions that are knowledge based and ensure to ask questions that simply test candidate's understanding and communication in Arabic.

- There were many instances where the teachers did only one task of less than 5 minutes when two tasks are required for this unit. Such cases are taken as one task and will only be given a maximum of half the total mark (out of 25).
- Some teachers did not allocate enough time for the pupils to say what they wanted to say; they interrupted them with new questions before the pupils had had time to complete their points.
- Many teachers use their own dialects, rather than Modern Standard Arabic, 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 teachers used English to clarify the questions for the candidates when the latter seem to misunderstand the questions asked.
- Many centres missed the Mark Record Sheets (MRS), which proved to be a major problem for marking and recognising the topics discussed during the examination time. Teacher examiners should realise that MRS provide examiners 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 centres did not complete the MRSs fully, leaving some important parts incomplete (e.g. the topics covered, the centre details, the name of the teacher etc). Topics must be recorded clearly on the MRSs by the teachers conducting the examinations.

2. Techniques of Exam Conduct:

- Many centres sent blank CDs 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 recording their own voices clearer and louder than those of their students. In some cases the student voices were hardly audible.
- Many candidates were too quiet during the recording and were not advised to speak louder.
- Some centres did not send the Attendance Registers or add the names of any candidates not included / entered late.
- **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 for the examiners who assume that any new recording should naturally start at the beginning of the tape. 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 conductors trying somehow to utter certain words and phrases that the candidates repeated.
- Many candidates were heard saying something erroneous, but then changed 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, standardisation, 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 invaluable marks.

Suggestions and Recommendations:

- An important reason for many of the problems above is the employment of examiners who are not fully trained speakers of Arabic.
- Many teachers lacked basic knowledge of Arabic. Some centres had candidates who 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. In one instance, the only audible voice that we could hear was the teacher's constant coughing and background noise of children playing outside the exam room.

- Teachers should conduct the test in a quiet environment, avoiding all background noises and interruptions.
- It is essential that the Mark Record Sheets are filled in and signed by both the teachers and candidates.

Conclusions

Despite the above mentioned problems and concerns, we have to acknowledge that 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.

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