



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
In Classical Arabic (4CA0)

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Introduction:

The theme of Classical Arabic 4CA01 paper is to provide a framework for the development of written and translation skills. This demand is further assessed with the practical application of the Arabic grammar. Schools should emphasise this by training their candidates to translate the ideas in the original text by using sound sentence structure.

Accurate punctuation is of vital importance in translation; of course, there are obvious complexities, such as the typical way English uses full-stops and capital letters to delineate the beginning and end of sentences, or the way English uses the past tense throughout a story that happened in the past, and therefore contrasts with Arabic in which there is a common tendency to slip into what looks like a present tense even where the meaning is clearly in the past.

It has been noticed that some students tend to include alternative answers in brackets or leave a blank in place of words they do not know the translation of, however this practice should be discouraged as it will lead to the loss of valuable marks.

Another important issue is the quality of handwriting. Doubtless, good penmanship should be more than just encouraged. As a Principal Examiner, I urge schools to instate a policy on legible writing. It is part of literacy so it should be enforced.

The following points were noted:

Question 1. Translation: Arabic to English.

Some candidates found the context of this fine classical Arabic text interesting and easy to follow. However, some key words/phrases posed a challenge to candidates in translation.

The following sections were ones which many candidates struggled to translate accurately, using good English to convey meanings:

In the first paragraph, the phrase about Um Jaffar who is described as 'amongst the wise, strict and eloquent' very few candidates were able to translate the three adjectives satisfactorily.

Another challenging phrase was 'I liked meeting her at my mother's so I could have more of her tales'. I was also surprised to find out that some candidates could not get the right translation for 'chess'.

The last sentence in this paragraph was rightfully translated by few candidates as most did not get the idea of 'he asked his father's

permission to be excused so he granted him this' most translated it as he apologised to his dad and he accepted his apology, which does not give the same meaning.

The second Paragraph, proved to be easier to translate. For example, the phrase 'when I was alone with Al Fadl' was not accurately translated, but quite a few got the gist of the meaning and came close to a good translation. Also, the word 'betting' was translated as challenge or by force.

The most difficult word that only four or five candidates got right was the word 'ink bottle', most came with the most bizarre translations, such as, camel, medicine, animal, or illness.

Hence, schools and centres should facilitate this by extensive practice in reading classical text and teachers should give proper guidance in the skills of written English.

Question 2. Translation: Arabic to English.

Even though the topic of this question is from a modern text, candidates found the subject of the alley and its surrounding features a bit alien and far from their own experience.

There were particular problems with the following:

In the first paragraph, the words 'alley' and 'semi isolated' were translated incorrectly by some candidates, but some used neighbourhood for alley which I accepted. Also, the phrase 'would be a historical occurrence' was not comprehensible by many and therefore was not well translated.

The phrase 'people differed in defining its exact date' was understood by most but was not translated accurately or in a sound English phrasing.

In the second paragraph, the metaphor 'braids' for women proved very challenging to most candidates, only few got it correct. The title 'Sheikh' was translated as chief, boss, president, or mayor, all of which do not suit the context of the text.

In the third paragraph, the phrase about 'the fountain, the religious school and the dome of the mosque' was a true challenge for almost all candidates. Only a handful got the three landmarks correct.

Question 3. Vocalization

Overall, there was an impressive quality of the answers this year. A number of answers were completely right and showed a good grasp of grammar and syntax; some were mainly correct, indicating some gaps in grammatical awareness, but nevertheless quite good. There were still a stubborn group of answers where it was clear that candidates had to rely on guesswork: this indicates that their understanding of Arabic morphology is shaky, and they have not managed to internalise the necessary lesson material.

Question 4. Translation: English to Arabic

The text had a mixture of straightforward sentences which were simple and easy for candidates to translate and some very challenging sentences. The more successful candidates translated the text in a very classical manner while others struggled resulting in many omissions and gaps being left without any translation. Often the lack of knowledge of good classical vocabulary and the understanding of Arabic grammar was clearly reflected in their translation. It has been noticed that some candidates wrote as they might have spoken without thinking of the written form or the syntax of the sentences they wrote. This usually indicates a lack of reading practice, without which it is much more difficult to write correctly, in any language.

These are the most challenging phrases/words:

In the first paragraph, 'when I grew up', 'hive of activity', and 'running wild'

In the second paragraph, 'I am fortunate', 'a ticket inspector', and 'customer service representative'.

In the last paragraph, 'humanity', 'big universe' and 'missing out'.

Question 5. Sentences for Translation: Arabic to English.

The language in the sentences for this question was carefully chosen. Candidates were not only expected to give an accurate translation of the sentences in Arabic but, they had to use classical language, correct spelling and vocalize words correctly. As a result, high scoring reflected candidate's ability to deliver the sentence correctly in good grammatical classical Arabic.

For a number of candidates, the sentences provided the opportunity to show their writing skills, and they were well able to achieve high marks. All too often, however, the general weakness in grammar and the use of guesswork in vocalisation was very much to the fore.

It is evident that many candidates neglected the vocalization of words due to the lack of knowledge of basic Arabic grammar, hence schools should advise candidates to practice well the most basic yet important grammatical rules to apply it in the translation of these sentences.

Style in writing these sentences were another problem which many tended to write in a way where the whole aim was to pass on the meaning of these sentences without giving much importance to the spelling, style in writing and vocalization.

These areas proved to be particularly the most areas of concern:

5a) The expression 'clock struck twice'.

The application of the collective noun grammatical rule.

5b) The application of the grammatical rule for the dual.

5c and 5d, the more able candidates produced good, accurate translation for these two sentences

5e) Most got the exclamation style correctly.

5f) proved the most challenging in translation as many were not able to translate 'the spread of modern Arabic literature' correctly.

5g) The grammar for sound feminine plural was not applied correctly by most of the candidates.

h) proved to be the easiest sentence to translate, however some struggled with the word 'flat' and gave strange answers, such as, earth, ground or surface.