

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
In Classical Arabic (4CA0)
Paper 01

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Question 1

Translation: Arabic to English.

Candidates generally still write in English following the looser Arabic style: they delineate sentences through the use of commas rather than full-stops, and either fail to use capital letters at the beginning of sentences, or use them incorrectly after commas. Their written English is usually a confusing mish-mash of ideas rather than a pleasing clarity of expression, even when the text is fully comprehended.

The top candidates were able to show understanding of the Arabic text by skilful selection of English vocabulary. They also had an awareness of English sentence structure, and an ability to manipulate it correctly to deliver the meaning in the Arabic text into clear, comprehensible English prose. They also had a reasonable mastery of the use of punctuation in English to delineate the beginnings and endings of sentences.

The majority of candidates were unable to achieve these ends as their attempts to write English were constrained by the Arabic text. Their English was not clear because they brought over Arabic sentence structures into their writing. Their writing did not reflect the understanding that an English sentence, contrary to the Arabic, does not easily contain more than one or two main clauses. They also displayed an almost total avoidance of the regular use in English of full-stops and capital letters to help readers process and assimilate the information in the text. An inability to differentiate between verb tenses was also a major problem: normal sequence of tenses in Arabic is very often incorrect in English. Again, only the most competent candidates showed awareness of this and were able to change tense appropriately in their English translation.

It is hence evident the necessity to teach English language skills adequately because answer papers are full of English translated word for word from the Arabic. Thus, for example, where the English reader desperately needs a full-stop/capital letter to assist assimilation of text, he finds instead the typical Arabic use of 'and' or 'so'. The importance of teaching candidates how to render Arabic into clear English, will assist the vast preponderance of the candidates to achieve better marks.

Where candidates come across an Arabic word whose meaning they do not know in English, they should try to find a suitable paraphrase which will also find credit with the examiners. Gaps left in sentences makes the meaning obscure and results in the loss of marks.

A good number of candidates lost marks through not showing that they understood completely who was talking or who was being spoken to at any given moment in the passage.

Some of the most common mistakes:

Sentence 5. A surprising number of candidates failed to translate both of the adjectives: (فازعاً باكياً) .

Sentence 6. Many candidates failed to notice the word 'حجري', and were again confused by unfamiliar language in the sentence.

Sentence 7. Most candidates did not know the word 'يأبى' and did not translate this sentence well as a result.

Sentence 8. The second part of this sentence was generally well translated, but candidates were unaware of other meanings for 'دهش' than 'surprised', which meant that they failed to transfer the idea of the child's state of mind at that time.

Sentences 10, 11 and 28. The use of 'إِذَا' with the meaning of 'lo and behold, suddenly' was not known by a large number of candidates, who thought that it meant 'if' even in these sentences.

Sentence 12. Half of this sentence was done well, but few candidates linked the word 'الطلب' With the idea of 'search party'; they incorrectly stuck to the idea of 'the request/the order.

Sentence 14. A surprising number of candidates confused brothers and sisters, failing to spot the feminine plural. Many of them also failed to mention both direction of travel and destination. Sentence 15. The phrase 'ساعدي الأيمن بدر' proved beyond the linguistic knowledge of many of the candidates.

Sentence 22. Most candidates seemed not to know the words 'راعنا' or 'جلبة'. Very few were able to gain any marks from the translation of this sentence.

Question 2

The above comments on Q.1 apply also to Q.2. The style of the modern text is different from that of the older classical text, but the use of punctuation in modern Arabic is not the same as that needed for modern English. Clearly, candidates should be taught how to translate an Arabic text into authentic English prose and many candidates simply place English words into the framework of Arabic sentence structure and Arabic punctuation.

The following list caused problems even for stronger candidates.

Sentence 5. A number of candidates failed to recognise the particular meaning of 'قد' when used with the present tense, and therefore failed to bring out the meaning of this sentence.

Sentence 11. The idea of 'presenting him with the man's wish to marry' was missed by most candidates.

Sentence 12. In spite of the insertion of a vowel to clarify the use of the passive in Arabic in the Verb 'قُيِّل', many candidates failed to recognise this and were thus unable to render the Arabic accurately into English.

Sentence 16. A helping vowel sign was put into the word 'القران', but the majority of candidates ignored this and translated it as if it meant 'al-Quran', the Holy Book.

Sentence 17. The translation of 'لا بأس' in this context was difficult for many candidates, and they lost marks through failing to render meaning into sound English.

Sentence 18. Most candidates failed to understand 'مرتبتي', and also very often failed to convey the idea that the salary 'was not considered nothing' at that time.

Sentence 19. The full meaning of the Arabic here was generally not brought over clearly into English by the majority of candidates: the ideas behind 'أنتلمس' and 'أمثالي من الأوساط' caused difficulty.

Sentence 20. This was quite well translated by many candidates but few of them were able to convey the meaning of 'الجاه' properly.

Sentence 25. Many candidates conveyed the idea of 'عصري' satisfactorily, but anything indicating 'على أحدث طراز' was beyond the reach of the majority.

Sentences 28 and 29. A number of candidates lost marks by failing to bring over into English some of the details present in the Arabic text.

Sentence 30. The detail of 'باتأ' refusing to marry was missed by many of the candidates.

Question 3

Candidates seem to find the new format- introduced last year- much easier so they achieved better marks than they achieved under the old format.

However, a small number of candidates still put the vowel marks on all the letters of the sentence which gives the impression that they did not read the question well or that their centres did not introduce them to the new format.

Quite a few candidates missed the shadda. Few placed more than one diacritic above or under the letters. In either case they lost the mark even when one of these was correct. Examiners are not expected to pick and choose the correct answer.

Question 4

The most competent candidates displayed a mature and pleasing style in their use of Arabic. They made few errors in their understanding of English text, and were able to choose suitably from their own wide Arabic vocabulary.

Less able candidates made varying amounts of spelling, grammar and vocabulary errors in their writing, while the weakest tended to interpret parts of the English text incorrectly and show a very poor grasp of sound Arabic rhetorical devices and vocabulary.

There was a number of spelling mistakes and some candidates struggled to translate full sentences such as 'until a light gleamed through the little cracks in the wall', so they tended to translate just part of the sentence and ignored the rest. This has evidently compromised their marks. Another shortcoming was that a good number of candidates missed to apply the agreement of dual verbs and nouns when translating sentence with such structure (and in this text there was a good number of these sentences).

These are some of the most common mistakes.

Sentence 1. Many candidates confused the meaning of the opening clause of the passage and translated 'as soon as' as though it meant 'I quickly finished my dinner' instead of 'immediately on finishing my dinner' (which may well have been finished slowly!).

Sentences 9 and 10. Some candidates translated these words as though they meant 'I was wondering how I knew who he was'. The whole point of these remarks is that the writer did NOT know who he was at this stage, and so marks were lost in these cases.

Sentences 12, 21 and 27. Many candidates failed to translate the adverbial or adjectival phrases which were part of the content of these sentences: they therefore lost marks, though a number of them might not have been aware of the significance of 'of SOME importance' in sentence 21, and others seemed not to understand 'at once' in 27.

Sentence 21. Many candidates misunderstood the word 'position' as used here, losing marks as they thought it referred to his standing rather than his job.

Sentence 23. The meaning of the word 'attache' here caused problems for many candidates as they failed to discern that this is a specific diplomatic job.

Sentences 24 and 25. Some candidates here transposed the meaning and translated that 'his excellent Italian was the reason for his stay in Rome', thereby losing marks even when their Arabic was correct.

Sentences 29 and 30. Candidates lost marks by misunderstanding the intensifier in 'for a good many years', and assuming that the writer meant that he knew Crown well. Marks were also lost through misunderstanding 'rarely', and equating 'meeting' somebody with 'seeing' them.

Question 5

Grammatical sentences for translating into Arabic.

The question is designed to be a proper test of candidates' ability to write Arabic accurately.

Candidates, who managed to translate correctly, vocalised the letter at the end of each word and wrote a soundly structured sentences, scored the highest mark.

On the whole, these were not very well done grammatically, though many students made at least a fairly good effort to render the meaning of the English sentence into Arabic.

Sentence (a). Many lost marks on poor translation of 'although', and from believing that 'could hardly walk' meant 'walked with difficulty'.

Sentence (b). Many candidates still have difficulty with the word 'headmaster', and follow the English custom in not putting 'يا' before a name in spoken text. The words 'bad' and 'good' were not always accurately translated.

Sentence (c). This was generally quite well answered, but 'cheeks' were generally expressed as a plural rather than as a dual. The spelling of 'شبيئاً' in the accusative proved difficult for a large number of candidates.

Sentence (d). The meaning of this sentence clearly required the use of 'لو' not 'إذا' as the conditional particle; many candidates missed this fact and lost marks accordingly. The usual problems with the writing of the sound plural in Arabic lost many marks, as did the use of a verb in the singular before a plural noun in the sentence. Many candidates still do not know the meaning of 'البلدية' in English.

This sentence was rather badly done in many cases.

Sentence (e). This sentence was fairly well done, but marks were lost when candidates failed to notice that 'waitresses' are female, and need feminine agreements on verbs and pronouns throughout the sentence.

Sentence (f). Marks were lost on the spelling of 'تتس' in the first sentence here. The second sentence was quite well done, but the third was not well understood by many candidates, in particular the real meaning of 'in two days' time'.

Sentence (g). Marks here were lost on the term 'secondary stage' and by a failure to translate detail such as 'straight'. There was also trouble with finding a suitable word for 'course'.

Sentence (f). This was fairly well done on the whole, though marks were lost over the meaning of 'In days gone by', and also by the mistaken assumption that the sentence referred to present or future time.

Advice and guidance for preparing students

- Candidates must improve accuracy in written English with correct and orderly sentence demarcation using full-stop and capital letter.
- They must also improve performance in English by confident use of correct sequence of tenses.
- They must learn to infer from context.
- They must cut out the many errors of spelling and grammar from their written Arabic, and extend and strengthen their knowledge and use of grammar.
- They must learn to revise and check critically their writing in Arabic

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