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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2022

Pearson Edexcel GCE
French 9FR0
Paper 3: Speaking

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This is the first report since 2019. The intervening period has obviously been a very trying time for all in teaching. Although things appear on the surface to have returned to normal, it is clear from reports submitted by colleagues that the disruption to candidates' studies has affected their learning and that sight of the objectives of the oral examination has been lost in enough centres to make this an opportune moment to revisit the principles of the test, its conduct and the implications of these on candidate outcomes.

First however, a few practical considerations. The exam period for each candidate is roughly 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 – roughly 7 minutes IRP – 2 minutes Task 2 Part 2 – roughly 9 minutes

The test is recorded. The important person in the procedure is the candidate. It is therefore preferable that the recording conveys what the candidate says and not what the examiner, the colleague in the next room or the comrades in the playground are doing.

Too many recordings are difficult to listen to because the candidate is too far from the microphone or the room is inappropriate, performing like an echo chamber and producing a "hollow" sound that distorts the candidate's response. Markers may not hear correctly what the candidate said and this may have repercussions on the mark awarded.

The order in which cards are offered to candidates is set down by Pearson and must be adhered to.

Colleagues are requested to identify the number of the card given to the candidate. It is recognised that this is not what is written on the Teacher/Examiner cover page, which asks only for the declaration A or B but colleagues point out that, without this information, they then have to look it up for themselves. This is time-consuming and unnecessary.

Although the test is described as a discussion, in fact it isn't. It is more like an interview, where one person seeks to find out things about the person in front of them, remaining in the background the while. Whilst it is perfectly understandable that colleagues should seek to create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere for their candidates, interrupting, commenting, laughing and joking, as one might in a normal conversation, are not really helpful in producing material that allows markers to assess the candidate's linguistic ability. They are a distraction and should be avoided.

All relevant material should be uploaded as soon as the examination has taken place. Colleagues have complained this year that many centres have failed to do this. This has meant that they have had to contact centres to request the missing elements and, in many cases, this has resulted in the centre being blocked for marking, creating frustration and delay. It is understood that centres were unprepared for the new procedures this year and hoped that next year the operation will be smoother.

Task 1, lasting some 7 - 8 minutes, is an examination of the candidate's knowledge and understanding of an aspect of the culture of French or Francophone society. Candidates are offered a pre-determined choice of two cards describing two themes, from which they select one. They then choose between two declarations illustrating aspects of the theme. The candidates' cards contain suggestions as to the areas candidates would be wise to pay particular attention to, as they form the basis of the two compulsory questions they will have to answer, once the test starts.

Invigilators must ensure that the running order of the card selection process is observed. Examiners should ask the questions as they are written. Any deviation from this procedure – such as re-phrasing or rewording – is misconduct and may incur penalties. Similarly, prompting or soliciting further information, suggesting topics, completing candidates' responses is not allowed and will result in the material produced as a consequence being disregarded. There were too many instances where

this occurred this year. Centres should reflect upon this when reviewing candidate outcomes.

Candidates should be aware that the substance of the compulsory questions must be addressed appropriately. Inspection of the Candidate's card will tell them what the questions will be about. They should use their 5-minute study time to prepare appropriate responses.

They should bear in mind that the first question will require an opinion on the declaration and the second some evidential material.

For example, having selected card FR12 on the theme of **L'Occupation et la Résistance** and chosen declaration B

Le général de Gaulle n'était pas un vrai résistant.

The candidate is advised to consider whether the statement is true and what de Gaulle's major contributions to the war effort were. S/he/they should prepare to address those areas in response to questions such:

Jusqu'à quel point peut-on décrire le général de Gaulle comme un résistant ?
Quelles ont été les plus grandes contributions du général de Gaulle à la lutte contre l'envahisseur allemand ?

General comments about the Resistance that do not address the point, however correct, cannot attract the full reward. This too should be borne in mind when reviewing candidates' performances.

Once the compulsory questions have been dealt with, the examiner can spend a little time asking for amplification of aspects of the candidate's responses before moving on to other sub-themes. It is not a requirement that all the sub-themes are addressed. Time is limited and examiners who break off an informed and successful discussion may actually be doing their candidates a disservice. Colleagues report that in too many centres, examiners dwelt on the initial topic too long, thus limiting the candidate's ability to demonstrate wider knowledge of the overall theme and consequently, affecting any extra credit they may acquire.

It has also been observed that, instead of being a spontaneous discussion, the second section of Task 1 often descends into a series of pre-rehearsed questions and answers where it becomes clear that examiner and candidate know in advance what, for a given sub-theme, the follow-up questions will be. This does not work to the candidate's advantage as spontaneity is a central feature of AO1.

Task 1 - Assessment of a candidate's Knowledge and Understanding of society and culture - Assessment Objective 4 (AO4 – 12 marks)

This section "assesses students' ability to communicate information about and demonstrate appreciation of different aspects of culture and society ... They are also assessed on their ability to respond analytically and critically to different aspects of the culture and society by selecting relevant material, presenting and justifying points of view, developing arguments, drawing conclusions based on understanding and evaluating issues" (Specifications p34)

It follows, therefore, that examiners who do not seek to elicit this ability by requesting opinions and requiring candidates to justify them are not enabling them to reach the upper reaches of the mark scheme which rewards those who can analyse the society and culture under study by presenting convincing arguments and conclusions based on perceptive, well-informed ideas and viewpoints.

Colleagues report that whilst, in the main, candidates can demonstrate knowledge of a society, their ability to interpret this information and form coherent opinions is less convincing.

Therefore, there are implications here for both the teaching of the subject, the preparation for the exam and the type of question. Whilst it is obviously important to establish what the candidate knows; it is more important from the point of view of the mark scheme and therefore the candidate outcome, to find out what they think about a given subject and their reasons for thinking thus. Too many "factual" questions should be avoided.

Examiners should remember to maintain the focus on French/Francophone societies. Comparisons with the UK, a favourite choice when discussing Education, for example, attract no reward and take up time that could be used more profitably.

Task 2 consisting of two parts takes up the remaining exam time.

Part 1 Responding to written language in speech - Assessment Objective (AO2 – 12 marks)

This is a 2-minute presentation of the candidate's findings on a topic of their choosing, relating to an aspect of French/Francophone civilisation. The Independent Research Project (IRP) tests the candidate's response to the sources they have used when conducting their research. It is assessed through a separate grid that is applied only once.

For this, candidates must list on their RP3 form the title, in French, of their project, the French language sources they have used and the aspects of the topic they would like to discuss further, after the Presentation. These should be listed in bullet point form and number between 6 and 10 items. They should be in English.

The Presentation lasts for 2 minutes only. Examiners must halt the proceedings at the most appropriate point 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 stopped, to be re-started once the candidate has recovered their composure and a move to Part 2 made. or abandoned This will, of course, have implications for the overall mark.

Done correctly, this segment pays handsomely. Candidates should announce their research topic and, perhaps, briefly explain why they were motivated to choose it. They should then clearly identify the two written French language sources they will be summarising, giving preferably the title, the author, the type of publication and the date. They should then summarise each source, "giving a clear outline of the author's main points and ideas" (not their own) before concluding with a personal response to these articles – and not a conclusion on the wider topic.

Candidates who do this will be rewarded with a mark in the upper reaches of the mark grid.

The major failings of candidates in this exercise are:

- not referencing the sources – partially or completely
- not summarising the sources
- 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 make a conclusion

It is worth stating that not satisfying the prescriptions of the test has very serious consequences. For instance, use of non-French sources renders the operation void, as does the use of non-written sources; referring to only one source limits the total mark to 3; concluding on the topic and not on the sources will attract no reward. Colleagues report that, in many centres, candidates appear not to have been aware of these requirements and therefore failed to perform correctly. This was, unfortunately, reflected in the final mark.

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.

Task 2 Part 2 is a wider exploration of the candidate's research. The examiner should use the bullet-points provided on the RP3 form to probe for further knowledge and deeper understanding of the topic. In many respects, remarks made concerning

the conduct of Task 1 apply here. This is not surprising as the same AO is being tested using the same mark grid. Examiners should therefore be attempting to elicit opinion and justified viewpoints as much, if not more, than facts. Candidates should prepare to respond with this outcome in mind and come to the task with substantiated arguments and opinions.

Colleagues report that, too often, this part of the test consists of the examiner moving from one bullet point to the next with the candidate providing pre-rehearsed responses that rarely contain any well-informed judgments. The element of spontaneity is all too often over-looked. This is a pity as there is yet another AO that relates directly to this skill.

Interaction (AO1 – 6 marks) assesses the degree to which the exchanges between candidate and examiner are authentic. It rewards consistent, spontaneous and sustained language input, during which candidates seek to lead and develop the conversation by offering further areas for discussion. Much has been made of the requirement to elicit opinion from the examiner or check their understanding of points being made. As a natural feature of authentic conversation, it is a laudable aim but it should not, as too often happens, become the focus of the exercise. A simple “n’est-ce pas” or “pas vrai?,” will suffice. Indeed, there is even a school of thought that says that simply by drawing the examiner down a certain path and getting her/him/them, this requirement is met.

Whilst there are candidates who are reluctant for whatever reason to participate to the fullest extent, the great majority are very happy to voice their opinions, however accurately.

The remaining **Assessment Objective AO3 – 12 marks** assesses the candidate's ability to "use a range of grammatical structures and vocabulary to produce articulate communication with a range of expression. It also assesses the candidate's ability to apply grammar and syntax accurately and accuracy of pronunciation" (Specifications p29).

Put simply, this AO assesses the degree to which lack of resources and/or misuse of those resources impedes or enables communication. It seeks not to highlight candidates' inadequacies but rather the efficiency with which they are able to communicate their thoughts despite the inevitable errors.

This is not the place for an explanation of phrases such as "complex language" or "articulate communication". These can be found on pages 29 and 30 of the Specifications and centres are urged to consult this document.

Fortunately, no instance of "no rewardable language" was recorded this session.

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. The match between the subtlety of their thoughts and the linguistic resources they have, determines where they end up on the scale. As a rule, the harder it is to express the idea, the more the performance is flawed.

It has to be said that there are more examples than one would like of candidates who, even at this stage, have not come to terms with notions such as gender, number, agreement, concord and conjugation. One cannot help but surmise that the disjointed nature of their learning over the last 3 years has had a role to play here.

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, as long as the qualifier is next to the noun. Intervening words appear to efface gender memory. 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 result of the type of exchanges that occur in situations such as an oral examination 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:

- Les maires demandent argent de le gouvernement
- L'année dernière je suis allée au le Paris

and the second is contraction. This somewhat basic error occurs frequently.

One would like to be able to report that, at this level, subject pronoun and verb ending concur in number and tense (and mood). Sadly, this is often not the case and instances where the verb is not conjugated at all, are far from rare. This is particularly the case when an attempt at subordination has been made. It would seem that the greater the distance between the components of a phrase, the greater the likelihood of an error appearing – "tous les femmes amies d'allemands a puni(es??) par la Résistance ", will serve as an example of this.

Candidates use the Present, Perfect and Imperfect tenses competently, if erratically. 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.

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 framing the questions they will use and try to offer candidates opportunities to display the range of their knowledge.

Other tenses appear rarely.

Correct use of Mood is the reserve of the best candidates. Although “je ne crois pas que ce soit ...” can appear in the seemingly most unpromising of performances, generally in response to a pre-arranged signal such as “Croyez-vous que ...”, the Subjunctive remains a mystery to the majority.

Voice continues to bedevil candidates and mystify examiners. Fundamentally, the construction of the Passive is the same in both languages and so should not be a cause of error. But, the phrase cited above stands as an example of a very common occurrence. It may well be that the form of the auxiliary in the Perfect defeats candidates, as when the auxiliary is in the Imperfect or even the Future, the error – omitting the past participle - is much less common.

Subordination is considered a complex language skill and partially explains why most candidates appear in a particular part of the mark grid. Being able to construct sentences using “Je crois que ... / Je pense que ...” which nearly all candidates can do at some point in the test, may be why so many of them achieve a respectable mark for AO3. However, phrases such as :

Ils veulent le gouvernement arrêter les immigrés venir en France
are far from rare and are testimony to a disappointing lack of understanding of the grammar of the language. To reach the upper ranges of the mark scheme, candidates need to show that they have a sound grasp of French syntax. “Ce qui/ce que; auquel etc; dont” are all features that allow candidates to add refinement, variety and interest to their responses whilst at the same time demonstrating their understanding of the language. They are, perhaps understandably, the reserve of the best.

The referential aspect of language, largely the pronouns, is another area that is not well understood. It is hardly surprising. “Elle” can appear in front of the verb and apart from it.

“Elle est intelligente. Tant mieux pour elle”. It seems to mean both “she” and “her”, so why not do the same for “il” - why can I not say “j’étais triste pour il” - especially since I can say “j’étais triste pour elle”?!

The place of the pronoun within the verb group, especially when a negative or an auxiliary verb are involved is an area that would benefit from greater attention.

This section of the report is perhaps making an argument for the study of certain grammatical aspects of the language to be more analytical, which in turn should lead to better understanding and increased use of those features that add variety and interest as well as attracting higher marks. Again, it is difficult to escape the suspicion that the last 3 years have had a bearing on this situation.

The Themes.

In the main, candidates had been well prepared. Some themes are intrinsically less productive than others but even so, candidates were able to display enough knowledge to make a credible response. As mentioned previously, they were less convincing when it came to voicing opinions. It is worth re-stating that the mark scheme rewards both aspects equally and an absence of either adversely affects the overall outcome. Equally, examiners should take note of the role they play in providing candidates with opportunities to showing they have not only learnt the facts but have analysed them and formed their own views.

FR1 showed that good awareness of the types of family found in France, the problems that might arise in the non-traditional ones and of the fact that not all French people were in agreement with the changes that had taken place over the years and their reasons for being so.

Most candidates chose declaration A.

FR2 offered the opportunity to discuss “redoublement” and most candidates took this option, showing generally good knowledge of why it was controversial, with parents and teachers, and how school pupils were affected mentally and academically by it, whilst recognising that there could be some merit in providing a second chance for some pupils.

Few candidates chose to discuss apprenticeships. This is not surprising as it is a more complex area and relatively new, so there is less information readily available and it encompasses other aspects such as the involvement of business and commerce.

FR3 sought to see whether candidates understood why anyone would make such a declaration about the French. It was the more popular of the two topics on offer. Most candidates understood that the French have a tradition of taking to the streets if they have a point to make, stretching back to the Revolution for many. In citing the revolt of the “gilets jaunes”, many made the mistake of classifying this action as a strike. The second half of this question, about the impact of strikes on politics in France was accessible to only a few, who were able to point to precise actions that had brought about political change.

The second option, on proposed changes in retirement law was more technical and as such, probably deterred many.

FR4 offered candidates the opportunity to show their knowledge of current musical trends and traditional Francophone music. Whilst the majority were familiar with the various manifestations of “rap” and its major exponents, they were less well informed about traditional forms, with many suggesting that Edith Piaf and Johnny Halliday were worth preserving whilst passing over the Celtic, Basque and Corsican heritages.

The second option was not popular. It suffered in comparison to the first one possibly, in that it was more sweeping in its demands but many of those who attempted it were well informed about Stromae and his appeal to the younger generation, on account of his own well-publicised personal problems.

FR5 asked for the candidates’ opinion on the effect of social media on the political and personal life of the Francophone country under study. Option A was more popular than B, possibly because Q2 asked for information that candidates had not researched, namely whether the authorities of that country controlled the media in any way.

Candidates had well-prepared answers to Q1 in A, which is not surprising as it is a major discussion point. The more focused aspect of Q2 proved more difficult to deal with but many had perceptive things to say about the use of platforms like Twitter by presidents and party leaders.

FR6 was well done in the main. Q1 in option A was somewhat of a gift and Q2 should have come as no surprise to those who have reflected on the changing nature of the ways in which French/Francophone societies approach festivals with religious origins. Option B required a little more imagination than A and, probably, for this reason was less popular. Q1 asked for information about the place occupied by festivals in society, how big and how widespread they were and candidates could point to a range of these. They were also able to list reasons why they remain popular, ranging from their economic impact on a town or region to their role as a meeting place promoting social solidarity and local pride.

FR7 on the positive impact of immigration on French society showed that candidates were very well aware of the contribution to the success of the national football team made by players from an immigrant background but other sporting areas, especially athletics, were ignored.

Option B may, at first glance, have discouraged candidates but Q2 provided a golden opportunity for them to set out all the ways immigrants have contributed to French life – in politics, sport, art, gastronomy to name but a few.

FR8 deals with a difficult area and requires more of candidates than others.

Understanding government policy towards immigrants is complex and many candidates showed an unsure grasp on what it is the French government is doing, or has done, to bring about greater integration of immigrants and how that comes up against deeply

held beliefs on all sides. Candidates showed knowledge of some laws, most obviously about the wearing of religious symbols, both in and out of schools but “laïcité” is imperfectly understood and leads to incorrect assertions.

Option B was chosen by very few candidates and the precise requirements of its questions was clearly a discouragement. Resentment of one section of the community towards another is a difficult area but it exists and so, is inescapable.

FR9 was well done. Clearly, the Presidential elections resulted in a greater awareness of French politics. Interestingly, most candidates doing option A believed that Marine LePen was a clever operator but not one to be trusted. They were able to point to the changes she had made to her party but did not believe she was sincere. Somewhat disappointingly, they tended to limit their answer on the RN’s political objectives to the question of immigration and national identity, passing over its position on the EU, the economy, plebiscites etc.

Option B again illustrated a heightened interest in French politics. It was less popular than A but those who tackled it showed good awareness of the French people’s frustration with traditional parties and their perceived repeated failures, the economic and employment effects of neo-liberalism and the apparent disregard by the governing class for certain sections of society.

The cards relating to the Occupation and the Resistance were also well done. Unlike some of the other themes, this one seems to spark candidates’ interest.

FR10 showed that most understood Petain’s motives for signing the Armistice but also that they were less sure about what life was like in the occupied zone than they were about life in the Free Zone. They frequently resorted to an account of how Jews were treated.

Option B showed that candidates understood there was a difference between the two zones but the same uncertainty about the Occupied Zone was apparent. The various forms of collaboration, resistance and persecution were all well-known and some even talked about le système D and the emergence of bartering, which was a pleasant surprise.

FR11 revealed that for many candidates Vichy equals Petain and his time in office. They knew what he wanted to create and mostly why. His fellow travellers remain murky characters for most candidates. The many initiatives taken by the then government that were preserved and form a fundamental part of French society are, also, largely unknown.

FR12 option A was popular. “La collaboration horizontale” is clearly a phrase that has resonated. Candidates were uniformly very generous in their explanation of the motives for this type of collaboration and appalled by the treatment meted out to the women. At the same time, they were not blind to the sentiments of those who had suffered too and yet stood firm, showing understanding of the reasons motivating their actions.

Option B produced some good responses on how far General de Gaulle could be considered a resistant, with many making the point that he did resist militarily before fleeing to England and that he was, for many, the embodiment of French resistance through his radio messages. His role as an organiser of the Resistance was also widely recognised but little attention was given to the part he played in representing France’s interests in Allied circles.