

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2011

GCSE Arabic (5AR02) Paper 1

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Speaking

The topics which the New Arabic GCSE/Speaking (5AR02 Paper 1) comprises are highly relevant and suitable to the purposes and levels of this test. They are suitable for candidates who speak Arabic as a first language and also for those who speak it as a foreign language.

Looking at the applicability side and the conduct of exams by centres and for the sake of assurance quality, consistency and accuracy of the GCSE exams and standardisation of grades and levels, all teachers should, more or less, follow a similar professional pattern or application of approach and methodology. Although the exam instructions on how to conduct the test are clear and straightforward, there are still great variations between one centre and another regarding the conduct of the exam and the elicitation of student responses. The majority of centres have highly trained and qualified speakers of Arabic to conduct the test, but there are many other centres that have used very poorly qualified people to conduct the test, whose command of the Arabic language is not up to the exam standards and/or have not read the exam instructions and rules.

Here are some of the observations examiners made whilst marking the speaking tests:

- There are many teachers who follow a strict order of questions as found in the specification without any change or variation, which though acceptable, may still not show the candidates' real performance abilities.
- Some teachers paraphrase the questions in the dialects of the pupils, thus affecting the quality of spoken language produced by the candidates.
- Many teachers use colloquial Arabic, rather than Modern Standard Arabic, when conducting the test, thus causing considerable confusion for the candidates. In certain cases the teachers actually encouraged their candidates to speak in their own dialects.
- Some teachers are happy to accept monologues or presentations throughout the tests, without any attempt at interrupting to offer variations and question/answer communication.
- Many teachers asked the candidates closed questions that would only elicit a 'yes' or a 'no' answer and they did not ask 'why?' or 'how?' questions to give the candidates the chance to expand and elaborate their answers.
- Many national and international centres gave the candidates only one task, ranging in length between 3 to 7 minutes. This puts the examiners in a difficult position, as they have to give just half the mark out of fifty for short presentations, although it is strictly not the candidates' fault or choice that they have missed half the test.
- Some centres with quite a considerable number of candidates seem to have pre-prepared a whole group with similar presentations, questions and answer formats, without variations or differentiation. One particular centre with over 80 candidates employed the same

two themes throughout the test, using the same questions, which all of the candidates seemed to have learnt by heart prior to the test.

- ***A considerable number of centres missed the Mark Record Sheets, which proved to be a major problem for marking and recognising the topics discussed during the exam time. This also means that the candidates did not sign the authentication form. This is serious, as pupils were denied the opportunity to sign a declaration sheet to authenticate their work.***
- Many centres did not complete the Mark Record Sheets fully, leaving some important parts of it unfilled (e.g. the topic order, the centre details, the name of the examiners and so on). Topics should definitely be recorded on the Mark Record Sheets by the teachers conducting the exams.
- Many teachers marked the test and recorded their marks on the Mark Record Sheets, thus misinterpreting the instructions in the Specification.
- Some centres did not send the attendance registers.
- Many centres sent blank CDs (not burnt with final recordings) and when contacted, some centres did nothing to rectify the problem.
- Some centres missed certain candidates when recording, although their MRS was provided along with their attendance registers marked present.
- Sometimes teachers did not give enough time for the pupils to say what they want to say, so they interrupt them with new questions before the candidates complete their points. Other teachers asked very difficult questions and did not follow Edexcel's recommendations and suggestions. Their questions were very political and although the candidates were clearly excellent speakers of Arabic they could not answer the given questions because of lack of knowledge of the geopolitical scene in the Arab World.
- Many centres did not wrap their envelopes securely, thus some tapes/covers were damaged or (in one instance lost) during posting.
- Many teachers did not favour or use the microphone close to the candidates, thus recording their own voices clearer and louder than those of their pupils. In some cases the candidates' voices were hardly audible.
- Many pupils were too quiet during the recording and were not advised to speak louder.
- There were some very badly recorded tapes, with both the teacher's and examinees' voices hardly audible. One centre with 84 candidates used very poor quality recording facilities. Almost all of their recordings were extremely difficult to hear.
- Many tapes were not rewound to the beginning.
- Some tapes were badly labelled, causing a lot of confusion. Also many tapes were stopped half way through and turned over and new recordings completed on them. This is confusing to the markers who assume that any new recording should naturally start at the beginning of the tape.

Suggestions and Recommendations

- There are clearly a good number of centres that had teachers who are fully qualified and experienced and were thus competent in their conduct of the test. These centres should be congratulated.
- One major reason for the problems stated above is that teacher examiners do not read the Instructions for the Conduct of the Examination on how to properly conduct speaking exams and thus they do not comply with the exam rules and regulations. Centres should instruct their teachers to conduct the test in the best possible way, making sure that they are complying with the Board's rules and instructions
- Many teachers lacked basic knowledge of Arabic. Some centres had candidates who were far better in Arabic speaking than their teachers.
- Teachers should be advised to put the microphone closer to the candidate.
- Mark Record Sheets must be completed and signed by both the teachers and candidates.
- Many of the centres who missed sending the Mark Record Sheets when telephoned did not even know about these sheets and asked for a copy to be faxed to them. This clearly shows that such centres did not read through their instructions well.

Grade Boundaries

The modern foreign languages specifications share a common design, but the assessments in different languages are not identical. Grade boundaries at unit level reflect these differences in assessments, ensuring that candidate outcomes across these specifications are comparable at specification level.

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link: <http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

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