

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2013

GCSE Arabic (5AR02)
Paper 1 Speaking in Arabic

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Publications Code UG035424

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GCSE Arabic
Unit 2 Speaking in Arabic
Examiner Report

The topics which the Arabic GCSE/Speaking comprises are highly relevant and suitable to the purposes and levels of this test. The assessment covers the criteria of Communication and Content, Range of Language and Accuracy.

The team of examiners 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 entered for this unit have adhered to the requirements and guidelines when administering the test. Many of the teachers and exam conductors of these centres are using appropriate questioning methods and techniques, eliciting from the students the right amount of conversation which is necessary for the final assessment.

Unfortunately, however, there are still many centres not following the basic examination guidelines and regulations, thus disadvantaging their students. 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 students need to secure the higher grades. This in effect means that the students 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 the test, techniques of exam conduct and cases of Malpractice.

1. Content

- A considerable number of centres have taught their students 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 students should not be given a set of questions in advance and they should certainly not rehearse any answers which would then be 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 without any change or variation, which though acceptable, may still not show the student's real performance abilities.

- Some teachers paraphrase the questions in the dialects of the pupils, thus affecting the quality of spoken language produced by the students.
- Many teachers use their own dialects, rather than Modern Standard Arabic, thus causing considerable confusion for their students.
- Many teachers used English to clarify the questions for the students when the student seemed to misunderstand the questions asked.
- 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 student's ability to speak Arabic. Considerable marks are lost when the whole of the student's performance is solely monologues.
- Oral presentations, if chosen as a technique for one or both tasks, should not last more than two minutes. They must then be 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.
- There were many instances where the teachers did only one task of less than 5 minutes with no boundary at task differentiation. Such cases are taken as one task and will only be given 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 students have had time to complete their points.
- 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/markers with details of the task, signatures of the teachers and their students (proof of authenticity) and other important information, for example, the centre and student number and details.
- Many centres did not complete the MRSs fully, leaving some important parts incomplete (e.g. the topics in order, the centre details, the name of the teacher examiners and so on.). Topics must be recorded clearly on the MRSs by the teachers conducting the examinations.
- Many teachers marked the test and recorded their marks on the MRSs, thus misinterpreting the instructions in the Specification and guidelines.

2. Techniques of Exam Conduct

- Many centres sent blank disks with no recording audible on them.
- Many centres did not wrap their envelopes securely, thus some tapes/covers were damaged in transit.
- 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's voice was hardly audible.
- Many students were too quiet during the recording and were not advised to speak more loudly.
- Many centres are still using 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 to 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 now anyway.
- Some centres did not send the Attendance Registers or added names to different, non Edexcel, registers. All candidates need to be entered in good time for the exam and the Edexcel register must be used.

3. Cases of Malpractice

- There were clear cases of exam conductors trying to give help to the students. Background noise in some of the recordings was quite audible and showed exam conductors trying somehow to utter certain words and phrases that the students repeated.
- Many students were heard saying something erroneous, but then change to say something else after being prompted by the teachers.
- Background noise in some of the recordings and nature of answers indicated that the students 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. Tests that are not conducted properly may lose the students valuable marks.

Suggestions and Recommendations

- One major reason for the problems above is lack of training for teachers and centre examiners/conductors of tests.
- Another important reason for many of the problems above is the employment of examiners who are not fully trained native speakers of Arabic.
- Many teachers lacked basic knowledge of Arabic. Some centres had students who were far better linguistically than their teachers.
- Teachers should be advised to put the microphone closer to the student and as far away from the teachers as possible. In one instance, the only audible voice that we could hear was the teacher's and background noise of 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 completed and signed by both the teachers and students.

Conclusion

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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