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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel GCSE
In Arabic (1AA0) Paper 2H: Speaking

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Overview

Speaking is a well-established oral assessment component of GCSE specification. The assessment of speaking component requires the candidate to demonstrate that s/he can communicate and interact effectively in speech in ARABIC.

Even though this was the first time the speaking unit has been assessed since the COVID pandemic [accounting for the interruption to learning] the examination team was pleased to report that there were some very good performances and that most candidates were well prepared at both Foundation and Higher tiers.

This report deals with the Higher paper of the Speaking Unit 1AA02H.

Most centres, as always, have undertaken the task of preparing, examining, assessing and recording their candidates' oral performance very professionally. This certainly has made the examination team's job easier. However, few centres have had problems this year where the teacher examiners were not well prepared and up to date. They didn't follow the specification requirements, hence caused deduction of marks for even very successful candidates. When conducting the role play (task 1) and picture-based task (task 2), the examiner should ask all the predetermined questions exactly as on the cards. Unfortunately, this year some teacher examiners did not follow this requirement and instead added their own questions or omitted some of the set questions. Teacher examiners need to bear in mind that the set questions and comments must be asked as they are presented and in the given sequence only. There must be no supplementary questions or rephrasing. Any rephrasing of the questions, unfortunately, results in candidates receiving no marks. The statements/questions may be repeated but no more than twice.

The speaking examination for the Higher (and for the Foundation) tier consists of three parts: a role play with 5 prompts, a picture-based task with five prompts and a conversation about two different topic areas. There are 10 role play cards and 10 picture-based cards. There is also a sequencing grid that centres are asked to follow when organising which candidate receives which role play, which picture-based card and the theme for the second conversation. Following the sequencing grid is very important, as it ensures that the candidate is tested in four out of five themes of the specification and it avoids duplication. The candidates have 12 minutes' preparation time to read through the role play and the picture-based card.

TASK 1: THE ROLE PLAY

The role play is marked for Communication only, unlike the Picture based Task and the Conversation. Short, relevant answers were all that were necessary to access the full marks. A number of candidates clearly thought they would do better to give unnecessarily developed responses and, at times, the teachers encouraged this by treating the role play as an extended conversation. Such practice is a waste of time and effort as there are no extra marks for long, developed conversations. Answers should be brief and to the point. Candidates sometimes lost marks by careless mistakes that created ambiguity. Occasionally, candidates ignored the question mark in front of the bullet point and made a statement rather than asking a question, thereby forfeiting the marks.

Teachers generally conducted the examinations professionally, although some deprived their candidates of the marks by straying from the scripted questions, paraphrasing or adding extra information. It is important to understand that any unscripted interjection from the teacher that could give an advantage to the candidate immediately invalidates any response from the candidate.

The biggest challenge for candidates in this section of the test was dealing with interrogatives. If their understanding of these was poor, candidates struggled to formulate a question where required. Some candidates did not pay sufficient attention to the context laid out in both English and Arabic on their role-play card and this would account for some inaccurate or irrelevant responses. In addition, some candidates missed certain details in the prompts and then used information they knew on a topic

which did not fit the scenario. For example, some candidates gave an opinion when this was not part of the task on the card. In the question task, less successful candidates sometimes asked a question which was totally unrelated to the prompt or simply read the prompt aloud which could not be credited. Despite that fact, however, this year teacher examiners were allowed to say هل عندك سؤال which prompted the candidates to add more relevant answers.

A few teachers failed to read out the introduction as scripted, an omission that could affect the candidate's performance. More serious was the occasional omission of one of the bullet-point questions and this clearly confused the candidates and frequently made them lose marks.

Finally, it is worth remembering the Marking Principles agreed across all modern languages:

- Where a candidate has used the wrong register, this is ignored unless it impedes communication. However, if the teacher strays from the script and changes the register of the question this gives the candidate an unfair advantage and the candidate's response is deemed to be invalid.
- If a teacher changes a question or inserts a supplementary question, there can be no credit for a response made by the candidate.
- Where a candidate has offered an incorrect response to a question, the teacher may not repeat the question. If s/he does so and the candidate then gives a correct response, this is ignored.
- Teachers may repeat each question twice but may not re-phrase any of the questions.

TASK 2: PICTURE-BASED CARDS

Teacher-examiners are reminded that responses to the first question must be rooted in the picture presented in the cards. On occasion, candidates mentioned items which were not in the picture and elaborated with detail which was clearly unrelated to the visual they had. These utterances could not be credited. Teacher-examiners are advised to read carefully the guidance in the mark scheme on paraphrasing questions. Some did this well whereas others, in their quest to assist candidates to respond to a question, did not convey the meaning of the original question; some have added to the questions, thus giving additional assistance, often via interpretation or explanation of the question. This often had the effect of disadvantaging the candidate response as key vocabulary had been provided by the teacher-examiner.

Most candidates did well and had prepared carefully and thoroughly for the Picture-based Task questions during the 12-minute period allocated for preparation time. Unlike the Role Play, there were marks available for extended answers in Communication and Content as well as marks for the Knowledge and Accuracy of language. Candidates were expected not only to develop their responses but also to express opinions and justify them and to narrate and describe events. Two of the bullet points required the use of the past and future tenses or time frames and at Higher Level, candidates had to contend with an unexpected question that prompted an opinion from the candidate on an aspect of the topic. As with the Role Plays, teachers must keep to the script without changing or paraphrasing any of the questions and without adding any supplementary, unscripted questions. If they do, then again, they will deprive their candidates of marks and any extraneous questions together with the responses are ignored. For the first question – Describe the picture – the candidates were well rehearsed into uttering useful expressions such as 'في الصورة أرى' 'في يمين' 'في يسار الصورة أرى' and 'الصورة أرى' which helped them to develop and extend their responses. The best candidates went methodically through the picture with

descriptions of the people, their physical appearance, clothes, colours and paying attention to the background setting. A number of candidates often gave developed answers to the picture description in bullet point 1 but thereafter gave much shorter, undeveloped responses to subsequent questions. Less successful candidates should be encouraged to describe the picture in more detail; often the description was very short and minimal. It is important to make use of the scripted follow-up questions - أي شيء آخر؟ or لماذا - to encourage candidates to extend their responses and aim for higher marks. Conversely, asking for أي شيء آخر؟ when a candidate has already given a very full and detailed response is counter-productive. A number of candidates found it difficult to differentiate between tenses in answering questions relating to the past or the future.

Finally, it is worth remembering the Marking Principles agreed across all the modern languages:

- Candidates must make reference to the visual image in response to the first bullet point question.
- Where a teacher changes a question or inserts a supplementary question which is not scripted, there can be no credit for a response made by the candidate.
- Teachers may repeat each question twice but may not rephrase any of the questions.
- If the teacher misses out a question or the question is not answered, the examiner will drop one band in the assessment grid for Communication and Content only.

TASK 3: GENERAL CONVERSATION

In general, the conversations were well conducted and the skilful and appropriate questioning from the teacher-examiner afforded candidates the opportunities to fulfil their potential in line with the criteria enabling candidates to achieve their best. Please note that a presentation is not an acceptable format for this part of the test. The emphasis is on dialogue, not monologue. In the case of some candidates, there was an imbalance between their exploration of their nominated theme and that of the second theme in terms of quality of communication.

Centres should be aware of the timings given within the specification. The Higher tier conversation timing should last between 5 and 6 minutes. It would appear that some centres were of the mistaken opinion that the conversation should be elongated to make up the total time of the whole examination, should the role-play and picture-based task take less time than suggested in the specification. This is not the case. Examiners stop marking at the end of the candidate's response after 4.5 and 6 minutes of the Higher conversations. Any material beyond that was not considered for assessment.

Centres are reminded that in the conversation task, there are two themes tested, the first chosen by the candidate and the second by Pearson according to the sequencing grid. Candidates may give a presentation of up to one minute on their chosen theme and each theme should be of roughly equal length. Examiners reported that in a large number of centres there was a far greater proportion of time spent on the first chosen theme and insufficient time spent on the Pearson-chosen theme. This may affect marks awarded as the conversation is marked globally and examiners take into consideration performances across both themes. The presentation allows candidates to be confident with presenting some information and the follow-up discussion then allows them to explore this with the teacher-examiner in more detail before moving to a second theme. It is therefore crucial to ensure that both themes are well represented and accomplished. In more than a few centres a carefully learnt topic within a theme was used for the presentation, but when it came to delivering answers in the rest of the conversation, many of the answers were not always understandable due to the errors

made. Where this was successful, centres used the presentation as a starting point, and the remaining time to follow-up on ideas given by the candidate, to probe further about the subject, and allow the candidate to take part in a spontaneous exchange. The task was often less successful where the presentation was followed by a sequence of well-rehearsed questions and answers. This did not allow candidates to access the higher mark bands as there is a need for spontaneity, interaction and an ability to deal with unpredictable questions within both themes. In these cases, teacher-examiners did not take the opportunities offered by the candidate to explore in more detail what the candidate had said. In some cases, teacher-examiners had ignored what the candidate had said in the presentation and asked a question that had already been referred to and consequently led to confusion. Best practice is to respond to the answers of the candidates rather than having a pre-set list of questions which do not allow candidates the chance to take part in a truly spontaneous interaction, thus preventing them accessing the higher mark bands for Interaction and Spontaneity. Where candidates were successful, teacher examiners asked questions appropriate to the level of the candidate being examined, challenging more successful candidates by asking for further explanation of a points made and tailoring their questions to the responses of candidates thus promoting more spontaneous conversations. In order for candidates to reach the higher mark bands they must be also be given the opportunities to interact and to deal with unpredictable elements (questions they had not already planned to answer). Less successful candidates should have the opportunity to respond to more modest questions using language which they are able to manipulate rather than attempt questions that they do not understand or have the capacity to answer. Less successful candidates were asked some very difficult questions, often in a range of tenses, where a simpler line of questioning would have instead enabled them to access higher marks for Communication and Content. Although many candidates performed well here and were a pleasure to listen to, in a minority of cases candidates, who had prepared their presentation thoroughly and were able to perform well in this part, had difficulty with the more interactive part of the conversation and were unable to answer many of the follow-up questions. There were occasions where teacher-examiners asked too many closed questions. Where a candidate was capable and clearly able to produce extended answers, this was extremely disappointing as the candidate, often opted for a yes/no response rather than produce responses that would allow them to reach their full potential. Similarly, on occasions candidates were not given enough thinking time before teacher -examiners rephrased questions, meaning that candidates were then judged to be reliant on teacher-examiner prompting. It should be noted that within the mark schemes there is a need for candidates to be able to produce developed responses and extended sequences of speech to reach the higher mark bands for Communication and Content. Within these there should be evidence of using the language creatively to express thoughts, ideas and opinions and these appropriately justified with a range of vocabulary. More successful candidates at each tier need to have opportunities to express a range of ideas and points of view and to demonstrate a range of more complex structures and vocabulary to reach the higher mark bands for Linguistic Knowledge and Accuracy. These are in the Higher tier grammar and structures and vocabulary sections in Appendices 2 and 3 of the specification.

There were a number of pleasing performances where candidates attempted to use more complex language and a range of tenses to offer information in response to skilful questioning by the teacher-examiner. However, there were also opportunities missed where the pre-set list of questions did not allow the candidate to expand upon the initial question to show what the candidates are capable of. Some teacher-examiners asked repetitive questions such as: ماذا تفعل هذا الأسبوع؟

ماذا فعلت الأسبوع الماضي؟ ماذا ستفعل الأسبوع المقبل؟ This limits the outcomes for candidates.

Again, it is worth remembering the Marking Principles that have been agreed across all modern languages:

- Higher Conversations should last between 5 and 6 minutes.
- Timings begin with the candidate's first utterance.
- Conversations that are too short are likely to be self-penalising.
- Conversations that are too long: once the 6 minutes have passed, examiners stop listening and assessing at the end of the candidate's response to the current question.
- An equal amount of time must be allocated to each Conversation.
- Where the first Conversation is a monologue and has no interaction, candidates will be limited to a maximum score of 6 marks for Interaction and Spontaneity. The marks for Communication and Content and Linguistic Knowledge and Accuracy, however, are unaffected.

The most popular choices of Topics for the first Conversation were Identity and culture, Holidays and School life and there was a significant number of prepared conversations on the Environment which allowed candidates to demonstrate their competence in specialised vocabulary. Again, however, the second, unprepared conversation often adjusted the balance when marks were awarded globally.

ADMINISTRATION;

This year Pearson has developed a new online way for centres to submit their candidate speaking recordings. The new system is called the digital Learner Work Transfer (LWT) portal. Most Centres followed the instructions to the letter, ensuring that the Register and word version of the CS2s Form were uploaded with the samples. However, some Centres had to be contacted either to submit the missing CS2 form or to re-submit the form with the signatures of the teacher and the candidate added. Some Centres sent the old style CS2 form which made it difficult for examiners to enter the marks. It is essential that Centres use the correct up-to-date CS2 forms and avoid using the PDF Form. Most recordings this year were generally clear and free from background noise – shouting in the corridor or bells ringing – although a few Centres submitted recordings that were very difficult to hear. It is very useful if teachers can announce the Role Play card number and the Picture Card number at the start of the tasks, as well as the Theme for each of the Conversations at the beginning of each one.

There is also a sequencing grid that centres are asked to follow when deciding which candidate receives which role play, which picture-based card and the theme for the second conversation. Following the sequencing grid is very important, as it ensures that the candidate is tested in four out of five themes of the specification and it avoids duplication. Most centres applied the sequence correctly although some made mistakes and included a note of apology or an explanation.