

# Examiners' Report Summer 2007

GCE

GCE O Level Arabic (7603)

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## O Level Arabic 7603

### Examiners' Report

#### (a) Question One

Although the majority of candidates succeeded in decoding the Arabic text with some degree of accuracy, the last sentence proved challenging for most, and many failed to convey the concept of choosing a first rate candidate for the position of judge over an inferior candidate. The key area that distinguished A grade candidates from those who obtained lower grades was the level of detail in translation. It is not sufficient to paraphrase the general gist of the text. To obtain a higher grade, students need to try to convey the meaning of the entire passage in a precise manner, without omissions. For example, many students omitted to translate <*wakaana yawma'idhin 'indahu fi dimashqa*> ('he happened to be with him that day in Damascus') in its entirety, and would either miss out <*yawma'idhin*> or <'indahu> in their translation.

Lack of attention to detail also caused many students to misread the word <'ilmihī> ('his knowledge') in the seventh sentence as <'amalihī> ('his work'), and a significant number wrote 'Umar ibn al-Khattab instead of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz in the opening sentence. Perhaps surprisingly, some students struggled to translate the titles <*amir al-mu'mineen*> and <*waalee*> and many failed to recognise the place name Basra, or did not know that <*Dimashq*> should be rendered into English as Damascus.

It was pleasing to note that a small number of candidates strove to convey a formal, classical tone in their translation, using such phrases as 'Your wish is my command,' or 'I hear and obey, O Commander of the Faithful' for <*sam'an wa-taa'atan yaa ameera-l-mu'mineen*>; and 'May Allah prolong/extend his life' for <*ataala Allaahu baqaa'ahu*>. The development of such a formal style that conveys the classical tone of the passage is to be strongly encouraged.

#### (b) Question Two

Question Two was, perhaps, the most accessible of the two passages to translate, although it was longer and more detailed. The last three sentences proved to be the most challenging area, particularly in relation to the level of detail required to pick up full marks.

Words or expressions in the passage that caused particular problems included the following:

<*farraash*> (attendant, caretaker or janitor - often translated as 'butterfly'!)

<*la-ankara*> (he would have denied)

<*yastabti'u*> (he found [his colleagues/classmates] to be slow to arrive)

<*faqallamaa*> (rarely - often misread as <*fakullamaa*> (whenever))

<*laa maaddiyyah*> (not physical)

<*ad-daa'ibiyy ad-dajeej*> (prattling, talkative, noisy/boisterous, rowdy etc.)

Unfortunately, some students are still using English slang in their translation work including expressions such as 'guys', 'okay', 'sure thing', 'cooled down', 'freaked out' etc. and many have not yet learned to distinguish between formal and informal English. There were also many instances of weaknesses in English grammar, in particular the failure to make pronouns and articles agree with the nouns they represent in terms of number (e.g. 'the birds and its movements between the branches'; 'he got a different eyes'). The other main area of grammar that could be improved upon is in the use of verb tenses. Many students switch between past and present tense verbs in an inappropriate manner (e.g. 'All this he's seeing today, heard and took his attention'; 'Mohsen was walking to and fro all over the place ... he runs jumping to the big stairs' etc.).

As with last year's paper, I must reiterate that students should be discouraged from drafting their work in rough and then copying it out as this is time consuming and the student may fail to complete the examination paper owing to the time lost in doing this.

#### (c) Question Three

The passage was selected to test the candidates' knowledge of various areas of Arabic grammar, in particular jussive verbs, the accusative case, the genitive of possession and the genitive following a preposition, as well as the correct pointing of diptotes in the genitive mood. Many candidates performed better at this task than in previous years. However, a substantial minority are still failing to write each vowel mark and orthographic sign as required. Surprisingly, question three revealed a chronic weakness in many students' understanding of the rules governing the genitive in general, as well as the agreement of adjectives in number and gender.

#### (d) Question Four

A substantial number of candidates succeeded in decoding the passage accurately and rendering it into fluent Arabic. However, certain areas of vocabulary and expressions proved particularly challenging and were poorly translated, even by some of the most able candidates. Examples are as follows:

- 'roared Dr. Batch'
- 'smoothed his hands...'
- 'a dozen'
- 'he proceeded to make an example of them' 'he enjoyed making an example of his pupils'
- 'lame excuses'
- 'conducting one of his usual exchanges'
- 'he began to walk up and down'

In the opening of the passage, many students failed to employ the dual form where Dr. Batch is speaking to the twins and therefore lost some marks.

The expression 'fifty-one young mouths' <*jaa'ar-raddul-mu'taadu min waahidin wakhmaseena faman sagheeran*> proved problematic for most and there seemed to be a general lack of understanding of the rules governing Arabic numbers. Here, 'mouths' should have been rendered in the singular accusative, and 'one' should have been masculine, in agreement with *fam* (mouth).

Many candidates failed to convey the correct concept of the word 'last' in the expression 'ends up last', tending to use <fin-nihaayah> rather than something along the lines of <fi mu'akhkharatil-fasli and fi'l-mu'akhkharati akkada Duktur Batch>.

(e) Question Five

Most candidates made a fair attempt at all the sentences, but sentence (c) challenged even the most able students owing to the idiom 'I did not take to Faisal', as well as the complexities of the sentence structure. Many showed evidence of understanding the English, but struggled to encode it into something approaching intelligible Arabic. Sentence (h) also stretched a substantial number of students.

In sentence (a), many students did not use the feminine plural attached pronoun at the end of <uhanni'ukunna> and <imtihaanaatikunna>, and did not use the feminine plural verb form in <hasaltunna 'alayhaa> or <haqqaqatunnahaa> in the same sentence.

Sentence (d) tended to be encoded correctly, but again lack of knowledge of the correct grammar governing the use of compound numbers - in this case, the number thirteen - let many students down.

**Recommendations for centres:**

**Candidates appear to need further guidance on:**

- Recognising Arabic titles and place names and learning their English equivalents.
- Developing a more formal English style and avoiding slang when translating into English.
- Paying closer attention to conveying the meaning of each word in the passage when translating into English and avoiding over-generalisation.
- Ensuring that nouns agree with pronouns and articles in English, and using verb tenses consistently.
- Using cardinal numbers and understanding the grammatical rules governing them in Arabic.
- Using the accusative and genitive cases appropriately in Arabic, including idafa and the genitive of possession, as well as diptotes.
- Rendering attached and detached pronouns into Arabic correctly, paying close attention to number and gender.
- Developing accuracy in Arabic spelling and understanding the rules governing the positioning of hamza (*qawaa'idur-rasmil-hamza*).

## Statistics

7603/01

Grade	A	B	C	D	E
Lowest mark for award of grade	70	57	45	40	26





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