Evaluating Arabic Speaking Proficiency:

A New FBI Protocol

Maria M. Brau, Ph.D., Chief, Language Testing and Assessment Unit

Rachel Brooks, Manager, Speaking Assessment and Testing Standards Program

Stephanie Stauffer, Applied Linguist, Speaking Assessment and Testing Standards Program

Eleonore Saleh, Language Analyst, Speaking Proficiency Tester, Arabic

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Introduction

- Context/Issues
- Examinees: mostly Native and Heritage Speakers
- Speaking Proficiency Test (SPT) initially in MSA only
- 2008: Dialect SPT made available for Special Agent applicants
- 2010: MSA SPT and Dialect SPT administered separately to linguist applicants
- Decision: combine MSA and dialect in one test
- Decision: SPT will yield one score (not two)
- Develop new protocol: Eleonore Saleh's proposal

Arabic Language
MSA or colloquial?

MSA (Fusha)

- based on Classical Arabic of the Qur'an and early Islamic literature
- the standard and literary written Arabic used in formal / official speeches across the Middle East and North Africa
- books, newspaper, magazines, official documents are written in MSA
- taught in schools at all ages in the Middle East
- like "Shakespearean" English or Latin

Colloquial Arabic ('Amiyyah)

- rooted in the Classical Arabic with national or regional variants
- the daily spoken language with wide national or regional varieties e.g. Egyptian, Levantine, Gulf, Northwest Africa, Sudanese
- typically spoken not written
- does not require formal education

Challenges

MSA SPT

- Interactive situation: unnatural - artificial
- Difficult for natives
- Use of dialect in MSA Test

Dialect SPT

- Non-interactive situation (Formal speech): unnatural - artificial
- Difficult for non-natives
- Use of MSA in dialect test

- **Egyptian Dialect Test**
- **Question:**
  - What are the challenges you face as an Egyptian mother raising your children in the US?
- **Topic:** Raising children
- **Task:** Complex description
- **Level:** 3
- **Elicitation:** Egyptian dialect

Examinee Response

- First, my situation is somewhat different. I am an Egyptian mom; however, my husband is not. My husband was born-raised here. He is originally from Colombia, South Africa, South America, *I'm sorry*. The challenges raising children here are more difficult a little bit … because there is an Egyptian mother, a foreign father raising next generation. We want also to raise them with principles that I was raised with as well. However, thank God, we try as much as we can to … also my husband and I share common principles. Therefore, the challenges we are facing here - ah - are moral challenges, and social challenges. Ah. We were raised with principles of respect for elderly, ah- the young people respect the elderly. Ah, these things. There are some morals and daily standard of conducts that we miss here, kind of, in this society. However, I try to instill it in my kids while still young. I try also - ah. There are also social challenges, as the principles we were raised with- ah-ah, like during the friendship phase, and boundaries of friendship and all these things, ah. They didn't reach this phase yet, so the challenges are not big yet because they are still in elementary school but I try as much as I can, to instill these principles from a younger age, so these are not bigger issues when they grow up.

Arabic Tester Workshop

- 13 Arabic Testers (Dialect/MSA):
  - Egyptian, Jordanian, Iraqi, Lebanese, Moroccan, Palestinian, Syrian, Yemeni

- Agenda
  - Discuss the nature of Arabic
  - Decide which tester combination to use
  - Decide how to transition between the Arabic variants
  - Decide how many ratings to assign
  - Conduct numerous trials

Revise Protocol → Administer Test → Rate Test → Discuss
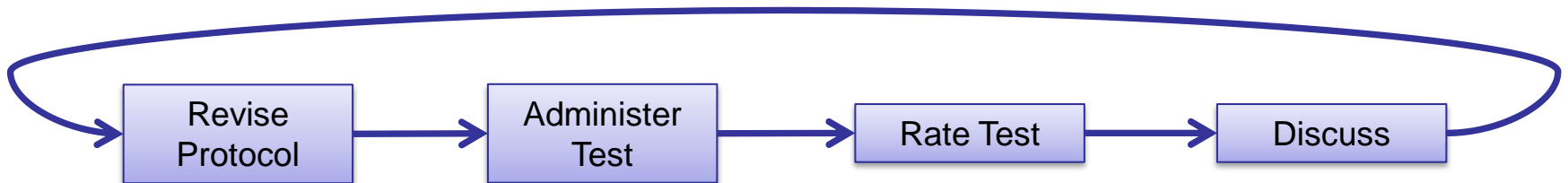
Trial Test 1: Level 3

Elicitation Language	Task/ Level	Topic	Response Language	Response
Dialect	Introduction/1-3	Self	Dialect	2-3
Dialect	Concrete Comparison/2	Education	Dialect	2-3
Dialect	Interactive Situation/2	Travel	Dialect	2-3
Colloquial/MSA Mix	Supported Opinion/3	Immigration	Dialect/ Colloquial/MSA Mix	3
Colloquial/MSA Mix	Abstract Explanation/3	Proverb	Colloquial/MSA Mix	3
MSA	Supported Opinion/3	Crime	Colloquial/MSA Mix	3
MSA	Abstract Comparison/3	Law	Colloquial/MSA Mix	3
MSA	Advise/4	Business	Colloquial/MSA Mix	3
MSA	Non-interactive Situation/4	Policy	Colloquial/MSA Mix	3

Trial Test 2: Level 2

| Elicitation Language	Task/ Level	Topic	Response Language	Response
Dialect	Introduction/1-3	Self	Dialect	2
Dialect	Concrete Comparison/2	Current Event	Dialect	2
Dialect	Interactive Situation/2	Shopping	Dialect	2
Colloquial/MSA Mix	Supported Opinion/3	Environment	Dialect	2
Colloquial/MSA Mix	Hypothesis/3	Weather	Dialect	2
Colloquial/MSA Mix	Concrete Description/2	Travel	Dialect	2
Colloquial/MSA Mix	Supported Opinion/3	Politics	Dialect/ Colloquial/MSA Mix	2
MSA	Abstract Explanation/3	Science	Dialect/ Colloquial/MSA Mix	2
MSA	Non-interactive Situation/3	Education	Dialect/ Colloquial/MSA Mix	2 - 3

Trial Test 3: Level 3+

Elicitation Language	Task/ Level	Topic	Response Language	Response
Dialect	Introduction/1-3	Self	Dialect/ Colloquial/MSA Mix	3
Dialect	Abstract Comparison/3	Law	Colloquial/MSA Mix	3
Dialect	Interactive Situation/3	Neighbor	Dialect	3
Colloquial/MSA Mix	Supported Opinion/3	Politics	Colloquial/MSA Mix	3
Colloquial/MSA Mix	Abstract Explanation/3	Culture	Colloquial/MSA Mix	3
MSA	Supported Opinion/3	Music	MSA	3
MSA	Advise/4	Immigration	MSA	3
MSA	Hypothesis/3	Business	MSA	3
MSA	Non-interactive Situation/4	Policy	MSA	4

Modern Standard Arabic
Levels 3 - 5

Colloquial Mix
Levels 2 – 3+

Dialect
Levels 0+ - 3

5

4

3

2

1

0
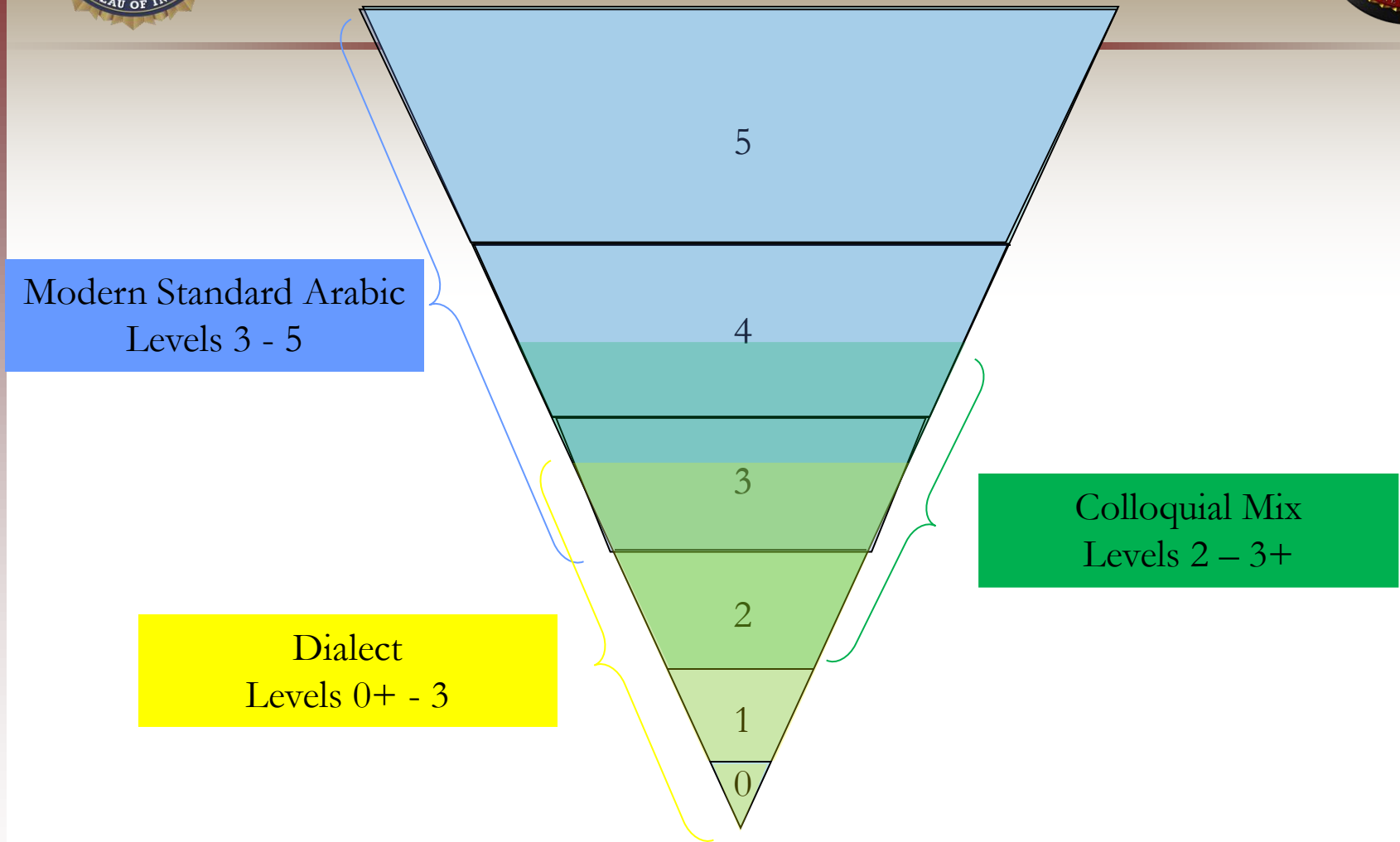
Test Phase	Elicitations	ILR Level	Elicitation Arabic Form	Response Arabic Form
Warm up	Introduction questions	0-3	Dialect	Dialect or Colloquial/MSA Mix
Core	Questions	0-2	Dialect	Dialect
Core	Interactive Situation	1-2	Dialect	Dialect
Core	Questions	2-3	Colloquial/MSA Mix	Dialect (2) Colloquial/MSA Mix (3)
Core	Interactive Situation	3-4	Colloquial/MSA Mix	Colloquial/MSA Mix
Core	Questions	3-5	MSA	Colloquial/MSA Mix (3) MSA (4 -5)
Core	Non -interactive Situation	3-5	MSA	Colloquial/MSA Mix (3) MSA (4 -5)
Wind down	Questions	1-3	Determined by examinee	

Employing the Protocol

- Examinee Types
  - Native Speaker
    - Raised and educated in the country where the target language is spoken. Literate in the target language.
  - Heritage Speaker
    - Raised and educated in a country where the target language is not spoken or is not the dominant language; educated in the dominant language; uses the target language in family and community settings. Often not literate in the target language.
  - Learner
    - Raised and educated in a country where the target language is not spoken or is not the dominant language; studies the target language in an educational setting. Taught target language literacy, sometimes before (or to the exclusion of) speaking skills.

Employing the Protocol

- Examinee Types: Arabic-Specific Considerations

	Dialect	Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)
Native Speaker	Native, in country	Learned within culture and at school
Heritage Speaker	Native (varies), not in country, often limited	Often not learned
Learner (MSA)	None or limited, not in country	Learned at school or in training
Learner (Dialect)	Classroom or immersion learners	Varies

Employing the Protocol

- Arabic Elicitation Considerations: Tasks and Levels

	ILR SLD Tasks (examples)	ILR Levels

Dialect
  Familiar and
  informal
  domains
	(Simple) description
	(Simple) narration
	Concrete comparison
	Give directions
	Report facts
	Support opinion (personal experience)
		1, 2
		1, 2
		2
		2
		2
		2

MSA
  Professional and
  formal domains
	Present a formal speech
	Support opinion (complex/abstract)
	Represent opposing point of view
		4-5
		4-5
		4-5

Employing the Protocol

- Score Reports and Interpretation
  - Single test, single score report
  - What does the rating mean?

Level	Descriptor	Using…	Who?
0 / 0+	No/Memorized Proficiency	Dialect/MSA	HS, L
1	Elementary Proficiency	Dialect/MSA	HS, L
2	Limited Working Proficiency	Dialect/Colloquial Mix/MSA	NS, HS, L
3	General Professional Proficiency	Colloquial Mix/MSA	NS, L, HS/L
4	Advanced Professional Proficiency	MSA	NS, L, HS/L
5	Functionally Native Proficiency	MSA	NS

Ongoing Considerations

- Legacy MSA tests from Language Training Program
- Comparison of "old protocol" ratings with "new protocol" ratings

Thank You

شكراً

- What are some effective ways to reduce environmental pollution in Egypt?

- **Tasks:** advise
- **Topic:** environmental pollution
- **Level:** 4
- **Elicitation:** MSA

Examinee Response

"We need many regulations. We need so many regulations to, ah, eliminate the environmental pollution. First, ah, using, ah, ancient vehicles and ah trucks with obsolete worn out engines producing toxins in the air. This has to be regulated. The amount of exhaust emission should be regulated or the vehicle should be discarded.

The densely populous areas have to expand further. The Egyptian population is concentrated along the Nile. Of course, this overpopulation causes dangerous environmental pollution. There should be other solutions. Building other towns absorbing the Egyptian growth in these new cities.

The waste: There should be other scientific and financial economic methods for waste disposal. It is unacceptable to dispose of it in the desert.

I'm talking here about the solid waste and not the human waste. The human waste is disposed of in the sea. Why until this moment – Egypt has vast empty areas to build, ah, wind power farms. Why until this day do we have but only a few units? We have the air that generates it. Why don't we utilize the solar energy?"

Employing the Protocol

- Types of Examinees and Typical Arabic Proficiency

	Dialect	Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)
Native Speaker	Fully proficient	Fully proficient
Heritage Speaker	Proficient; proficiency may be limited	Limited or no proficiency
Learner	Limited or no proficiency	Some proficiency; may be quite proficient