Assessment of Arabic Oral Proficiency

Mahdi Alosh
The United State Military Academy
Background

- Attempts to address assessment problems:
  - Modifying the OPI introduction (2004)
  - Proposing the comprehensive model (2000)
  - Testing the Standard and Colloquial varieties separately
Demographic change in test takers

- Beginning learners intending to study abroad
- Returning intermediate and beginning learners
- Advanced and Superior learners to study abroad
- Government employees with varying levels of proficiency
- American professionals
- Heritage speakers: two types
- Educated Arabic native speakers
Testing the dialects of Arabic

- A flawed approach
- Implies that proficiency is divisible
- Violates the Arabic diglossic model
- Has a problem in construct validity
- Robs Arabic of its main characteristic
- A test of Appalachian English?
- Problem in rating
A Conceptual Framework for Spoken Arabic

Language Interaction

- Formal
  - Public
  - Non-local
  - MSA
- Familiar
  - Private
  - Local
  - NL
  - Colloquial

Event

- Public
- Private
- Intimate

Setting

- Non-local
- Local
- NL
- L
- NL
- L
- NL
- L

Language Continuum

- MSA
- Colloquial
Current problem

- Need to obtain a rating that reflects the examinee’s true ability in Arabic:
  - Ability to perform along the language continuum
  - Sensitivity to the dialect/standard distinction
  - Sensitivity to register
  - Degree of control in each variety
Two Testing Models

- The consecutive model (flawed)
- The interface (sociolinguistic) model. It has...
- A similar structure to the OPI
- Planned integration of situations that call for the use of MSA and CA (test format)
- OPI as a formal setting (use MSA)
Elicitation

- Five phases as in the OPI
- Multiple role-play situations at predictable intervals
- Select appropriate RPs for MSA and CA
- Examinee’s performance determines type of situation to be selected.
## Oral Proficiency Test Format

(Note: Multiple occurrences of Global Tasks and Role-Plays)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>1+</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>2+</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>3+</th>
<th>4-5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WU</td>
<td>WU</td>
<td>WU</td>
<td>WU</td>
<td>WU</td>
<td>WU</td>
<td>WU</td>
<td>WU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GT1</td>
<td>GT2</td>
<td>GT2</td>
<td>GT2</td>
<td>GT3</td>
<td>GT3</td>
<td>GT4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP1</td>
<td>RP2</td>
<td>RP2</td>
<td>RP2</td>
<td>RP3</td>
<td>RP3</td>
<td>RP4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GT1</td>
<td>GT2</td>
<td>GT2</td>
<td>GT2</td>
<td>GT3</td>
<td>GT4</td>
<td>GT4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP1</td>
<td>RP1</td>
<td>RP2</td>
<td>RP3</td>
<td>RP4</td>
<td>RP4</td>
<td>RP4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WD</td>
<td>GT2</td>
<td>GT3</td>
<td>GT2</td>
<td>GT3</td>
<td>GT4</td>
<td>GT4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RP1</td>
<td>RP2</td>
<td>RP3</td>
<td>RP3</td>
<td>RP4</td>
<td>RP4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WD</td>
<td>WD</td>
<td>WD</td>
<td>WD</td>
<td>WD</td>
<td>WD</td>
<td>WD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rating

- Same assessment criteria for MSA and CA
- Degree of control of each variety
- Evaluating understanding and speaking
- Unitary versus dual score
## Unitary Versus Dual Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Unitary Score</th>
<th>Dual Score</th>
<th>MSA</th>
<th>CA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0+</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>4+</td>
<td>4+</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>3+</td>
<td>3+</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>