Arabic OPI Testing at DLIFLC
A Brief History and Current Status

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Overview of the OPI at DLIFLC

• Carefully conducted face-to-face interview with two trained testers for 20-40 minutes
• Speech sample rated against the ILR descriptions
• Test will show what the examinee can and cannot do with the language
OPI Test Structure

• Phase 1: Warm-up
• Phase 2: Core of the test characterized by iterative..
  – Level checks (to show what the examinee can do)
  – Probes (to show what the examinee cannot do)
• Phase 3: Wind-down
The DLIFLC Examinee Population

- Second language learners who learn Arabic at DLIFLC or elsewhere
- Heritage speakers of Arabic (09L Program)
- Native speakers of Arabic (FPS)
Uses of the OPI at DLIFLC

• Hiring or personnel placement
• Selecting individuals for assignments
• Placing individuals for continued language instruction
• Determining eligibility for proficiency pay
Rating Factors for the OPI

- Structural control
- Lexical control
- Delivery
  - Pronunciation and Fluency
- Socio-cultural appropriateness
- Discourse type produced
Testing Arabic at DLIFLC

• From the inception of OPI testing at DLIFLC in 1981, testing has only been in MSA

• MSA testing is still done as it has been for more than 30 years

• Shifting mission requirements after 9-11: The new model for testing Arabic with a focus on dialect assessment

• In the last two years, the movement has been to increase Arabic testing in dialect
Factors Driving Assessment in Dialects

• Assuring mission readiness for deploying military members to specific geographic areas
• Increasing need for skilled listeners to work voice intercept targets in dialect
• Implementation of new foreign language pay incentives
Issues and Challenges Associated with Testing Dialects

• What type of Arabic test to administer?
  – Learners: dialect only up through level 2
  – Heritage: dialect and MSA beginning at level 2+
  – Native: dialect and MSA

• DLIFLC testers focused on dialect must know how to conduct a full-continuum test

• The socio-cultural context as a rating factor is extremely important in conducting and rating lower-level tests
Issues and Challenges Associated with Testing Dialects

• When testing full-continuum Arabic for higher-level (above level 2) in which any dialect is acceptable:
  – How does one determine structural and lexical accuracy?
  – To what degree will education and experience level of the tester(s) influence rating accuracy?

• For dialect-only tests (below level 2+) it may be necessary to construct rating factor grids for each dialect to assure tester norming
Difficulties Setting the Boundary Between Dialect and MSA

Figure 3. Arabic language continuum

Alosh’s MSA-Dialect Continuum
Examinee OPI Options

Currently in 2012
• MSA
• Levantine dialect
• Iraqi dialect

Coming in 2013
• Egyptian dialect
• Moroccan dialect
• Sudanese dialect
Testing Options for Dialect Assessment at DLIFLC

- **Test MSA only**
  - Not practical since most DLIFLC examinees are second language learners who achieve up to level 2 proficiency

- **Test dialect only**
  - Practical for second language students graduating from second language programs of study

- **Test continuum (dialect with MSA)**
  - Necessary when testing heritage and native speakers to get the most accurate indication of proficiency
Questions/Discussion