Department of State
Foreign Service Institute

FSI's Arabic Speaking Test Model

Choice-based approach
ECOLT
November 2-3, 2012

FSI's Examinee Population

- Second language learners

- Examinees who learned Arabic elsewhere

- FSI-trained Examinees with language skills enhanced at post

FSI's **OLD** Test Format
Two Protocols

- Interactive

- Separate MSA test protocol

- Separate dialect test protocol

OLD FSI's Test **Challenges**

- Define boundaries (MSA/Dialect)

- Establish boundaries between various dialects

- Establish a system of credits and penalties based on use of MSA or dialect

FSI's **NEW** Test Format
One Protocol

- Interactive

- Integrated but flexible

- One protocol for both MSA and dialect

- Based on examinee's choice of dialect

Precepts of Arabic Use

- Arabic: one continuum

- Examinee: choice of dialect

- Yardstick: highly articulate well-educated native speaker

- Meaning: negotiated

- Audience: defines language interaction

Arabic Language

Formal Arabic

- Classical Arabic

- Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)

Colloquial Arabic (informal)

- Colloquial of the Educated

- Colloquial of the Enlightened

- Colloquial of the Illiterate

Examinee's Choice

Test Choice

- **MSA**
- **Egyptian Arabic**
- **Iraqi Arabic**
- **Moroccan Arabic**
- **Sudanese Arabic**
- **Syrian Arabic, etc.**

Register Choice

- **Situation** (conference, formal speech, birthday party, interview, shopping…)
- **Audience** (doctors, judges, journalists, street vendors, farmers…)
- **Topic**
- **Type of message**

Yardstick

(Highly Articulate Well-Educated Native Speaker)

- Speaks formal and informal Arabic

- Moves naturally between the two

- Selects register based on audience, topic, situation, and message

Negotiated Meaning

- Pure MSA

- Dialect

- Blended Arabic (MSA/Dialect mix)

- Mix of multiple dialects (rare)

Outcome

Natural interaction regardless of the Arabic variant.