

**Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers
(English Language) 2001
Assessment Report**

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to consolidate the Chief Examiners' observations of the performance of candidates who sat for the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) 2001.

General Observation

2 Candidates achieved different proficiency attainment rates in different papers. The attainment rates* for individual papers are: Reading, 85.68%; Writing, 33.33%; Listening, 68.35%; Speaking, 50.71%; and Classroom Language Assessment, 89.25%.

Paper 1: Reading

3 This paper consists of two parts, namely Part I: Multiple-choice Cloze and Part II: Reading Comprehension. The attainment rate of the 398 candidates who attempted this paper is 85.68% .

3.1 This relatively high attainment rate appears to reflect the candidates' familiarity with the text types and content, and ability to understand such passages.

3.2 There has been little evidence of 'indiscriminate copying' in answers to the short questions.

3.3 However, candidates did make a number of grammatical mistakes in their answers.

3.4 Some grammatical mistakes appeared to have resulted from candidates' attempt to use their own words to avoid copying from the passages.

* Scoring '3' or above in the Reading and Listening papers, and '2.5' or above on any one scale and '3' or above on all other scales in the Writing, Speaking and Classroom Language Assessment (CLA) papers

3.5 Performance in Part I (i.e. Multiple-choice Cloze) and Part II (i.e. Reading Comprehension) appeared to have been consistent with each other.

Part 1: Multiple-choice Cloze

4 Most items were correctly answered by more than 50% of the candidates.

4.1 This signals strong recognition of appropriacy in lexical choice, understanding of the development in a text, understanding of the overall meaning of the text and recognition of structural cues.

4.2 There was evidence that the candidates found some cohesive devices, lexical meanings and phrasal verbs rather difficult.

Part 2: Reading Comprehension

5 Guessing the meaning of words from the context appeared to be challenging for many candidates.

5.1 Referencing questions in which candidates were asked to identify the referents of 'it', 'they' and 'elsewhere' were reasonably well handled.

5.2 Weaker candidates failed to understand some questions and/or were unable to locate information to which the questions referred.

5.3 Stronger candidates were able to answer the questions fully and to paraphrase or use their own words in the answers.

Paper 2: Writing

6 This paper consists of two parts, namely, Part I: Task 1, Expository Writing, and Part II: Tasks 2A & 2B, Correcting and Explaining Errors /Problems in a Student's Composition. Candidates are tested on five scales of performance, namely, (a) Organisation and Coherence, (b) Grammatical Accuracy, (c) Task Completion, (d) Correcting Errors/Problems, and (e) Explaining Errors/Problems. Descriptors of each scale are set out in the Syllabus Specifications published in November 2000. The attainment rate of the 387 candidates who attempted this paper is 33.33% .

Part 1: Expository Writing

7 One evident weakness the markers observed is that much of the candidates' writing contained grammatical errors. These errors included tenses, articles, prepositions, topicalisation in sentences (repetition of the topic), subject/verb agreement, adverbs, cohesive devices, concord, lexical choice, relative clauses, and redundancy problems. Markers also identified certain error types that are sometimes committed by native speakers. These included incomplete sentences, run-on sentences (two independent clauses without any punctuation marks or connectors between them), and comma splices (two independent clauses joined by a comma).

7.1 It is likely that many of these anomalies are performance errors, meaning that the candidates made these mistakes in their writing even though they might know the related rules when asked about them. It is therefore likely that some of these candidates could have significantly reduced the numbers of their mistakes if they had taken time during the writing session to proofread their work.

7.2 Other than the 'Grammatical Accuracy' scale, the most difficult scale for many candidates was 'Organisation and Coherence'. Paragraphing was often weak; some paragraphs were either too long or too short. Also some weaker candidates did not follow the rule of 'one main idea in one paragraph', making reading these texts difficult. It is noted that paragraphing is a weakness found in the writing of some candidates who displayed native-speaker or near native-speaker ability in their use of words and expressions.

7.3 Weaker candidates did not demonstrate a good flow in their development of ideas. They were quite limited in their use of vocabulary. On the other hand, most candidates did quite well on the 'Task Completion' scale.

Part 2: Correcting and Explaining Errors/Problems

8. Most of the candidates seemed to have adequate time to complete Task 2A (i.e. Correcting Errors/Problems in a Student's Composition), and Task 2B (i.e. Explaining Errors/Problems in a Student's Composition).

8.1 Some candidates failed to realise that Tasks 2A and 2B, though related, were two separate tasks. They put their answers to the two parts together. As a result, marking these scripts was extremely difficult and time-consuming. Candidates should have read the instructions more carefully before they attempted the questions.

8.2 The discourse-level errors in Task 2A did not seem to be too difficult for candidates on the whole. On the other hand, many candidates had difficulty in providing adequate corrections to sentence-level errors.

8.3 Task 2A explicitly required that candidates should, as far as possible, retain the original wording or the meanings intended by the writer. Despite this requirement, some weaker candidates tended to over-correct. For example, in the item given below, candidates were asked to correct the underlined portion:

‘Finally, our dinner (9) was coming and put on the table.’

One candidate replaced the word ‘coming’ by ‘ready’ and wrote: ‘Finally, our dinner was ready and was put on the table.’ While it has now become a grammatical sentence, it does not meet the task requirement that the original wording or meanings should be retained as far as possible. An acceptable answer in this case is: ‘Finally, our dinner came and was put on the table.’

8.4 In Task 2B, some candidates merely stated in their explanations what they had done in Task 2A; they failed to give the underlying rules and generalisations concerning the erroneous parts, using grammatical terms where appropriate. For example, candidates were asked to explain the errors/problem in the following item:

‘(3) All the fish were die and were float on the water.’

One candidate wrote: “The writer should use ‘dead’ as ‘were die’ is not correct; also past participle should be used. The writer should use ‘were floating’.” As this answer merely describes what the candidate did in Task 2A, it is not acceptable as an answer in Task 2B.

8.5 Candidates must understand that using grammatical terms alone in their explanations is not sufficient for Task 2B. An example of such inadequate explanations is: “The word ‘die’ should be changed into its adjective form ‘dead.’” Once again in an answer such as this, the candidate is only describing what he or she did in Task 2A. For this particular example, a good answer would have to indicate that:

- (i) the adjective ‘dead’ should be used to describe a state, i.e. the state of the fish; and
- (ii) the past continuous tense, ‘were floating’, should be used because this part of the sentence refers to an on-going phenomenon.

8.6 Some weaker candidates used grammatical terminology inaccurately. They were misled by the ‘form’ of the errors and showed confusion in their answers (e.g. present participle vs. continuous tense, verb + preposition vs. phrasal verb).

Paper 3: Listening

9 This paper consists of one or more segments of spoken discourse of approximately 30 minutes in total length and candidates are required to answer approximately 20 questions of various types. The attainment rate of the 376 candidates who attempted this paper is 68.35%.

9.1 The vast majority of the candidates were able to complete all the questions in the paper.

9.2 Although candidates were reminded during the test that they should give answers that are clear enough for another reader, some failed to do so.

9.3 The success rates for items requiring local retrieval skills were higher than those requiring higher level processing skills, such as prediction, guessing from context, listening for gist, etc. Weaker candidates also failed to infer the stance of the speaker from his tone or attitude. Some candidates found certain tasks more difficult, for example, tasks that required them to first select relevant bits of information from all that they had jotted down and then reconstruct answers.

9.4 Candidates performed relatively well in the post-listening writing task, which required them to reconstruct the information from the listening input and use it to complete a writing task. Most candidates were able to complete this task. In general, the candidates understood the contents of that part quite well and what was required of them in the task.

Paper 4: Speaking

10 This paper consists of two parts. There are three tasks in Part I, namely, Task 1A: Reading Aloud a Poem, Task 1B: Reading Aloud a Prose Passage, and Task 1C: Telling a Story/Recounting an Experience/Presenting Arguments; and one task in Part II, namely, Group Interaction.

10.1 Candidates are tested on six scales of performance, namely, (a) Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation; (b) Reading Aloud with Meaning; (c) Grammatical Accuracy; (d) Organisation and Cohesion; (e) Interacting with Peers; and (f) Explaining Language Matters to Peers. Descriptors of each scale are set out in the Syllabus Specifications published in November 2000

10.2 Of all the six scales in this paper, candidates' weaknesses are mostly surrounding 'Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation', 'Reading Aloud with Meaning' and in particular 'Grammatical Accuracy'.

10.3 The attainment rate of the 351 candidates who attempted this paper is 50.71%.

Part 1: Tasks 1A, 1B and 1C

11 In this part of the paper, assessors observed that candidates performed best in Task 1C (i.e. Telling a Story/Recounting an Experience/Presenting Arguments), followed by Task 1B (i.e. Reading Aloud a Prose Passage) and Task 1A (i.e. Reading Aloud a Poem).

Part 2: Group Interaction

12 In Part 2 of the paper, candidates were able to make use of conversational strategies; hence, on the whole they did quite well in this part of the paper, especially on the scale of 'Interacting with Peers'. A weakness observed in a minority of cases was the use of incorrect grammatical terms and/or erroneous grammatical explanations.

Paper 5: Classroom Language Assessment

13 This paper consists of the assessment of two live periods on two school days. Candidates are tested on four scales of performance, namely, (a) Grammatical Accuracy, (b) Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation, (c) the Language of Interaction, (d) the Language of Instruction. Descriptors of each scale are set out in the Syllabus Specifications.

13.1 The attainment rate of the 93 candidates who attempted this paper is 89.25%.

13.2 Instances of communication being impeded as a result of grammar and pronunciation problems were rare. Some common grammatical problems included the use of inappropriate expressions, errors in collocation, agreement and tenses. As for pronunciation, stress and intonation, the most common problem apparently was the interference of L1, that is the display of Cantonese speech patterns/characteristics.

13.3 Some candidates had problem coping with consonant clusters and many failed to pay enough attention to the final consonants. Certain consonants, for instance, /r/, /n/ and /l/, also presented problems to a few candidates.

13.4 The performance in interaction and instruction was satisfactory. Most teachers were able to give clear classroom instructions. However, a number of teachers failed to organise the discourse coherently, thus making it difficult for students to follow. As for interaction, the most common problem seemed to be the repetition of language from within a very small repertoire. Such inadequacy, in the worst cases, rendered the interaction ineffective. Praises, for instance, are meant to motivate and encourage. The excessive and indiscriminate use of the word 'good' irrespective of the quality of the answers might devalue the word and render the praise meaningless.

13.5 Candidates should try to organise their lessons in such a way that all the skills specified in the Classroom Language Assessment scales can be demonstrated.

The End

The Hong Kong Examinations Authority
September 2001