Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) 2005 (September)

Assessment Report

Introduction

1.   The purpose of this report is to consolidate the Chief Examiners' observations of the performance of candidates who sat the Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) 2005 (September).

General Observation

2.   Candidates achieved different *proficiency attainment*[*] rates in different papers. The proficiency attainment rates for individual papers were: Reading, 59%; Writing, 30%; Listening, 64%; Speaking, 39%; and Classroom Language Assessment, 92.5%.

Paper 1: Reading

3.   This paper consists of two parts, namely Part 1: Multiple-choice Cloze and Part 2: Reading Comprehension. Candidates performed reasonably well in this paper, with results within the range of those achieved by earlier cohorts.

4.   Candidates generally performed well on the multiple-choice section of the paper. There were problems with their performance on the reading comprehension section, however. Some candidates gave answers which were incomplete, imprecise, inappropriately phrased or lacked coherence.

5.   There was some evidence of candidates guessing answers and as a result copying inappropriately from the passage. Candidates also sometimes made errors in structure or word choice when attempting to respond in their own words such that incorrect answers were produced.

6.   There was again evidence that candidates should pay more attention to time management during the paper, with some candidates unable to complete answers for both reading comprehension passages. In some papers the scores in Part 1 (Multiple Choice Cloze) and Part 2 (Reading Comprehension) were unbalanced, indicating perhaps that some candidates had allocated too little time to one or other of the two Parts.

7.   There is some evidence that candidates are not reading the questions carefully. Understanding of the questions is a major reading task and it is important for candidates to take the time to check their interpretation of what is being asked.

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

Part 1: Multiple Choice Cloze

8.　　Candidates responded reasonably well to both cloze passages. Candidates were quite successful in selecting appropriate vocabulary items and appropriate verb forms/tenses. They were less successful in items requiring the selection of prepositions, the expression of idea relationships and the identification of certain collocations.

Part 2: Reading Comprehension

9.　　Candidates generally attempted most questions in both passages; however as noted earlier there was some evidence of candidates running out of time while doing the second passage. Questions requiring global understanding or interpretation of information continued to be less well-answered.

10.　　Candidates generally performed well on questions requiring understanding of a single piece of information (for example, 'What is 'good old-fashioned playing'?').

11.　　There was quite significant evidence of candidates misreading questions. For example, the question 'What is using the Internet compared to?' was sometimes answered 'a library', or 'a library with all the books scattered in piles'. The question asks about 'using' the library, indicating that the response should include 'walking into' or a similar verb phrase. The question 'In line 9, 'a unique solution'… to what?' was often answered by candidates giving the result of the solution rather than the problem itself, the latter being what the question was asking for. The question 'What kinds of public institutions have been cited as having consulted Wikipedia?' was often answered with *examples of,* rather than *kinds of,* institutions.

12.　　Candidates sometimes appeared uncertain about the definition of 'term' or 'phrase', copying out longer sections of the passage which may have included the appropriate response, but which could then not be marked as correct.

13.　　Many candidates had difficulty responding appropriately to the questions asking about what was 'sacrificed' or 'denied'. Responses often included 'less time…' or 'no opportunity…'. Candidates need to recognize that it is not logical to suggest that 'less time' is being denied, or that 'less/no opportunity' is being sacrificed.

14.　　Most candidates completed the chart reasonably well, although some candidates were unable to identify one informant, David Elkind, as having conduced research.

15.　　Candidates should note the following advice:

　　15.1　　Aim to manage your time so that you can attempt all question items in the paper. Do not spend so much time on one Part that you are unable to complete the paper or have to guess at answers to either Part.

　　15.2　　Read the cloze passages aloud quietly to get a sense of the structure and flow of the passages. As you read, consider possible word choices for each blank. Then tackle the items by looking at the options for each.

15.3 Allow yourself time to read quickly through each reading comprehension passage before you begin to tackle the questions, so that you have an idea of the overall content and the writer's point of view before you begin to answer the questions. Then read each paragraph more closely as you attempt the questions.

15.4 As part of time management, aim to read the reading comprehension questions carefully and check that you have understood what is being asked. Examine the structure of each question and check that your proposed response is adequate and logical.

15.5 If the best response to a question is contained in the words from the passage, use those words. If you choose to use your own words, check that you have expressed yourself clearly. The mark scheme does not include the deduction of marks for grammatical or spelling mistakes; however, marks cannot be awarded if the marker cannot understand the answer.

15.6 Adopt the habit of reading on a regular basis to improve your overall English language skills. Read for pleasure and read materials related to your profession. Aim to understand the writer's point of view and familiarize yourself with expressions of opinion and feeling.

Paper 2: Writing

16. This paper consists of two parts, namely, Part 1: Task 1, Expository Writing, and Part 2: 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 proficiency attainment rate of the 1445 candidates who attempted this paper was 30%.

Part 1: Expository Writing

17. The expository writing task required candidates to write a newsletter article to discuss some of the problems mentioned in a given passage and to illustrate their views on the topic with examples. While the task was straightforward for many candidates, some failed to notice the instructions in the rubric regarding the perspective from which their views should be stated.

18. The majority of candidates had little difficulty making the overall structure of their texts clear to the reader, but a fair number of scripts displayed problems with intra-paragraph cohesion and coherence. As in previous rounds, many candidates had difficulty writing concisely. They tended to write too much, which disrupted the flow of the text and affected the focus of their paragraphs.

19. While the task allowed better candidates to display their writing abilities, grammatical errors were to be found in the majority of scripts, undermining the effectiveness of the writing in some scripts and impeding understanding in others. Common errors

included noun-pronoun inconsistency, subject-verb (dis)agreement, misuse of tenses, dangling modifiers, incorrect parts of speech, misuse of discourse markers and faulty sentence structure.

Part 2: Correcting and explaining errors/problems

20.   Candidates generally performed fairly well in Task 2A, where they had to identify and correct errors. Their performance in Task 2B (explaining errors) was very weak, however, and many answers displayed a lack of understanding of English grammar, for example: (Item 11) … she not want to…

21.   Some candidates wrote 'the verb "to be" is required, therefore insert "does"'. Besides giving the wrong base form of the verb 'does', this answer did not explain why a verb is required in this clause. A suitable correction for the error needs to mention that the verb 'does' is needed to complete the negative verb structure 'does not want'. There were also candidates who classified 'does' as a modal verb. Rather, 'does' in this sentence is an auxiliary verb.

22.   Other common error types were:

- Over correction (i.e. correcting items that were already correct).
- Lack of explanation, for example: 'change "talk at" to "talk to"' for Item 3.
- Failure to provide necessary metalanguage, for example:

    (8) she took away our phones and she locks in the drawer when school finishes

    Simply writing 'the *word* "when" should be replaced by "until"' warrants no mark because of the failure to identify the function of 'when' and 'until' as conjunctions as well as the reason for the replacement.

- Incomplete explanation of the error, for example:

    (3) they are able to talk at me if they worried

    Some candidates wrote that the adjective 'worried' was incorrectly used as a verb. This would warrant one mark; candidates needed to state that a verb such as 'are' had to be added before the adjective 'worried' in order to get the second mark.

- Ambiguous answers, for example:

    (8) she took away our phones and she locks in the drawer when school finishes

    Answers such as 'a pronoun should after a verb' cannot be awarded any marks because (i) not all verbs take a pronoun after them, and (ii) there are three verbs in the underlined sentence.

- Spelling mistakes, for example:

    (3) they are able to talk at me…

Instead of 'preposition', many candidates wrote 'proposition', which has a different meaning.

23. In general, the language of the explanations was rather weak, with many candidates failing to write a comprehensible explanation using correct grammar and sentence structure.

Paper 3: Listening

24. As in previous administrations, candidates performed well on items requiring factual information or *verbatim* recording of a speaker's words. Weaker candidates had problems in the following areas:

- mishearing words (e.g. 'doable' recorded as 'durable').

- misinterpreting utterances (e.g. 'practical issues' arising from implementing Liberal Studies interpreted as meaning *being practical is a strength of Liberal Studies*).

- failing to react to phonological cues, for example some candidates failed to pick up the two stressed words 'only' and 'every' in one answer, opting instead to focus on information which was repeated.

- misunderstanding a speaker's attitude if expressed indirectly, for example the phrase 'not belittling the importance of this' was understood by some listeners as meaning 'not unimportant' or 'being important', despite the fact that this interpretation contradicts what is said previously by the speaker.

25. Advice to candidates taking this paper is given below.

    25.1 Listening to a second or foreign language is a complex process, and successful L2 listening involves the appropriate use of lexical knowledge. While having a larger vocabulary will definitely help, a good listener also needs to develop the ability to understand how the same words are used in different linguistic contexts. Candidates are advised to develop the awareness of the more subtle differences between lexical items which seem to share similar meanings. (e.g. the difference between "not belittling something" and "think that something is important") One way to begin is to do componential analysis on the similarities and differences among a group of synonyms as for example, "teach", "coach", "instruct", "train". Ultimately, however, L2 advanced learners must learn to avoid being trapped in a simple dialectic (of "important-unimportant") when communicating, a set approach that often proves very useful for many secondary beginners when they are asked to develop an argumentative (the "pro-and-con"). Not all speakers in natural contexts are direct and explicit in their expression of a stance, and in fact in real life a stance often comes with other qualifications given by the speaker.

    25.2 Finally, perhaps it is no accident that the two most difficult items commonly involves the processing a clause of contrast (the concession adverbial of "while"). Candidates may wish to pay special attention to the use of this linguistic feature, which reportedly, Chinese and Japanese ESL writers in

general tend to over-use than do English native speakers in academic writing (Hinkel, 2002, p. 210), but perhaps using it too simplistically.

25.3 Candidates should note that during the listening test they must **switch off their mobile phone**. Even when set to silent or vibration mode, the signal can interfere with the broadcast of the recording. This will affect the performance of both the candidate himself/herself as well as other candidates. Any candidate failing to abide by this rule will be liable to incur **a severe mark penalty or even disqualification**.

Paper 4: Speaking

26. This paper consists of two parts. There are three tasks in Part 1, namely, Task 1A: Reading Aloud a Prose Passage, Task 1B: Reading Aloud a Poem and Task 1C: Telling a Story/Recounting an Experience/Presenting Arguments; and one task in Part 2, namely, Group Interaction.

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.

The proficiency attainment rate of the 1244 candidates who attempted this paper was 39%.

27. As in previous administrations, candidates performed better on the scales of Organisation & Cohesion (Task 1C) and Interacting with Peers (Task 2), and less well on Pronunciation, Stress & Intonation (Task 1A/B), Grammatical Accuracy (Task 1C), Reading Aloud with Meaning (Task 1A/B) and Explaining Language Matters to Peers (Task 2).

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

28. The typical problems exhibited by candidates while reading aloud a poem and a prose passage were:

- mispronouncing uncommon words (such as 'enticing' or 'sever')
- pronouncing final consonants (such as 'blaste<u>d</u>' or 'slee<u>p</u>')
- stressing syllables which should not be stressed (e.g. 'do<u>cu</u>ment')
- conveying appropriate meaning through sentence stress and intonation, particularly when the sentence was long or expressed a particular emotion or attitude.

Part 2: Group Interaction

29.   With regard to Explaining Language Matters, candidates were generally able to identify errors in the student's composition. However, some were unable to offer coherent explanations for the problems or suggest sensible teaching strategies. As in previous years, many candidates gave very general suggestions, such as 'read more' or 'do more exercises', instead of specific tasks designed to address the problems identified in the composition. In short, many candidates simply did not demonstrate an ability to discuss language matters in a professional context.

30.   Candidates should understand that the nature of the speaking test is that the candidate's performance at the time of the assessment is the one that is taken into account. Whilst there should be some degree of correlation between the ability shown by each candidate on the different components of the LPATE, such as Speaking and Classroom Language Assessment, it does not follow that a candidate will automatically score the same on each test, or on similar scales across the different tests.

Paper 5: Classroom Language Assessment

31.   The Classroom Language Assessment started in late September and was completed in late October 2005. Of the 612 candidates assessed, 92.5% attained Level 3 or above in all the four scales (Grammatical Accuracy; Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation; Language of Interaction; and Language of Instruction). The pass rate is the highest ever achieved.

32.   The majority of candidates performed well, demonstrating a very high level of language proficiency as well as confidence in using the language. It was evident that the candidates fully understood the descriptors and were able to use a variety of structures and expressions.

33.   <u>Grammatical Accuracy</u>

  33.1   Most candidates successfully employed a good range of structures and expressions. In general, most of the grammatical mistakes that occurred did not impede communication. Most mistakes involved articles (e.g. 'a chalk'); subject-verb agreement (e.g. 'he like'); tense (e.g. 'Have you saw it?'); and prepositions (e.g. 'Look at here'). Many candidates managed to self-correct almost instantly.

  33.2   Some candidates had problems with direct and indirect questions. Sentences like 'Do you know why is he unhappy?' and 'What you can do on the beach?' were common.

  33.3   In extended utterances, some candidates made mistakes in sentence structure, tense, voice and relative pronouns. Examples of these error types are:

  '**They love their parents** is important' (sentence structure).
  'Call your mother as soon as you **reached** the shop' (tense).

'The game **cancelled** because it was raining' (voice).
'I want you to know **whom** I am' (relative pronoun).

33.4   Another common type of mistake involved omitting the object, as in 'How to spell?', probably due to the interference of Cantonese.

34.   Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation

34.1   Most candidates demonstrated an acceptable level of accuracy in pronunciation, stress and intonation. Some cases of mispronunciation suggested L1 influence, such as when 'Snoopy' was pronounced as 'Sloopy', 'friends' as 'flends' and 'show' as 'sow'. Inappropriate intonation patterns in questions such as 'Where can you put it?' and 'Can you describe it?' were also noted.

34.2   Most candidates were able to pronounce final consonants. There were some exceptions, however, such as 'Father **Ant'** pronounced 'Father **Ann'**, and 'school **gate'** as 'school **gay'**. In general, 'Linking' was not given enough attention. In many cases, the final /k/ and /t/ and /l/ were simply left out, as in 'loo**k a**t'; 'Le**t i**t go' and 'a**ll o**f you'. Some consonants proved especially difficult: 'Let's give her a c**r**ap' (clap); 'Do you like the **w**est?' (vest); 'It's a long **w**ide' (ride); 'The **l**et teacher is so **l**ice.' (net/nice); 'What can you see in a **sh**oe?' (zoo). Problems with consonant clusters were also noted as in '**cl**ean' being pronounced as '**k**een'.

34.3   Some candidates made no distinction between long and short vowels, so that pairs of words such as 'l**ea**ving/l**i**ving' were indistinguishable. There was occasional vowel confusion, e.g. between /ae/ and /e/ (as in 'p**a**n / p**e**n'). There were also problems with diphthongs, as in 'c**ou**nt' (pronounced 'c**an**'t').

34.4   There was occasional sound insertion, as in 'J**r**ack' (Jack), and pronunciation of silent letters such as the 't' in 'cas**t**le' (pronounced as /ka:stl/).

35.   The Language of Interaction

35.1   Most candidates were able to effectively employ appropriate language to elicit responses from students and to acknowledge students' responses appropriately. Overall, the language used was varied and spontaneous.

35.2   In acknowledging students' responses, most candidates proved capable and effective, using positive phrases such as 'Beautiful drawing', 'That's creative', 'Don't worry', and 'I'll have someone help you.'

35.3   On occasion, the smoothness of the teacher-student interaction was adversely affected by an inability to respond appropriately to utterances or unexpected questions from the students, as in the following situations:

Dialogue A
Student: 'May I be excused?'
Teacher: 'No.'

Dialogue B
Teacher: 'Now do the exercise.'
Class: 'We have done it already.'
Teacher: 'OK. Just do it now.'

Dialogue C
A Form Three student: 'He no this paper' (meaning his fellow classmate did not have the worksheet)
Teacher: 'He no this paper? OK. Share.'

The lack of sensitivity in the first dialogue, the failure to offer a proper response in the second and to correct the student's language error in the third rendered the language of interaction unsatisfactory, if not altogether ineffective.

35.4 Some candidates became inaudible when the volume of student talk increased during games and group activities. This invariably affected the assessors' ability to hear and hence hindered the assessment.

36. The Language of Instruction

36.1 In most lessons, the language used was appropriate and the discourse was coherent. Some candidates displayed good skills in adjusting their language to enhance comprehension by rephrasing. Instructions and explanations were generally clear.

36.2 In some cases, the lack of clarity was caused by grammatical inaccuracy. Examples are: 'Can you introduce us?' (used to mean 'Can you introduce the character to us?'); 'Pass.' (meaning 'Pass the worksheet.'); 'Keep it.'(meaning 'Leave the machine on/ Don't turn it off.')

36.3 Candidates generally did reasonably well in explaining vocabulary items. A few candidates, however, relied so heavily on prompts and scripts that the language of instruction was actually more like writing than speech.

37. In general, candidates seemed to be well acquainted with the requirements of the assessment and its procedures. They were able to use daily expressions appropriately and to pronounce words accurately. They should, however, exercise care in the selection of activities and teaching aids to allow a full display of their language skills. As the four scales carry equal weighting, a good balance between interaction and instruction is desirable.