

# Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (English Language) 2002

## 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) 2002.

### General Observation

2. Candidates achieved different *proficiency attainment*\* rates in different papers. The proficiency attainment rates for individual papers were: Reading, 55%; Writing, 29%; Listening, 39%; Speaking, 58%; and Classroom Language Assessment, 91%.

### Paper 1: Reading

3. This paper consists of two parts, namely Part 1: Multiple-choice Cloze and Part 2: Reading Comprehension. The attainment rate of the 662 candidates who attempted this paper was 55%.
  - 3.1 Candidates' performance was about average in this paper, with more than half achieving the proficiency requirement (level 3).
  - 3.2 There was a wide range of performance within the cohort.
  - 3.3 There was little evidence of 'indiscriminate' copying in answers to the short questions.
  - 3.4 Candidates made some grammatical mistakes in their answers. Since this paper tests comprehension and evidence of understanding of the texts, the marking scheme ignored such mistakes unless they interfered with the meaning of the answer.
  - 3.5 There was strong evidence of candidates not managing time well, with some scoring highly in the cloze and then failing to answer even the most straightforward questions in the comprehension section.

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\* 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.

### ***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 understanding of the text overall and the recognition of structural cues in particular.
  - 4.2 Selections related to phrasal verbs (e.g. 'deploy into'), appropriate vocabulary (e.g. 'expertise', 'devote') and items influenced by the context of the passage (e.g. 'teachers have shown themselves to be unprepared to use computers') appeared to cause candidates more problems.
  - 4.3 Most candidates completed this section.

### ***Part 2: Reading Comprehension***

5. Many candidates only partially completed this section.
  - 5.1 The weakest candidates had difficulty responding even to the easier questions such as 'Is this statement true or false?' Responses by these candidates included 'Not', 'Can't', 'Yes', 'Does'.
  - 5.2 Some candidates appeared to guess at answers without reference to the passage(s).
  - 5.3 Referencing questions were reasonably well-handled (e.g. Who does 'they' refer to?).
  - 5.4 Questions referring to metaphorical and idiomatic use of language were generally not well answered (e.g. 'like pistons under pressure in this machine, teachers are forced to ...', 'reform cannot come quickly enough').
  - 5.5 Stronger candidates wrote concise answers directly responding to the questions, without superfluous information.

### ***Advice to Candidates***

6. Candidates should note the following advice:
  - 6.1 Candidates are strongly encouraged to:
    - (i) Plan the time they wish to allocate to each section;
    - (ii) Read each passage before attempting the questions;
    - (iii) Attempt to answer all questions.
  - 6.2 Candidates should recognise that reading widely, especially on educational

matters pertaining to English teaching, is beneficial to language skills development and thus will help in examination performance.

## **Paper 2: Writing**

7. 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 708 candidates who attempted this paper was 29%.

### ***Part 1: Expository Writing***

8. In general, the markers found candidates' performance to be satisfactory in this part of the paper, although the following points should be noted:
  - 8.1 Many candidates misunderstood the task, which required them to do four things: respond to the writer's email message concerning an educational exchange activity; say how this activity could benefit the local students; add one more idea on how the two schools could work together; and say how this new idea would benefit the international students. Instead of adding one more idea, a number of the candidates expanded on the 'exchange' idea, commenting on how **this** would benefit the international students. Many candidates did not separate the benefits for the two sets of students and as a result scored poorly on 'Task Completion'.
  - 8.2 'Organisation and Coherence' was generally well-achieved, although in common with 2001, paragraphing was often weak and 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. Some candidates tended to write too much, so that a lot of irrelevant information was included, such as details about procedures for the exchange activity or details about the writer's school situation, which were not needed to complete the task.
  - 8.3 The markers commented on such grammatical errors as poor sentence structure, incorrect tenses and prepositional misuse, as well as spelling mistakes. In addition, weaker candidates demonstrated inappropriate use of vocabulary, often overusing clichés such as 'widening their horizons' or 'taking golden opportunities'.
  - 8.4 Candidates are advised to spend more time reading English so as to increase their vocabulary, and practising their writing. In future assessments, candidates should make sure they read the task instructions carefully.

## *Part 2: Correcting and Explaining Errors/Problems*

9. 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).
- 9.1 Some candidates failed to realise that Tasks 2A and 2B, though related, are 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 read the instructions more carefully before they attempt the questions.
- 9.2 For Task 2B, a number of candidates explained the errors in all 10 of the items from Task 2A (Items 2-11), when in fact they were only required to explain the errors in the designated 5 items (Items 2, 5, 7, 8 and 11). This resulted in these candidates wasting much of their time. Again, candidates should make sure they read the instructions carefully.
- 9.3 Also, some candidates corrected errors in the designated items in Task 2A but then failed to explain those corrections in Task 2B, thereby losing the opportunity of scoring on those items.
- 9.4 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. Some very straightforward errors were 'missed' by many candidates, such as in the following item:

(7) to another planets by the UFO.

In this item there are two errors. The first concerns the determiner 'another', which should be changed to 'other' to agree with the plural object 'planets' (or 'planets could be changed to 'planet' to agree with 'another'). This error was corrected by over 90 per cent of candidates. However, the second error in the sentence proved more difficult for candidates. As 'UFO' had not been mentioned previously, it should have been corrected to 'a UFO' (or 'UFOs'). Few candidates corrected this error (approximately 18 per cent), indicating a particular weakness in knowledge of the use of definite/indefinite articles.

Also, many candidates did not see the one spelling error in the text:

(10) I had clam down because ...

In this item, the word 'clam' should have been spelled 'calm' (and the tense changed) so as to read 'I calmed down because ...'

- 9.5 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:

(2) So I phone to my parents,

There are two errors in this sentence, the verb 'phone' should be changed to its past tense form, and the preposition 'to' is redundant. To explain the second error, one candidate wrote: 'To should be crossed out as it is unnecessary.' As this answer merely described what the candidate did in Task 2A, it was not acceptable as an answer in Task 2B.

9.6 Candidates must understand that using grammatical terms alone in their explanations is not sufficient for Task 2B. An example of such an inadequate explanation is: 'The second problem is to cross out the preposition "to" because it is unnecessary to use it there after "phoned"'. This 'answer' is only partially correct, as it does not explain **why** the preposition is not needed. For this particular example, a good answer would have to indicate that:

- (i) the verb 'phone' should be used in its past tense form, 'phoned' as the writer is telling what happened to him/her in the past; and
- (ii) the preposition 'to' is not necessary here as 'phone' should be followed directly by a noun phrase/by a direct object.

9.7 A common mistake was found in the following item:

(5) There were nobody here, but a television switched on.

An acceptable answer for this item was: 'There was nobody there, but a television was switched on.' Many candidates corrected the first part of this sentence as 'There was nobody, but ...'. One candidate who did this wrote in his/her explanation for the omission of 'here' in the sentence: 'Also, "here" is a pronoun which indicates the place where the writer is, but the word "there" is used, there is no use to use two pronoun to indicate the place, therefore "here" can be omitted.' This indicates a common misunderstanding; the first 'There' in the sentence is an introductory subject and not an adverb of place. 'Here' is the adverb of place but needs to be changed to 'there' to indicate that the place was distant from the writer at the time of writing. It is possible to omit the first 'There' but a reordering is necessary as in 'Nobody was there, but ...'.

9.8 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). Candidates should become more familiar with basic grammatical terminology so that they can identify and explain errors more clearly and concisely.

9.9 As a general comment, candidates should remember that the requirement of Task 2B is twofold: firstly, to identify the error; and secondly, to explain why the correction is necessary. Candidates preparing for the assessment should

refer to the Syllabus Specifications for the LPAT (English Language) pages 48-50, and when doing the assessment, to the example given in the paper.

### **Paper 3: Listening**

10. The paper was based on a topic of relevance to Hong Kong teachers' teaching situation, i.e. the operation of the University of Hong Kong's *TELEC* service. This topic was non-academic and practical in nature. The paper contained a range of suitable task types including box filling, true/false, multiple choice, blank-filling and open-ended questions. This range allowed for a variety of appropriate listening skills to be tested. The recording was natural-sounding and delivered at a normal speaking speed in standard accents. Of the 670 candidates who took this paper, 39% achieved the proficiency requirement (level 3) or above.
  - 10.1 The vast majority of the candidates were able to complete all the questions in the paper.
  - 10.2 Generally speaking, candidates wrote their answers clearly and coherently. This was aided by the fact that, overall, shorter answers were required this year as compared with last year.
  - 10.3 Many simple items involving local retrieval (e.g. dates, numbers, names) were wrongly answered by candidates. For example, candidates were asked to identify the date (month and year) in which *TELEC* was founded. Although the speaker clearly said that it was 'July 1993', many candidates gave an incorrect month, such as 'October', indicating that they had simply guessed the answer.
  - 10.4 Many answers given by candidates were irrelevant to the questions or failed to pick up the detail of information given. Candidates showed a lack of recognition of key words such as 'exploit', which was confused with 'explore', and 'fund', which was confused with 'fun'.
  - 10.5 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.
  - 10.6 Candidates performed relatively poorly 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. Many candidates were unable to complete this task.
  - 10.7 When preparing for this test, candidates are recommended to listen to much more spoken English and to a wide variety of genres, accents and speeds.
  - 10.8 When tackling the test, candidates are recommended to make greater use of context and knowledge of the world to make sense of the text rather than relying on strategies involving simple word or sound recognition and/or guessing.

## **Paper 4: Speaking**

11. 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 679 candidates who attempted this paper was 58%.

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

- 11.1 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 1A (i.e. Reading Aloud a Prose Passage) and Task 1B (i.e. Reading Aloud a Poem).
- 11.2 The major weakness of candidates in Part 1 was found in ‘Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation’ when reading aloud the prose passage and the poem, with stress and intonation a particular problem for many. It is recommended that prospective candidates spend time reading suitable English texts and listening to the ways that such texts are read aloud by competent speakers.
- 11.3 In general, Task 1C was carried out well by most candidates, who were able to talk on the given topic for the time required. A small minority of candidates did appear to read from a ‘script’ that they had prepared during the preparation time. Such candidates were marked down for this as the assessors usually found that once the candidate had completed their ‘reading’, they had nothing else to say, or what they did say either repeated what they had said already or even contradicted it, making the whole ‘monologue’ incoherent. Candidates are advised to make brief notes during the preparation time and to work from these, such that their talk has a clear structure and is relevant to the topic. Candidates should try to present different aspects of the topic to demonstrate to the assessors that they are able to organise their thoughts and present them coherently. They should also be able to demonstrate the ability to use a range of grammatical structures accurately. Candidates should talk for about 2 minutes and will be told by the assessors when to stop their presentation.

## ***Part 2: Group Interaction***

- 11.4 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. As is the case with the explaining errors section of Paper 2 (Writing), candidates should try to become more familiar with basic grammatical terminology so that they are able to identify errors.
- 11.5 In a few cases, candidates talked about certain categories of errors that did not feature in the text. This would indicate that they had rehearsed a "speech" prior to the assessment. In such cases candidates are marked down on "Explaining Language Matters to Peers" as they had not shown an ability to discuss the errors in the text provided.
- 11.6 Another weakness of some candidates in the group interaction was the tendency to talk about irrelevant matters such as the characteristics of their own students or problems with the education system. This showed an inability to interact with peers, which should involve not only speaking to others but listening to them and responding appropriately. Again, candidates should prepare for this part of the assessment by practising speaking in English with colleagues rather than memorising sections of speech in advance.

## **Paper 5: Classroom Language Assessment**

12. This paper consists of the assessment of two live lessons 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.
  - 12.1 The attainment rate of the 266 candidates who attempted this paper was 91%.
  - 12.2 Candidates taking this paper generally performed well with the majority achieving at least a pass in all four scales. One common problem, however, was L1 interference and it was obvious in both grammar and pronunciation. In many cases, candidates used expressions and structures that reflected a Chinese construction. For example, a teacher might say, "No, you can't see", meaning the students were not allowed to look at the picture, or "Wait, don't faster than me". Pronunciation problems typical of Cantonese speakers, like the failure to produce consonant clusters (e.g. "fill in the blanks" pronounced as "fill in the banks") and to give final consonants due attention (e.g. "line 10" pronounced as "lie 10"), were indicative of such L1 interference.
  - 12.3 Most candidates did well in the Language of Instruction. In some cases though, inadequacy in language competence led to poor explanation and presentation. Such inadequacy was also obvious in the Language of Interaction. Often, opportunities for interaction were either not fully utilized or missed altogether

as a result of the teacher's linguistic inadequacy.

- 12.4 In terms of appropriateness, while candidates usually had no problem using language appropriate to the level of the students, it was noted that in some lessons brighter students were not given linguistic content at a sufficiently challenging level. Few candidates actually attempted to go beyond the familiar to reach out for a wider repertoire of vocabulary and a greater range of grammatical structures.