



# **Arabic OPI Testing at DLIFLC**

## **A Brief History and Current Status**

**Thomas S. Parry, Ph.D.**

**Dean, Proficiency Standards**

**DLIFLC**



# 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

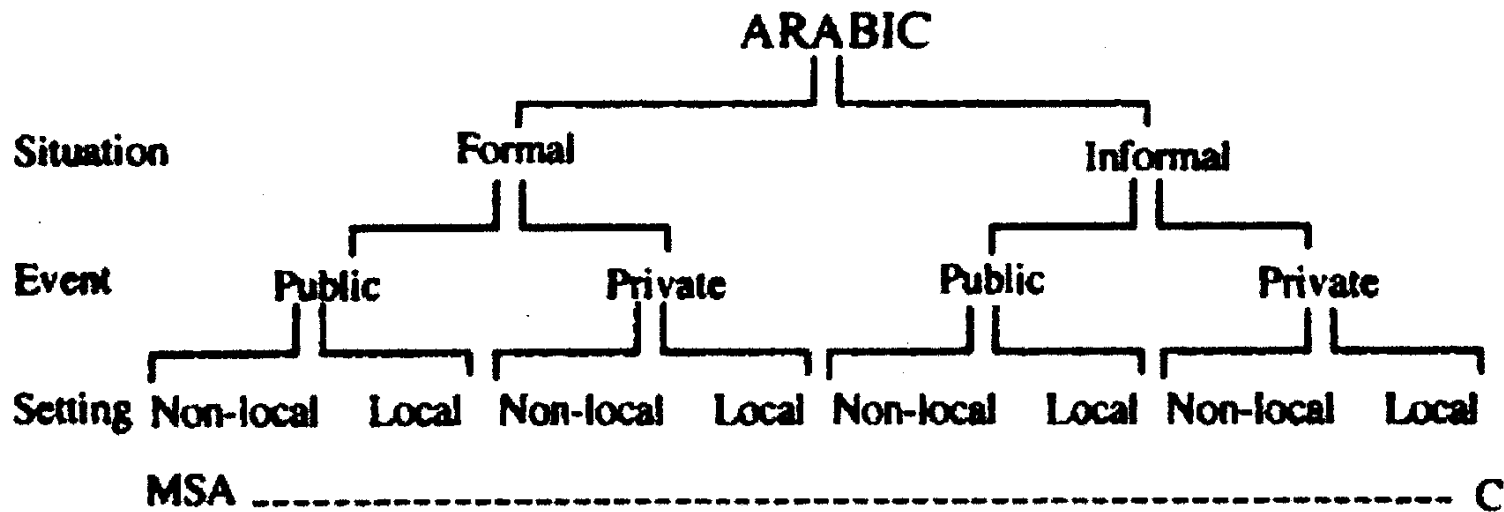


Figure 3. Arabic language continuum

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