

# Testing in MSA and Dialect

The Foreign Service Institute Model  
Testing in One Arabic

# FSI Speaking Test Parts

- Conversation
- Work-related exchange
- Interview

# FSI Test Takers

- DOS employees
  - Learned Arabic at FSI
  - Learned Arabic elsewhere
- Employees of other government agencies
  - Learned Arabic at FSI
  - Learned Arabic elsewhere

# FSI Old Test Format

## Two Protocols

- Interactive
- Separate MSA test protocol
- Separate dialect test protocol

# Old Test Challenges

- Defining boundaries (MSA/Dialect)
- Establishing boundaries between various dialects
- Establishing a system of credits and penalties based on use of MSA or dialect

# FSI 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: ILR descriptors
- 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**

# Use of Arabic

(by Educated Arabic Speakers)

- Speak formal and informal Arabic
- Move naturally between the two
- Select 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.