

Comparison of Tasks Employed in Mandarin Chinese Proficiency Tests for Natives Conducted in China and that in Hong Kong: One Country Two Systems

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Abstract

The State Language Proficiency Test (PSC) is the only recognized public Mandarin (Putonghua) Proficiency Test for natives in China, conducted by State Language Commission. Oral proficiency (one way speaking) is the only task or skill required. In Hong Kong, Test of Proficiency in Putonghua (TPP) was developed by Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA). Tasks / skills arranged include: speaking (one way and two ways), listening and transcription (Romanization). Other than TPP which is for members of general public, potential Putonghua teachers of primary or secondary schools have to pass a Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (Putonghua) (LPAT). There are also three language proficiency papers on speaking, listening and transcription respectively. Similar approach is adopted by a Peking University developed test, for testing the Putonghua proficiency of primary and secondary school students in Hong Kong. For convenience sake, only TPP is discussed and compared with PSC in this paper.

There is no proficiency test for reading and writing in Chinese for natives, neither in China nor in Hong Kong.

In China, Putonghua is used as the medium of instruction in schools from kindergarten to tertiary education. Most educated people from dialectal areas can communicate in Putonghua although with different accents. In this regard, listening ability seems not of a problem in China. It is therefore, the focus of PSC is on the standardization of pronunciation. That is why only oral test is arranged. In Hong Kong, Cantonese has been the medium of instruction in schools several decades before the return of sovereignty to China from British government in 1997. Putonghua is regarded as a second language.

Under the principle of One Country Two Systems, Hong Kong has the freedom of conducting their Putonghua tests in their own way: both speaking and

listening tests are arranged. And the focus of oral test is on communication, other than accuracy / standardization of pronunciation.

As for transcription, it is regarded as a tool for learning Putonghua, not as a component of the spoken language in China. In Hong Kong, transcription has long been regarded as a part of Mandarin / Putonghua learning and testing.

Specific tasks employed in the China and Hong Kong tests will be tabulated and compared. Tasks include reading aloud, oral presentation, conversation, recognition of standard language, listening comprehension, transcription, etc. Further comparison include: Opposite weighting distribution for the tasks of reading aloud and speaking, accuracy in pronunciation (PSC) versus communication competence (TPP), the availability of reference word lists and designated passages for reading aloud and designated topics for oral presentation (PSC), one way speaking (PSC) versus two ways dialogue (TPP), different tasks for the testing of recognition of standard Chinese, etc.

To conclude the paper, it also mentions new tasks in Putonghua proficiency testing in Hong Kong, i.e. to identify the wrong/ non-standard items, and testing through action/movement and games --- proficiency testing for small kids in kindergartens.

Different Focuses on Speaking Proficiency Testing for Natives: One-Way Speaking only versus both Oral and Aural Abilities

1.1 The State Language Proficiency Test (widely known as PSC, short form of Putonghua Shuiping Ceshi, referred as China test below) is the only recognized public Mandarin (Putonghua)(1) Proficiency Test for natives in China, conducted by State Language Commission. Oral proficiency (one-way speaking) is the only task or skill required. Announcers in broadcasting business should reach Grade 1 Level A, the highest level in the 3 grades 6 levels grading system. (2) Grade 1 Level B, the second highest, is the required proficiency level for Chinese Language teachers in Northern China. In Southern China, Grade 2 Level A, a lower level is allowed. For civil servants in China, Grade 3 Putonghua is the minimum requirement.

1.2 In Hong Kong, Test of Proficiency in Putonghua (TPP, referred as Hong Kong test below) was first administered in 1988 by Hong Kong

Examinations and Assessment Authority (HKEAA), well before 1994 when China test was developed. Tasks / skills employed in Hong Kong test include: speaking (one way and two ways), listening and transcription (Romanization). (Table 1) Other than TPP which is for members of general public with an estimated education level of secondary three or above, potential Putonghua teachers of primary or secondary schools have to pass a Language Proficiency Assessment for Teachers (Putonghua) (LPAT) before they can actually teach the subject in Hong Kong schools. There are three language proficiency papers on speaking, listening and transcription respectively. (3) LPAT was administered by HKEAA in 2001. Similar approach is adopted by a Peking University developed (in 2006) test, for testing the Putonghua proficiency of primary and secondary school students in Hong Kong. (4) For convenience sake, only TPP is discussed and compared with PSC in this paper. (5)

1.3 There is no official and recognized proficiency test for reading and writing in Chinese for natives, neither in China nor in Hong Kong.

1.4 Under the One Country Two Systems policy, Hong Kong has the advantage to conduct the China test (with the assistance from State Language Commission, Beijing) and the local test. People in Hong Kong have the privilege to choose either or both tests, if they wish. (6)

Table 1**Comparison of the Skills Tested in China and Hong Kong Putonghua Tests**

Titles of Putonghua Tests	Organization Bodies	Skills Tested			Target Groups
		Oral (speaking & reading aloud)+	Listening (& recognition of standard expressions)	Transcription	
PSC (China Test)	The State Language Commission, PRC*	√			Announcers in broadcasting business, teachers, civil servants & the general public in China
TPP (Hong Kong Test)	HKEAA (Hong Kong Examinations Authority)	√	√	√	The local people in Hong Kong

* With the assistance of the State Language Commission, Beijing, PRC, the Putonghua testing centers in Hong Kong tertiary institutions can conduct PSC for people in Hong Kong. The tertiary institutions include: Hong Kong University, Hong Kong Institute of Education, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Baptist University, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, City University of Hong Kong, Lingnan University, Open University, Shu Yan University, Chu Hai College and Hong Kong Vocational Training College.

+ For dialectal areas such as Guangdong Province and Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, a task on recognition of standard Chinese is required, which is incorporated in PSC, the oral proficiency test.

Why the Testing of Listening Ability is Unnecessary in China?

2 In China, Putonghua is regarded as native spoken language albeit there are seven major dialects. As a state policy, Putonghua is used as the medium of instruction in schools from kindergarten to tertiary education. Educated people from dialectal areas can communicate in Putonghua although with different accents. The language environment in this country with a population of 1,200 millions is mainly Putonghua. In this regard, listening ability seems not of a problem in China. It is therefore, the focus of the State Language Proficiency Test (PSC) is on accuracy, the standardization of pronunciation. That is why only oral test is arranged in PSC.

Why the Testing of Listening Ability is Necessary in Hong Kong?

3.1 In Hong Kong, over 95% of the 7 million people speak Cantonese. Cantonese has been the medium of instruction in schools (kindergarten, primary and most secondary) several decades before the return of sovereignty to China from British government in 1997. Putonghua / Mandarin is regarded as a second language (and taught as a subject in schools). Educated people in Hong Kong with limited knowledge in Putonghua can hardly communicate (i.e. speaking + listening) effectively with Putonghua speaking people from mainland China. (7) It is therefore, the testing of listening ability in Putonghua is a major component in Hong Kong.

3.2 Under the principle of One Country Two Systems, Hong Kong (a special administration region of China) has the freedom of conducting their Putonghua tests in their own way: both speaking and listening tests are arranged. And the focus of oral test is on communication, other than the standardization of pronunciation.

Different Points of View in the Testing of Transcription

4 As for transcription (Romanization of the sound system), it is regarded as a tool for learning Putonghua, not as a part of the spoken language in China. Transcription is therefore not included in the State's

PSC test. In Hong Kong, transcription has long been regarded as a part of Mandarin / Putonghua test (TPP). However, since 2006, candidates of TPP have the option to take transcription paper separately. The results of this part won't affect the general results of oral aural abilities, with exception of LPAT. Teachers also need to pass the transcription paper in LPAT (Putonghua) before they can teach Putonghua (as a subject) in schools in addition to the other three papers, i.e. speaking, listening and classroom language. Nowadays, the three parts of TPP (i.e. speaking, listening and transcription) become three independent papers. Candidates are free to take either one or all three papers.

Tasks Employed in Mandarin Chinese Proficiency Tests for Natives Conducted in China and that in Hong Kong

Tasks in PSC, the China test

5.1 PSC is an oral proficiency test. The objectives of tasks in the test are to find out the examinee's accuracy in pronunciation, fluency in reading aloud the written form of literature works, oral presentation ability (not relying on written script) and mastery of standard Chinese. The tasks in PSC with examples are given below. English translation is done by the author. Source: *Putonghua Shuiping Ceshi Shishi Gangyao* (PSC Outline for Implementation), compiled by Putonghua Training and Testing Centre, State Language Commission, published by Commercial Press, Beijing, PRC, 2004.

Testing time: about 13 min. Preparation time: about 10 min. Question papers are written in traditional Chinese. Papers in simplified characters could be given if requested.

There are five tasks in PSC (Table 2). They are:

Task 1: Reading Aloud Monosyllabic Words (100 syllables) 10 marks (out of 100 in total)

Example: Reading aloud the following:

畫, 八, 迷, 先, 毡, 皮, 幕, 美, 徹, 飛.....

Task 2: Reading Aloud Polysyllabic Words (100 syllables) 20 marks

Example: Reading aloud the following:

取得, 陽台, 兒童, 板凳兒, 混淆, 衰落, 分析, 防禦.....

Task 3: To Choose and to Decide (Recognition of Standard Putonghua) (8) 10 marks

Task 3A: Words

Example: Please choose and read aloud the correct Putonghua word (from a group of 5 words) (10 groups)

後生子, 後生崽里, 後生家, 後生仔, 小伙子 (ans.)

Task 3B: Pairing/matching of measure words and nouns (10 groups)

Example: Please pair up and read aloud the correct combination of measure word and noun (from a group of 10 measure words and 10 nouns)

一 (one) → 把 張 棵 支 扇 輛 條 間 頭 所 (measure words)

汽車 鑰匙 桌子 鈔票 樹 筆 牛 學校 門 草 (nouns)

Ans.

一 → 把 張 棵 支 扇 輛 條 間 頭 所
 / / / / / / / / / /
汽車 鑰匙 桌子 鈔票 樹 筆 牛 學校 門 草

Candidate should read aloud: 一(a)輛(measure word)汽車(car); 一把鑰匙 (a key); 一張桌子(a table); 一棵樹(a tree).....

Task 3C: word order or expression (5 groups)

Example: Please choose and read aloud the correct Putonghua sentence:

那部電影我看過 (ans.)

那部電影我有看

Task 4: Reading Aloud a Short Passage (400 syllables) 30 marks

Example: Please read aloud Passage No. 12

夕陽落山不久, 西方的天空, 還燃燒著一片橘紅色的晚霞。大海, 也被這霞光染成了紅色, 而且比天空的景色要壯觀。因為它是活動的, 每當一排排波浪湧起的時候, 那映照在浪峰上的霞光, 又紅又亮, 簡直就像一片片霍霍燃燒著的火焰, 閃爍著, 消失了。而後面的一排, 又閃爍著, 滾動著, 湧了開來。 . . .

Task 5: Oral Presentation (according to given topics) (3 min.) 30 marks

Example: Please speak according to one of the following topics:

1. 我的業餘生活 (My Amateur Life)
2. 我熟悉的地方 (The Place I am Familiar)

Tasks in TPP, the Hong Kong test

5.2 Traditionally, Putonghua in Hong Kong is regarded as one single spoken language (cf. Para. 1 above), rather than the spoken part of modern standard Chinese. Putonghua and the other two spoken languages (i.e. Cantonese and English) make up the trilingual part of the bi-literate (Chinese and English) and trilingual language policy in Hong Kong. TPP (Test of Putonghua Proficiency) is a public examination which consists of three parts: oral proficiency, listening and transcription. Each part is an independent test. Candidates can take one, two or three tests at a time. Individual certificates will be awarded to candidates whose individual performance reaches the standard of pass or above.

The general objective of the tasks in TPP is to find out the candidate's general proficiency level in Putonghua, including oral proficiency, listening and transcription. For over 20 years, oral aural is an integral part of the examination. Perhaps for the reason of comparing with PSC which has no listening tasks, the three parts under TPP became independent tests in recent years.

The tasks in TPP with examples are given below. English translation is done by the author. Source: *Testing Outlines and Grading Description of the Test of Putonghua Proficiency (Revised Edition, 2011)*, published by Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2011.

There are several tasks in each test under TPP (Table 2). They are:

- Oral proficiency: 3 tasks. Testing time: about 8 min. Preparation: about 8 min. The tasks are:

Task 1: Reading Aloud Words (50 characters) **and Dialogues** (100 characters) 40%

Example: Words:

浸, 翁, 活, 挽, 麻辣, 討論會, 不一而足.....

Dialogue:

A: 欸! 昨天參觀工展會, 有什麼收穫嗎?

B: 買了新產品。

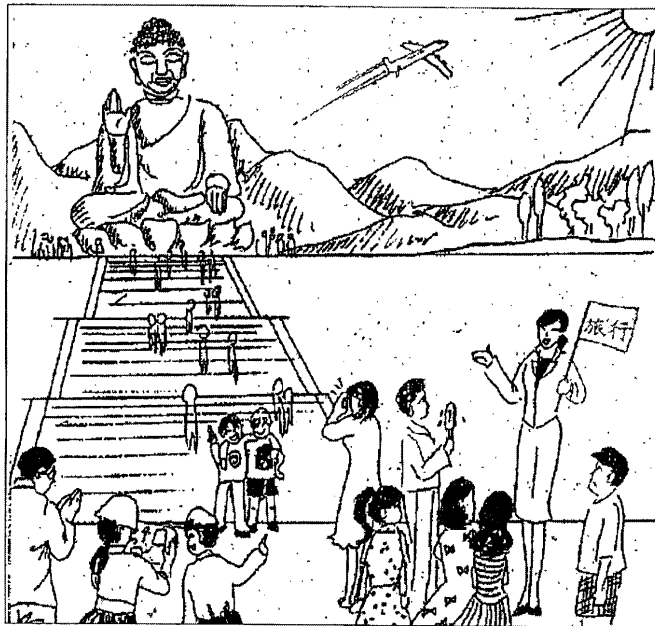
A: 快介紹介紹。

B: 罐裝染髮劑。一摠噴嘴兒, 把泡沫噴在梳子上, 往頭上一攏, 白髮漸漸變黑, 多省事。

Task 2: Oral Presentation according to a given topic and a picture
(choose either one, 2 min.) 30%

Example:(1)假如你要看病, 你會選擇中醫, 還是西醫? 請說明你的理由
(If you are sick, would you choose to see a Chinese herbalist, or a medical doctor? Why?)

(2) 看圖說話 (Speaking according to a picture)



Task 3: Discussion with examiners according to given situations (choose one from two, must follow the examiner's instructions. 3 min.) 30%

Example: (1) 你叫劉明。最近你愛了上網。你的朋友徐華為你擔心, 大家談起來。(Your name is Liu Ming. Recently, you love to work online. Your friend Xu Hua is worrying about you. You two are chatting...)

(2) 你叫劉明。你很喜歡養寵物。你的朋友徐華也想養寵物, 就向你請教。你和他/她談起來。(Your name is Liu Ming. You like to keep pets very much. Your friend Xu Hua also wants to keep pets. You two are

chatting...)

- Listening: 4 tasks. Testing time: 40 min. The tasks are:

Task 4: Identification of Specified Words (multiple choice, 12 questions) 6% (Listen to the recording of a sentence and a repeated word once and then find out the meaning of the word in the sentence from a group of four written in Chinese on the question book)

Example: A 坦途(ans.) B 談吐 C 貪圖 D 唐突

Task 5: Listening Comprehension on Idiomatic Expression used in Sentence Context (multiple choice, 5 questions) 10% (Listen to the recording of a sentence and a repeated idiomatic expression and then find out the meaning of the idiomatic expression in the sentence from a group of four written in Chinese on the question book)

Example: The candidate hears the recording (not appearing in written form): 他就是那麼個人，你犯不著理他。(sentence) 犯不著 (repeated word/expression)

Then choose:

A 不應該 B 不值得(ans.) C 不可能 D 不至於

Task 6: Recognition of Standard Expressions (multiple choice, 5 questions) 10% (Listen to the recording of four sentences or expressions once and then find out the correct usage in standard Putonghua. No questions or items to be chosen could be seen from the question book)

Example: The candidate hears the recording (not appearing in written form): A. 黑墨墨 B. 紅當當 C. 黃燦燦 D. 白雪雪

Then make his /her choice on the answer sheet.

C (ans.)

Task 7: Listening Comprehension on Passages (multiple choice, 35 questions) 74% (Listen to the recording of dialogues, passages, stories or articles once and then find out the correct answer from a group of four written in Chinese on the question book)

Example: The candidate hears the recording (not appearing in written form): 要是你們一個人也不參加，那才不夠意思哪!

Then choose:

- A 如果只有一個人參加就不好了
- B 你們最好一個人參加
- C 幸好你們有人參加了 (ans.)
- D 幸好你們全部都參加

This is an example of identification of hidden message. There are other questions. The purposes of which are to test the candidates' abilities in: identification of key point(s), reasoning and determination, conclusion / summing up the main ideas, understanding cultural difference(s) etc.

The answer sheet of listening test is to be marked by computers. Candidates are requested to use an H.B. pencil to fill up the small boxes, which they think representing the correct answers.

- Transcription: 3 tasks. Testing time: 30 min. The tasks are:

Task 8: Identification of Transcribed Speech Sounds (multiple choice, 10 questions) 10% (To choose an answer written in Chinese from a group of four, which corresponds to a given transcription written in Hanyu Pinyin or Mandarin Phonetic Letters) (9)

Example: shǎng

- A 爽 B 賞(ans.) C 想 D 噪

Task 9: Reading Comprehension on Transcribed (in Pinyin /MPL) Words & Passages (filling blanks, 60 syllables) 60% (To write down given words in Chinese based on single transcribed symbols or specific symbols in a passage. Both traditional and standard simplified Chinese characters are accepted.)

Example: Zhèli de chūntiān tài (1) cháoshī, (2) wù yòu dà, dì hé qiáng dōu (3) shèn shuǐ.

Ans. (1) 潮濕 (2) 霧 (3) 滲

Task 10: Transcribing Chinese Characters (filling blanks, 30 syllables) 30% (To transcribe given single words or specific words in a passage written in Chinese)

Example: 大自然每一種(1) 色彩, 對光的 (2) 吸收和反射程度都不 (3) 一樣.

Ans. (1) sè (2) xī (3) yí

References for Setting Questions

6.1 For PSC, words for reading aloud come from two word lists titled “Word Lists for Putonghua Proficiency Test: Word List 1 and Word List 2” which consists of 6,595 and 10,460 items respectively. The passage for reading aloud for individual candidate would be one of the 60 designated passages/articles. For oral presentation, examinees are asked to make a 3-minutes presentation on one given topic (chosen from two), which comes from a range of 30 designated topics (please see PSC Outline, 2004). For the task to choose and to decide (Recognition of Standard Putonghua), there are two reference comparative lists between Putonghua and dialects: words and grammar (also see PSC Outline, 2004).

6.2 Test papers are generated by computers according to requirements specified in the PSC Outline for implementation (2004). For example, the requirements for setting questions for reading aloud monosyllables and polysyllables are:

- 70% of the 100 syllables are selected (by computer) from Word List 1 and the rest 30% comes from Word List 2.
- Within the 100 syllables, each initial appears not less than 3 times and each final appears not less than 2 times. For the four tones, their appearance is more or less in balanced arrangement.

6.3 When PSC is conducted in Hong Kong, the computer generated papers are prepared by State Language Commission, Beijing before each test conducted in the Putonghua testing centers in the 12 tertiary institutions.

6.4 There is no reference word list or designated dialogues, nor designated topics for presentation for TPP, the Hong Kong test. It says in the Test Outline for TPP (2011), the content of questions (e.g. reading aloud and transcription) come from commonly used words. Subject matters for oral presentation and situational dialogue would be daily life on working and learning, hobbies, attitudes etc. And any scenario could be used as the subject matter for the test of listening abilities. (Table 2)

Table 2

Tasks Employed in Mandarin Proficiency Tests for Natives Conducted in China and Hong Kong

Titles of Tests	PSC (China test)			TPP (Hong Kong test)				
Skills	Reading Aloud	Recognition of Standard Expressions	Oral Presentation	Oral Proficiency			Listening Abilities	Transcription
Tasks	1 & 2: Reading aloud words (200 characters) 4: Reading aloud a short passage (400 characters)	3: Choose and read aloud correct usage in Standard Chinese	5: Speaking according to a given topic (choose one from two)	1: Reading aloud words (50 characters) and dialogue (100 characters)	2: Speaking according to a given topic and a picture (choose either one)	3: Discussion according to a given situation (choose one from two)		
References for Setting Questions	Two word lists and 60 passages	Two comparative lists	A list of 30 topics	Common words and things	Daily life on working and learning	Hobbies, working, attitudes, etc	Any scenario could be used as the subject matter	Commonly used words in modern Chinese

Comparison of Tasks Employed in PSC and TPP

Comparison of the Tasks Employed in PSC and TPP

7.1 There is only oral test in PSC, whereas in TPP, there are oral test as well as written test which consist of tasks in the testing of listening, recognition of standard Chinese and transcription (Table 2).

Both PSC and TPP require the examinee to do the same tasks for oral proficiency testing (Table 3). They are:

- Reading aloud (monosyllables / polysyllables words and a passage)
- Speaking (oral presentation or/and situational dialogue)

However, to cope with their individual objectives and focuses, the weightings of these two kinds of tasks in individual tests are different. Please see 7.2 below.

In addition to a one-way speaking task, i.e. oral presentation, a two-way speaking task, i.e. situational dialogue is arranged in TPP. Please see 7.5 below.

Although it pays attention to test the recognition of standard Chinese in both tests, the relevant tasks in the two tests are different. Please see 7.6 below.

As oral aural abilities in Putonghua are regarded as both important in TPP in Hong Kong, tasks for the testing of listening are arranged. And, the ability to transcribe Putonghua is regarded as a part in learning Putonghua in Hong Kong, tasks for this purpose is also arranged. Please see 7.7 below.

Table 3**Comparison of the Tasks in PSC and TPP with respect to Oral Proficiency**

Tasks	PSC (China test)	TPP (Hong Kong test)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reading Aloud Monosyllabic Words (100 syllables) ● Reading Aloud Polysyllabic Words (100 syllables) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ (100 syllables, 10%) √ (100 syllables, 20%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ (50 syllables, 10%) √
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reading Aloud a Short Passage ● Reading Aloud Dialogue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ (400 syllables, 30%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ (100 syllables, 30%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognition of Standard Expressions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ (25 multiple choice typed questions, 10%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ *
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Oral Presentation according to a given topic ● Oral Presentation according to a given picture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ (3 min. 30%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ (2 min. 30%) or √ (2 min. 30%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Situational Dialogue 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ (3 min. 30%)
Total	(100%)	(100%)

* This is a task for listening test in TPP, i.e. Task 6. Please see Para. 5.2.

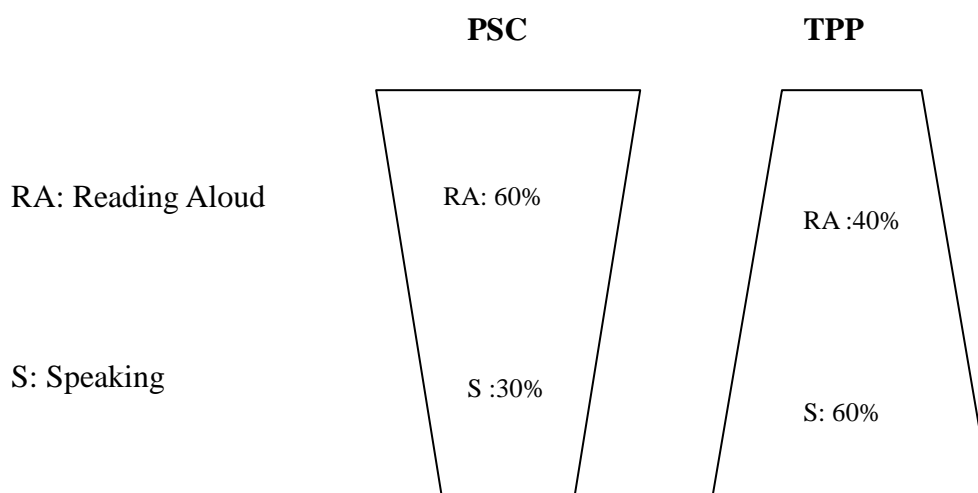
Opposite Weighting Distribution of Reading Aloud and Speaking in PSC and TPP

7.2 To reflect the importance of the mastery of accuracy in pronunciation in Putonghua, the China test requires candidate to read aloud 600 characters / syllables (words: 200 and a passage: 400) which comprises 60% of PSC test. On the other hand, TPP requires 150

characters / syllables (words: 50 and dialogue: 100) for the task of reading aloud, only 1/4 of that in PSC. The percentage of reading aloud in TPP is 40% whereas the percentage of that in PSC is 60%.

The opposite weighting distribution could also be seen in the tasks for the testing of speaking, the objective of which is to test the candidate's competence in verbal communication. PSC requires 3 minutes oral presentation, which constitutes 30% of the China test. There is a much higher weighting for speaking in TPP, the Hong Kong test: 2 minutes in oral presentation plus 3 minutes in situational dialogue which constitutes 60% in the TPP oral proficiency test in Hong Kong (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Opposite Weighting Distribution of Reading Aloud and Speaking in PSC and TPP



Accuracy in Pronunciation (PSC) versus Communication Competence (TPP)

7.3 The marking scheme of PSC shows that it demands a high level of accuracy in pronunciation for the higher level (i.e. Level 1) achievers in PSC test. For the task of reading aloud, 0.2 and 0.1 marks will respectively be deducted for one syllable wrongly and defectively (e.g. speech sound with dialectal accent) pronounced (see PSC Outline, 2004).

For the task of oral presentation, 20 out of 30 marks are given to accuracy in pronunciation. The distribution of the other 10 marks is: 5 each to the mastery of standard Chinese and natural fluency. Content of speech is not the major concern in PSC. No details of marking scheme are given in the TPP document.

It is therefore, the announcers in broadcasting business in China are all excellent in speech sound in Putonghua as they need to obtain Level 1 Grade A (the highest level) before they are qualified to do the job. An examinee who achieves Level 1 Grade A means that he/she loses less than 3 marks (obtained 97-100 marks) in PSC test. In TPP, the highest level is Distinction. Marks obtained are from 90 to 100.

Reasons for the availability of Reference Word Lists and Designated Passages for Reading Aloud, and Designated Topics for Presentation

7.4 General speaking, for language proficiency testing, there are no designated articles for the task of reading aloud, nor designated topics for the task in speaking or presentation. It is said that if you do make good preparation on reading aloud the word lists and the 60 passages, and to well prepare in advance the 30 designated topics before you actually attend the PSC test, your Putonghua proficiency will for sure be improved (Song X. Q., Tian X. L.)

Of the 30 designated topics for the task of presentation in PSC, 80% (24) are related to personal daily life, such as my wish (or dream), my learning life, the person I respect, animals I like, childhood memory, occupation I like, unforgettable journey, my friends, literature I like, amateur life, season I like, learning experience in Putonghua, holiday life, grow-up history, my native place, festival I like, my school/ organization, movie star I like, books I like, place I would like to go, etc. The rest (20%, 6) are special discussion topics, such as discussions on hygiene and health, on dressing, scientific development and social life, on delicious food, on occupation ethics, on environmental protection, etc.

No reference word lists are given for the preparation of the TPP

tasks; neither is there any designated passages/ articles for the task of reading aloud and designated topics for the task of oral presentation. In the TPP document, it only says commonly used words and things will be considered when setting questions, and daily life on working and learning will be the subject matters for the task or oral presentation and situational dialogue.

One way Speaking versus Two ways Dialogue

7.5 There is a one-way speaking task (i.e. oral presentation) in both PSC and TPP tests. In PSC, it requires the examinee to speak according to a given topic (choose one from two), from a list of 30 designated topics. Similarly, in TPP, it requires the examinee to speak according to a given topic or a picture (choose either one). However, TPP, the Hong Kong test requires the examinee to do one more task on two-way communication, i.e. situational dialogue, discussion with examiner on a given situation (choose one from two) on daily working and learning life. Although the task has one extra objective to test the examinee's ability in language reaction, research shows that the results of these two tasks (i.e. one way speaking and two ways dialogue) in Putonghua tests are highly correlated. (Tian X.L.), it is understandable for PSC, the China test to require the examinee to do the one way oral presentation only.

Different Tasks for the Testing of Recognition of Standard Expressions

7.6 Recognition of standard expressions is required by both tests, through different tasks. For PSC, candidates are asked to choose and read aloud the correct answer from a series of five items/words. For TPP, that is one of the multiple choice typed questions in listening test. Candidates need to write down the correct letter/alphabet representing the correct answer after hearing the recording of all four sentences. No written questions or items to be chosen could be seen from the question book. Please refer to Task 3 of 5.1 and Task 6 of 5.2 above for details of the task in PSC and TPP, the China and Hong Kong Putonghua proficiency tests respectively.

Tasks included in TPP but not in PSC --- Listening and Transcription

7.7 Unlike PSC which is an oral proficiency test, TPP has listening

and transcription skills tests (cf. Section 2, 3 and 4 above). There are four tasks in the testing of listening abilities. They are all multiple choice typed questions, including:

- Identification of speech sounds (see Task 4 in 5.2 for details)
- Listening comprehension on idiomatic expressions in sentence context (see Task 5 in 5.2 for details)
- Recognition of standard expressions (see Task 6 in 5.2 for details)
- Listening comprehension on passages (see Task 7 in 5.2 for details)

There are three tasks in the testing of transcription abilities. They are:

- Identification of transcribed speech sounds (see Task 8 in 5.2 for details)
- Reading comprehension on transcribed (in Pinyin /MPL) words & passage (see Task 9 in 5.2 for details)
- Transcribing Chinese characters (see Task 10 in 5.2 for details)

It is worth mentioning that the traditional MPL (Mandarin Phonetic Letters) which is still commonly used in Taiwan is also given parallel to the popular Romanized Pinyin System. Candidates are free to choose either one in answering the question. There are only a handful of people in each test, who choose MPL in doing the transcription task. These candidates most probably receive their primary education in Taiwan.

Conclusion and New Tasks in Mandarin Proficiency Testing

A Simple Oral Test in China versus a Variety of Tests with Multiple Tasks in Hong Kong

8.1 There is only one Putonghua proficiency test for natives (i.e. PSC) in China (with a population of 1,200 millions). In Hong Kong (with a population of 7 millions), under the One Country Two Systems policy, it offers a variety of Putonghua proficiency tests for local Cantonese speaking natives, which caters for the needs of different people. These

tests are:

- LPAT(P)(10): for student teachers of Putonghua or Chinese language teachers who are going to teach Chinese language in Putonghua.
- TPP: for general public with an estimated education level of Secondary 3 or above.
- GAPSK Secondary(11): for Secondary 1 to Secondary 3 Students
- GAPSK Upper Primary(11): for Primary 4 to Primary 6 Students
- GAPSK Lower Primary(11): for Primary 1 to Primary 3 Students

In addition to the common tasks of reading aloud (words and passages), recognition of standard Chinese and oral presentation, there are two more tasks in Hong Kong tests, i.e. listening and transcription (see Para. 2, 3 and 4 above). For TPP, it requires an extra task on situational dialogue between the examiner and the examinee.

New Tasks in Putonghua Proficiency Tests: Identifying the Wrong Item

8.2 It is a common practice that examinees attending Putonghua proficiency tests are asked to find out / identify the correct / right items (from a group of 4-6 items. Please see Task 3 in PSC in 5.1 and Task 6 in TPP in 5.2 for examples). However, the Peking University developed GAPSK has tasks requiring the candidates to identify the wrong items in the task of identification of speech sounds (listening) and in the task of recognition of standard Chinese. An example of the task of identification of the non-standard usage in listening is given below.

Listen and Choose the Non- standard Item: (Listen to the recording of the sentence and identify the non-standard item. 5 marks)

這次來香港可以住多幾天。

A.次 B.來香港 C.住多(ans)

New Testing Tasks for Small Kids: Testing through Action/Movement and Games

8.3 To cater for the needs of parents in Hong Kong, GAPSK recently

launched a new Putonghua proficiency test for kindergarten pupils in Hong Kong. There are three tasks in the test, i.e. listening, answering simple questions on a picture and reading aloud (short sentences and children's songs). No pen-and-paper test is required for kids. On the other hand, the concepts of action / movement and games are adopted in order to release the pressure to young children. It is hoped that young kids' Putonghua proficiency can truly be tested in an interesting and relax situation. Please see Appendix for an example of listening and speaking tasks for small kids.

Notes:

- (1) The term "Putonghua" meaning "common spoken language" is used in Mainland China for the sole reason of promoting the national spoken language in dialectal areas in China.
- (2) The 6 levels, from high to low in the grading system are: 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3A and 3B. There are three levels in Hong Kong test, namely: distinction, credit and pass.
- (3) Teachers have to take and pass one more paper on Classroom Language when they are actually teaching Putonghua in schools.
- (4) Known as GAPSK (Gang-Ao Putonghua Shuiping Kaoshi, Putonghua Proficiency Test for Hong Kong and Macau). The test, developed by Peking University and operated by GAPSK Examination Committee in Hong Kong from 2006, was specially designed for school students in Hong Kong. There are three kinds of test in GAPSK, namely: GAPSK for Secondary Students, GAPSK for Upper Primary Students and GAPSK for Lower Primary Students. In May 2012, GAPSK launched a new Putonghua proficiency test for kindergarten pupils in Hong Kong. Please see Para. 8.3 above.
- (5) There is a series of official Putonghua proficiency tests in the history of Putonghua testing in Hong Kong. They all adopted the same approach, i.e. with tasks in speaking, listening and transcription. Advanced Level of Putonghua Proficiency Test was developed and implemented in 1990 and ceased to operate in 2008. Putonghua subject in School Certificate Examination was developed and implemented in 2000 and ceased to operate in 2011. TPP is the local Putonghua proficiency test with a longest history---24 years.
- (6) PSC is more popular in Hong Kong as seen from the number of local people taking the test. 75,152 candidates attended PSC in Hong Kong in the past 15 years (1996-2011), as officially released by State Language Commission in the 15 anniversary of PSC operation in Hong Kong. That is, about 5,000 per year. This is about ten times of the people (i.e. about 500 or less) who attend TPP per year. Please see Ho K.C. (1997).
- (7) In China (including Hong Kong), we share the same writing system, i.e. Chinese characters (simplified or traditional). Reading and writing among people in different dialectal areas is not a problem.
- (8) In Northern areas in China, this task might not be necessary. If it is the case, the number of marks assigned to oral presentation is increased from 30 to 40.
- (9) Mandarin Phonetic Letters/ Symbols (MPL), a compulsory component in Taiwan's primary education, is still commonly used in Taiwan. Since this is not a Romanized system, MPL is not given in this paper.
- (10) Cf. Para. 1.2 and Note 3 above.
- (11) See Note 4 above.

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Appendix:

Examples of the tasks of testing Putonghua proficiency of kindergarten pupils in Hong Kong.

Source: *Testing Outlines of the Test of Putonghua Proficiency for Kindergarten Pupils (2012)*, published by Han Yu Press, 2012. And *Mock Examination Papers for the Test of Putonghua Proficiency for Kindergarten Pupils (2012)*, published by Han Yu Press, 2012. English translation is done by the author.

(Children are warmly welcome to play games by a smiling lady examiner)

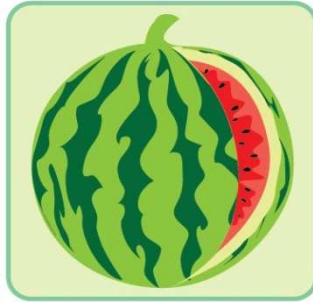
Part One: Listening

● **Task 1: Listen and Choose the right answer**

(The examinee is shown two pictures with a letter A or B underneath, and given two plates with a letter A and B respectively)



A



B

音：樂樂愛吃西瓜。(Recording: Lele likes eating watermelon)

問：樂樂愛吃什麼？(Examiner asks: What does Lele like?)

Ans. (The kid would score if he raises Plate B)



● **Task 2: Action according to Instruction**

(The child is invited to pay attention to the things on the table)



• 請你從盤子裏拿出一輛藍色小汽車。(Examiner asks: Please take out a blue

car from the tray)

- 請你將兩把雨傘放進盤子裏。(Examiner asks: Please put two umbrellas into the tray)

(The child would score if he does it correctly)



Part Two: Speaking

● Task 3: Answer Questions

你叫什麼名字啊? (What is your name?)

你喜歡吃什麼水果? (What fruits do you like?)

● Task 4: Speaking according to a Picture



(Examiner asks and the child responds)

天上飛著多少只小鳥？ (How many birds are there flying in the sky?)

天上飛著 3 只小鳥。 (There are five birds flying in the sky)

地上有多少朵花？ (How many flowers are there on the ground?)

地上有 5 朵花。 (There are five flowers on the ground)

● **Task 5: Reading Aloud short Sentences and Children's Song**

小明不愛喝汽水。 (Xiao Ming doesn't like soda water)

弟弟喜歡跳舞。 (My younger brother likes dancing)

一去二三里， (Children's song)

煙村四五家；

亭台六七座，

八九十支花。

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