know your level in Arabic, a linguistic capsule in the concept of Arabic proficiency

Mahmoud elshehawy[1]

[1]University of Alexandria

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Abstract

Before embarking on the present study, raising its questions, and answering them, I would like to start with an introduction to show the significance of the study and to explain the rationale behind choosing it. Due to the openness in the field of teaching Arabic for non-speakers of Arabic many researchers have joined the field—researchers who have set teaching Arabic according to its skills as their main goal. Accordingly, all those researchers have resorted to educational workbooks that were set according to the standards of CEFRand ACTFL and their requirements because these are the most popular accredited frameworks of teaching languages and learning them. Generally, there is nothing wrong with that, but one feels obliged to point out the fact that these workbooks should be preceded by several steps before using them for teaching and learning purposes. One of these endeavors that fall under the educational process, and upon which the educational process depend as a major constituent of the educational process is the placement test of the foreign learners of Arabic and its requirements with the purpose of placing them in their relevant levels. From this point, learners would be immersed in learning the Arabic language according to their performance and their linguistic capabilities which would manifest in different tests.

Based on that, setting placement tests and authorizing them in educational institutions has become of the utmost importance since it plays a major effective role in determining the performance of a learner and their linguistic competence on the one hand, and it accounts for the backwash that befalls the learner due to the placement test on the other hand. It is noteworthy that this term "backwash" that Arthur Hughes has devised in his book entitled Testing Language Teachers clearly explains the reactions to placement tests, be it positive reactions or negative ones. As a result, including that type of testing in the educational process is undoubtedly valid since it is a requirement that precedes language learning immersion on the one hand, and it would encourage the learner to learn Arabic or repel them away from learning it on the other hand.

In light of that, the research questions arise. One of these questions is: Are placement tests of the Arabic language set according to the standards of competence and performance? If so, how could a learner's receptive skills of reading and listening be measured since they differ from productive skills of speaking and writing? These two questions have led me to a third major question which is the main goal and the epitome of the present study which is: How can an advanced exam be set, away from any familiar stereotypes, bearing in mind achieving a communicative function with all learners of Arabic who speak different language since communication is a pivotal key of learning a language and teaching it?

In conclusion, this study answers all these questions, and attached to it is a placement test of the Arabic language as a foreign language. On the one hand, the test is set according to the findings of this study, and on the other hand, it is a confirmation of the credibility of the present study away from any unjust theorizing.

know your level in Arabic, a linguistic capsule in the concept of Arabic proficiency.

Made by

Dr. Mahmoud El-Shehawy Ismail
A Lecturer in TAFL Centre- University of Alexandria
Academic Counselor in Arizona State University- ASU
Preparatory Academy

Translated by

HebatAllah Hassan El-Meligy

Introduction

Before embarking on the present study, raising its questions and answering them, I would like to start with an introduction to show the significance of the study and to explain the rationale behind choosing it. Due to the openness in the field of teaching Arabic for non-speakers of Arabic many researchers have joined the field—researchers who have set teaching Arabic according to its skills as their main goal. Accordingly, all those researchers have resorted to educational workbooks that were set according to the standards of CEFR[1] and ACTFL[2] and their requirements because these are the most popular accredited frameworks of teaching languages and learning them. Generally, there is nothing wrong with that, but one feels obliged to point out the fact that these workbooks should be preceded by several steps before using them for teaching and learning purposes. One of these endeavors that fall under the educational process, and upon which the educational process depend as a major constituent of the educational process is the placement test of the foreign learners of Arabic and its requirements with the purpose of placing them in their relevant levels. From this point, learners would be immersed in learning the Arabic language according to their performance and their linguistic capabilities which would manifest in different tests.

Based on that, setting placement tests and authorizing them in educational institutions has become of the utmost importance since it plays a major effective role in determining the performance of a learner and their linguistic competence on the one hand, and it accounts for the backwash[3] that befalls the learner due to the placement test on the other hand. It is noteworthy that this term "backwash" that Arthur Hughes has devised in his book entitled ***Testing Language Teachers*** clearly explains the reactions to placement tests, be it positive reactions or negative ones. As a result, including that type of

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[1] https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/level-descriptions

[2] https://www.actfl.org/

[3] Backwash means the effect of the placement test on the process of teaching language and learning it, which could be beneficial sometimes and harmful other times. As a result, the effects of the test are no longer exclusive to only learning since not only is testing a tool of measuring but also, it expands to the way the assessment affects the entire society. To better understand the term 'backwash', refer to Hughes, Arthur. *Testing for Language Teachers.* Cambridge University Press. Second Edition. 2003, pp. 1-3.
Refer also to Fulcher, Glenn. and Davidson, Fred. *Language Testing and Assessment: An advanced Resource Book*, Routledge. 2007, pp. 221-229. It is worth noting that this term is the same across reference books, which is 'backwash', and it is defined the same way across all textbooks and references which explain it briefly or in detail. Apart from its figurative use in the English language, the term in this context means both the negative and positive reactions to placement tests.

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In conclusion, this study answers all these questions, and attached to it is a placement test of the Arabic language as a foreign language. On the one hand, the test is set according to the findings of this study, and on the other hand, it is a confirmation of the credibility of the present study away from any unjust theorizing.

Placement tests between competence and performance

Before attempting to explain the scholarly goal that would be achieved through placement tests conforming to the standards of both competence[4] and performance[5], it is worth mentioning that key role of linguistic communication since it is the main focus of the research as pointed out before. As a matter of fact, a discussion of linguistic communication is key to the present study as well since it is one of the major functions of all human languages; people do not speak so they move their vocal cords, but they speak so that they communicate something to their recipients. In other words, "they

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[4] Competence means a speaker's/learner's command of the implicit linguistic capacity to express whatever meaning that comes up in their mind. It enables the speaker to generate an infinite number of sentences that they have never produced or heard before. It also enables the speaker of the language to understand these sentences when received, and even judge its linguistic accuracy. The linguistic competence of any individual represents the linguistic system that they have acquired or learned, with all its phonetic, lexical, morphological and grammatical rules.

[5] Performance is the tangible manifestation of competence, or its practical application, and it does not have to correspond with the linguistic system. For further knowledge and research, refer to Chomsky, N. (1985): *Aspects of The Theory of Syntax.* Cambridge, Mass, M.I.T. Press. pp. 3-18. Refer also to De Saussure, F. (2011): Course in General Linguistics. Columbia University Press, New York. The reason I chose both references is that Chomsky has been influenced by de Saussure's distinction between language and speaking in his explanation of the notions of competence and performance. He views language as a result of linguistic collective work whereas speaking is purely individual work. Accordingly, he defines language as the tongue without speaking, and it is the result of linguistic habits that enable the individual to understand and be understood.

speak with a purpose which would not be communicated successfully unless their recipient understands that purpose."[6]

The process of linguistic communication is evident in conveying a message from a sender (first person narrator, speaker, or addresser) through sending it to another person who is a recipient (second person, or listener or addressee) provided that both participants of the communicative act/event (addresser and addressee) are in agreement beforehand on a symbolic system. Naturally, this system is made up of linguistic signs which are the lexicons, which are made up of linguistic elements that are the phonemes, morphemes, not to mention that this system includes a pattern of distinct rules which make up the grammar that governs and coordinates lexical items, phonemes and morphemes.[7]

The reader may conclude from all of that that the process of linguistic communication is only meant for communication purposes which is something that has drawn the attention of linguists who highlight the significance of a speaker's rhetorical purposes which are known as ***pragmatic intentions***[8] in their research. Lexical items are two-faces coins: some lexical items could be ***signifiers*** (those conjure up audible or visual images), and they could be ***the signified*** (the thing being referred to through these images). The process of reference is made possible through using these lexical items, with their connotative and denotative meanings, to make up a sentence, and this reference could be perfectly understood through the syntactic context.[9] As a result, the process of speech production is a process that requires implementing thought and cognition. To better understand the purpose of speech production, there should be mutual contextual beliefs between both participants of the communicative event that are based on two intuitions upon which both participants depend. The first intuition is the linguistic intuition and the second one is the communicative intuition, and they both serve to

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[6] Bach, K. and Harnish. R. M.: *Linguistic Communication and speech acts.* Cambridge, Mass. And London, The MIT Press, 1979 p.3.

[7] Look up Moustafa Hemeeda, *The System of Attachment and Connection in the Syntax of the Arabic Sentence*. (1997). Dar Noubar, Cairo, First Edition. (pp.13-14)

[8] Pragmatic school is a philosophical American school that sets practical results as standards to measure the value of philosophical ideas and their credibility, for instance: J. A. Fodor, T. Bever, M. Garrett. K. Bach, R. Harnish Exchanged contextual ideas: a clear system that explains how ideas are displayed through a speaker's intentions and how the listener understands them.

Linguistic intuition: a listener's assumption that a linguistic expression means to the speaker what it means to him, and the speaker sharing the same assumption.

Communicative intuition: a collective exchanged idea that is shared by a linguistic group. It means that whenever a member of the group says something to another member, they do that to convey an expressive purpose that is comprehensible.

[9] Lyons, J. (1970). *New horizons in linguistics.* Harmondsworth, Penguin. pp. 51-52.

convey the meaning that the speaker intends, and to help the listener or the reader as a recipient on the other hand. The best example for this is what Harnish and Bach maintain in their research about mutual contextual beliefs through the different meanings of "I love you like my brother" which, when uttered between two men who live on the same street; it would mean that they are not brothers, but the addresser indeed loves his addressee as he loves his own sibling. In case of a setting change, when that same sentence is uttered between two conflicting soldiers in a war, the purpose of communication would be conveying feelings of hatred towards the addressee through the use of irony/sarcasm. In case of using the same sentence when the addresser is a woman and her addressee is a man, the meaning would change according to the gender of the addresser being a female in which case the communicative purpose of the addresser/speaker would be to draw the boundaries of her relationship with her male addressee/recipient which would be easily conveyed to him through his communicative intuition as a recipient/listener to this exchange—a communicative intuition that is key when it comes to the listener/addressee understanding the transactional purposes of the speaker/addresser. These shared beliefs are not only exclusive to both participants (speaker and listener) in a communicative event, but rather, they are shared beliefs amongst the members or participants of a linguistic group in general.[10] Therefore, for the communicative event to be successful, it is highly significant for both participants of the communicative event to abide by a shared background that is suitable for the shared contextual situation and that conforms to what all members of the linguistic group (that both participants belong to) share as a whole.

So, why does the present study open with the process of linguistic communication as a starting point of the research? In fact, discussion of linguistic communication is inescapable if one is to research competence and performance due to the interdisciplinary nature of the relationship between the process of linguistic communication on the one hand, and both performance and competence on the other hand. It is best to discuss these interdisciplinary relations before stating the role of competence and performance that govern the standards of setting placement tests so that the goals and findings of the present study are made clearer for the reader. The educational process that is part of the communicative approach aims to eliminate the method of copying information and knowledge from only one source (the class teacher). It also aims to achieve a focus on the learner and fulfil a learner's needs with the

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[10] Bach. K. and Harnish. R. M.: *Linguistic communication and speech acts.* Cambridge, Mass. and London, the MIT Press, 1982. P. 4-6

purpose of making him/her reach their full potential in a way that would suit the age of technology and the modern means of communication. In other words, the whole educational process is more like an orchestra concert where a maestro who uses signs and gestures that are only understood by the orchestra members to direct them to produce symphonies that are masterful work on arts.

Language teaching classes that revolve around the axis of the communicative approach and believe in communication as the main goal of languages are indeed like harmonious orchestra concerts. Part of that same image are the standards of competence and performance, since, for example, a piano player can master several musical tracks, and those tracks would stand as a testimony to his competence[11] as a piano player. The same applies to placement tests that conform to the standards of competence and performance, and that is because they deal with both participants (sender and recipient) where the sent message is represented through the text that the examined student receives as a form of productive competence[12], and where the reception would also be represented through the examined student as well where reception would be classified as understanding and deductive skills as a form of receptive competence[13] that is manifested through listening and reading. Understanding and deduction are also evident in a learner's ability to merge both types of competence (productive and receptive) together since both productive skills of writing and speaking require the understanding of instructions and deducing the functional goals that lead to productivity in placement tests. As a result, placement tests and scaling them from beginner to advanced represent the performance of the examined student which in turn reflects both types of competence (receptive and productive) of the student. That is due to the fact that placement tests measure learners' competence accurately with the aim of determining the language-learning challenges that would face them before placing them in their respective levels to embark on their journey of acquiring and learning the intended foreign language. Placement tests also help students better understand their linguistic challenges and how to overcome them through their learning journey. Accordingly, they become aware through their language acquisition journey of the challenges that they would have overcome, and the challenges that they would still need to work on and overcome.

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[11] Di Pietro. R.: *Language structures in contrast*. Rowley, Mass, Newbury House, 1971. pp. 19-21.

[12] Productive competence: it includes productive skills such as speaking and writing.
[13] Receptive skills include language skills of reception and absorption, and those are listening and reading.

As a result, placement tests should abide by the standards of competence and performance which are highly significant for the educational process in general, and for the process of acquiring foreign languages in particular. That is because competence differs from one learner to another; especially within productive and receptive competence which is the result of focusing effort on one skill over the other, or the teacher not making enough effort teaching a specific skill to escape the challenges that are posed by that skill be in the process of learning it or the process of teaching it. This difference in receptive or productive competence could be attributed to health or physiological reasons that would prohibit the learner from following linear learning that aims to develop all their linguistic skills at the same time.

As a result, placement tests are made to measure receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing); each skill independently without any interference with another skill so that objective measuring of productive and receptive skills amongst examined students could be achieved according to the standards of both competence and performance. Accordingly, placement test examiners should avoid any overlap between skills, which would be evident in setting essay questions to measure receptive skills that should be based on only deductive thinking and understanding which would genuinely be reflected in the examined student's performance. Therefore, a question arises to those who are prone to overlap skills in their exams, and especially in placement tests: how would you be able to examine and measure receptive skills (listening and reading) through essay questions that require productive competence that examined students may not have? That leads to another question that is equally important to ask: what is the use of essay questions to measure receptive skills when essay questions already exist in exams that are meant to measure productive skills (speaking and writing) to accurately determine the level of an examined student's productive competence? Finally, how, then, would you, as an examiner, measure the disparity between productive and receptive skills amongst learners of foreign languages?

Remarkably, tools of measuring performance and competence in placement tests are no longer restricted to productive and receptive skills, but they have expanded to include exams that test grammatical competence which means arranging the lexical items according to the syntactic structure of the target language, which could vary according to the different geographical groups taking the test. Grammatical competence is tested with the purpose of gauging the learner's ability to communicate, which, if flawed, could result in miscommunication between both participants of the communicative event. That is because syntactic structures- which differ according to the language

group- communicate meaning as much as lexical items do the same because "syntactic structures are the means and the meanings they convey are the end."[14] Accordingly, it is a must to set determiners of **grammaticality** [15]that reflects the grammatical competence of the examined student, with the aim of shedding light on the particulars of the syntactic structure of the target language, and recognizing the challenges that face students taking the placement tests. That is the reason why I suggest, at the end of this research, doing further foundational studies with the purpose of examining the particulars of the Arabic syntactic structure, and scrutinizing them in light of the universal meanings of all the languages in the world, so that students of the Arabic language (who speak other languages) are made aware of the difference of arranging lexical items according to the syntactic structure of the language. That is because all linguistic meanings share a universality that should prove useful for both processes of teaching and learning a language, except for psychological and social meanings, which are undoubtedly significant in advanced levels of acquiring any language.[16]

How to measure receptive and productive competence, and the implemented techniques

Before embarking on this part of the research, it is best to discuss the challenges that examiners and students go through of which have led to the marginalization and stereotyping of placement tests, which makes them pointless for the process of teaching the language and learning it, even though they should be an essential part of the educational process because they are the first step of the learners' engagement with the language before acquiring it. On the level of cognitive formation, placement tests are given to students who are not only different in terms of their nationalities, but they also differ in terms of their cognitive abilities, their physiological traits, their cultural shocks, their identity crises, the conflict with their *language ego[17]*, and the

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[14] Moustafa Hemeeda, Cohesion and Coherence of the Arabic Sentence Structure, p.55

[15] Lyons, John. (1981). *Language and linguistics: an Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. p. 114

[16] Because meaning is essential in forming syntactic structure, all the languages in the world share the essential roots of meaning which are represented through the dictionary meanings of an infinite number of words, where we can find the equivalent of each word in another language, or even a meaning that is close to it, which is known as the essential/focal meaning. There is also the additional meaning or the implicit meaning, which is the meaning that changes with the change of culture or the passing of time. On another level, meaning has grown more specific in terms of the stylistic meaning, which belongs to the geographical area of the language, and it expands to include the psychological meaning, which is more individualistic, and it is not general or circulated amongst individuals. Refer to Ahmed Omar Mokhtar. (1998, pp 36-40). *Semantics*. Book World, Cairo. 5th Edition

[17] *Language ego* refers to the inseverable connection between the self and the mother tongue. It is worth noting that when a learner starts acquiring a new language, they tend to form a new fragile language ego that is the result of the dominance of their mother tongue that goes deep socially and culturally, and conflicts with the new cultural variables that threaten it. That is when the learner falls prey to the conflict between the language ego of their mother tongue and the new language being acquired.

stagnation they face in the ***interlanguage***[18] phase, etc of the reasons that account for the essential different variables that help the learner achieve the language acquisition required from their classes after they pass the placement tests. As a result, placement tests are marginalized because they tend to be unreliable, and classroom environments are used instead to accurately determine the student level. Another reason for the marginalization of placement tests is that students' answers vary according to the individual variance amongst students on so many other levels, as mentioned before, and that is because setting exams and tests on methodological and scientific foundations does not guarantee model answers from all examined students taking the tests, and that is because examiners are not dealing with robots (examined students) who have received their languages from the same source. In other words, the performance of the learners taking the tests that reflects their receptive and productive competence could be juxtaposed to a road that has been paved for car drivers, and even though that road has been paved with all safety instructions in mind, and even though it has all the required signs and directions that would help drivers go through it without going over the speed limit, there are still traffic violations committed on that road. These violations define the performance that reflects the competence of every driver. That is why you would never find the same performance from all the cars driving through that road, despite following safety instructions, signs, and speed limits from the start because human beings differ in their behaviors and tendencies. As much as humans share the same spirit in different bodies, and even though the ground is still, but the Earth is moving, and even though a word is the same, but its meaning is ever-changing, so is a placement test that might be the same, but the learners who answer it are different.

Measuring receptive skills (listening and reading), and the used techniques

Naturally, many questions arise when it comes to placement tests that measure receptive skills (listening and reading), and these questions need to be addressed: How does the learner receive reading and listening texts, and how do they respond to them? What are the standards used in choosing

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[18] ***Interlanguage*** refers to a separate system devised by the learner after they fall into the conflict between the mother tongue, and the target language; it is neither a system for the mother tongue nor is it a system for the target language. Some students in advanced levels of language acquisition make typical mistakes that have taken root in their acquired language, and that is because they succeed in communicating with the foreign language they acquire while maintaining these mistakes that stem from the dominance of their mother tongue over the target language.
Refer to H. Douglas Brown. (2007). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. 5th Edition, Pearson Longman.

reading and listening texts? Which leads to another question: what are the techniques used to achieve the aim of placement tests, which is the measurement of these skills?

To answer the first question, attention should be drawn to the processes that examined learners go through when they receive reading and listening texts, with the purpose of getting closer to choosing texts that would suit the different levels of the learners on the one hand, and that would take into consideration the particulars of the target language on the other hand. That is because the text would make the examined student go through a number of processes that could be summarized as follows:[19]

1. ***Syntactic knowledge***: it refers to observing the connections between words in sentences with the purpose of deducing meaning. The best example for this is the additional form in Arabic that transforms two words into one phrase that cannot be severed, and where one word in that phrase cannot be identified or understood without the other.

2. ***Morphological knowledge***: it is one of the cornerstones upon which the learner depends for understanding and deduction. Every change in meaning leads to a change in structure, and accordingly "grammar does not acquire structures of meaning except through morphology"[20] There are countless examples that start from the basic physiology of the Arabic language which is represented through roots, and end with derivation, infliction, addition and omission such as the gender change of a specific word after the addition of the feminine form of a closed 'taa'/ (ة) at the end of the word, or deleting it to go back to the masculine form of the word. The same applies to exchanging the 'ya'/ (ي) that denotes the present tense with a 'ta'/ (ت) to make it feminine and distinguish it from the masculine form.

3. ***General world knowledge***: which refers to the non-linguistic information that help the reader/listener interpret and understand the meaning of words and sentences, and it is known as non-linguistic knowledge because understanding and deducing the meaning depend on a wide-scale background knowledge of the world that enable the learner to construct meaning.

4. ***Sociocultural knowledge***: that encompasses linguistic and non-linguistic sociocultural knowledge, because cultural and social knowledge is built through understanding that social values and the behavioral standards of a given society are formed through its language. Cultural knowledge outside linguistic boundaries is formed through the cultural situations that a linguistic

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[19] Hedge, Tricia. (2000). *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom.* 1ˢᵗ Edition. Oxford University Press, Oxford. p.189

[20] Tammam, H. (1994). *Morphology and Meaning of the Arabic Language*. House of Culture. P.178

group has agreed on embracing or rejecting such as exchanging hugs, handshaking, and bowing. Accordingly, social and cultural knowledge contribute to understanding what is written, and vice versa in case of language loss for one of the participants of the process of communication.

5.   ***Topic Knowledge***: this kind of knowledge could be summarized as follows: the more the reader has a knowledge of the topic that they are reading, the more they would understand, and that is because a highly knowledgeable reader/listener has a capacity of linking the new information offered by the text to the old knowledge they already have. As a result, those who have lower knowledge are less capable of understanding the new text and deducing its aim because they would not be capable of establishing connections between the topic and the weak knowledge they already have.

6.   ***Genre knowledge***: understanding the text within its context, since understanding the genre would affect the relation between the author of the text (addresser), the text itself (the message), and the recipient of the text (the addressee). For example, an engineer's text and their engineering-related register is different from the register of a physician's text, and in case of a communication occurring between an engineer and a physician with people who do not belong to their specializations, the knowledge itself would change according to the context that would give rise to that kind of communication.

According to all of this, the text as a message is a kind of conflict that absorbs the reader/listener- especially the texts given to learners of a second language/foreign language- because learners in that case become recipients of a message that they struggle to understand and gather as much information from it as possible, with the purpose of making sense of the text, and giving it a new meaning. This comprehensive process occurs due to the interaction of all the above-mentioned processes in a game called ***Goodman 'the psycholinguistic guessing game'[21]*** because the dynamic relation between all the above-mentioned processes accurately describes the ***interactive[22]*** process between the message (the text), and its recipient (reader/listener). This dynamic relation is the reason that the reader/listener-as a recipient- is capable

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[21] Psycholinguistic guessing game: it is a game where the reader reconstructs a message that is symbolized by an author through a text that was drawn by words. Accordingly, this model required interactive reading where the reader would use all the textual signs to be able to make correct predictions of the meaning of the text. As a result, the reader reconstructs meaning from the written language using the accompanying linguistic processes that occur when receiving a text. Refer to Carrell, P. L., Devine J., and Eskey D. E. (eds.). (1988). *Interactive Approaches to Second Language Reading.* Cambridge University Press, New York. pp. 2-3.

[22] ***Interactive*** is a term that is associated with the skill of reading as an active process where the reader is in constant interaction with the text. That is why Goodman places reading within the context of vast communication that is part of meaning, information processing and highlighting the psycholinguistic aspects of the reading process (how language and thought interact) as well as the sociocultural aspects of reading (language as part of a social context) such as authors and readers. Refer to ibid, p.9

of responding to the author- as an addresser- and it enables the reader/listener to discuss the contents and meanings of the text as a message.[23]

Accordingly, and in light of all the above-mentioned processes, the necessity to recall **ACTFL** as the standards that form the foundations of the present study is of the utmost importance. That is because these standards come together with all the processes of receiving a text along with the resulting variance between each recipient and the other, due to the disparity of learning levels amongst learners of Arabic as a foreign language and their differences in their receptive skills. As for the reasons of choosing the standards of the American center as the sole referential framework of choosing the texts, I should point out that resorting to the standards of **ACTFL** as the cornerstone of choosing the texts is due to a meticulous scientific advantage, and another advantage that is subjective, but is open for discussions; for the scientific advantage is with the aim of choosing any standard in general is to agree on a specific reference and generalize it to avoid the choice of texts based on an examiner's preference away from scientific accuracy. As for the personal subjective advantage of resorting to **ACTFL**, it is due to the accuracy, flexibility and proven experience of those standards, and the variation of a single standard amongst the beginners, intermediate learners and the advanced ones even after setting up its guiding rules, major and secondary ones.

So, depending on the standards of **ACTFL** as the framework of choosing texts, that would conform to and sift through the standards of the American center, ensures that these texts are the best most accurate ones to measure the receptive skills of the examined learners according to the international **ACTFL**, and they would also ensure the method of setting the guiding rules of the main and secondary language learning levels. For instance, the American center focuses on measuring the level of competence based on the functional goals of the language, which are summed up in a learner's capacity of accurate communication with any linguistic means that is dictated by the context of the situation. So, these competence tests target performance, and they require the examined learner to apply the acquired knowledge to perform specific communication tasks. So, they depend on a learner's functional capability without conforming to the educational material that changes with the change of curricula, and institutions because the main goal of placement tests is to place the foreign language learner in a class that qualifies him for real-life functional communication using the target language.

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[23] Hedge, Tricia. (2000). *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom.* 1st Edition. Oxford University Press, Oxford. p.188

The hierarchy of the learning levels of foreign language learners from beginners to intermediate to the advanced to the highly advanced, signifies that language skills intricately overlap with more complicated skills, and that includes simpler essential skills as evident through the hierarchical figure of **ACTFL**.[24]

After choosing the texts according to **ACTFL** standards, it is equally significant to draw the attention to the mechanisms of choosing the text itself to ensure both the credibility and the reliability of the test.

Naturally, so many questions and inquiries would come up in an examiner's mind before choosing texts according to the **ACTFL** standards, and that would be a suitable means of measurement at the same time, and some of these questions, to mention only a few, are: what are the reliable resources that an examiner can use for choosing the texts? This question undoubtedly leads every examiner to ask about the type of text, its form, how long it should be, and its accessibility, all in a way that would suit the different levels of the examined learners, whose competence of the target language is the main goal of these tests. So, the examiner given the task of designing these tests should be aware that the nature and essence of choosing these texts lies in answering these questions first so that the examiner/test designer is able to frame the exam/research according to the standards of **ACTFL**, for example, from the beginning, in which case the examiner would be able to use the international standards most suitable for the learners' levels so that the chosen text eventually ensures the reliability of the test and the credibility of its results. These afore-mentioned test questions resemble the human journey from birth to the grave because every phase of every human life has requirements that differ according to each age group. Similarly, the type, form, length, ease of the exam/test texts are determined by the variance of levels of the learners taking the test/exam in the target language.

As a result, the resources used to search for texts are determined by the variance of the levels of the target language that are to be measured. For example, texts for a beginner could be post cards, emails or advertisements or signs or timetables. As for both the intermediate, upper-intermediate, advanced and highly advanced levels, resources would vary to include textbooks, newspaper and magazine articles, short stories, poems and some

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[24] Theodore V. Higgs. (1998). *Teaching for Proficiency the Organizing Principle*. National Textbook Company with The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. pp. 113-116

extracts from novels.[25] Based on that, the linguistic functions of all those chosen texts are equally significant because they also vary according to the variance of the performance that reflects the linguistic competence which is the main goal of measurement—linguistic competence that would be measured through following instructions, narration, description, expository skills, analysis and providing arguments.[26] So, the linguistic function is the first and main supporter when it comes to narrowing down the scope of resources used to choose texts, and their corresponding fields, for the test/exam.

After choosing texts and having provided a discussion of the implemented strategies to measure receptive competence (listening and reading), I would like to raise a question that would represent a main introduction to the space of technology and its varied activities. So, naturally, the question is about which language used in a test given to all students before choosing the right technique for measurement: Should the questions be in the target language or in the native tongue of the reader?[27] Especially that this test would be given to many examined students who have different native tongues. Accordingly, the ease and clarity of the question, whether that is in the target language or the mother tongue, mirrors of the linguistic competence of the examined student because if the text questions are difficult to understand, the learner would face another layer of difficulty. As a result, the examiner would not be able to tell if the weakness of performance is due to a difficulty understanding the text itself, and its meanings, or due to a difficulty understanding the questions and their meanings? So, based on this great difference that is made by the effect of the question as a means to achieve an end (discerning the level of performance), it has become equally significant to determine the language of the question, not to mention the significance of striving to use simple language whether the question is written in the target

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[25] Hughes, Arthur. (2002). *Testing for Language Teachers.* 2nd Edition. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. p. 140. For further research: J. Charles Alderson. (2000). *Assessing Reading.* 1st Edition.Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. pp. 60-74

[26] Theodore V. Higgs. (1983). *Teaching for Proficiency: The Organizing Principle.* Ntc Pub Group. pp. 219-226
- Literary texts: it is worth nothing that there is an ongoing controversy over including literary texts in placement tests, without paying much attention to the essential value of the literary texts over non-literary texts. For example, some scholars maintain that literary texts such as poetry are far more complex than other types of texts, and that is due to learners seeking to escape poetry reading because it is hard for them to understand these poems due to their lack of knowledge of the rhetorical and poetic rules of poems, compared to prose and drama which help them construct visual imagery of the prose text. Additionally, grammatical rules, phonetic, linguistic and semantic deviations all result in posing a difficulty for the learner to understand poems and discern their meaning as opposed to narrative prose texts that are formed through simple syntactic structures that help examined learners to understand the text and deduce its meaning, as well as create a visual through their imagination.

[27] J. Charles Alderson, *Assessing Reading* pp. 86-93

language or in the native tongue. So, before discussing this matter, I ask the reader: would choosing the target language as the language of the exam/test impair the learner's performance in the target language? My answer to this question would depend on the goal of the test for there is no doubt that the learner's performance in the target language is the main goal of the test so that the learner is placed in his/her correspondent level, and so that his challenges are better understood in a way that would help them overcome these challenges through their educational journey. Accordingly, forming the question in the native tongue of the learner or in a language common among most learners, especially in tests for beginner levels is very significant for understanding the level of learners in the target language to ensure the clarity of the question, and to ensure the best performance in the target language away from any possible obstacles. As for tests given to upper and advanced levels that are aimed at the upper and advanced levels of the target language, I believe that the language of the test should be the same as the target language, not only because it would be clear and easily understood by the examined students, but also because it intertwines and overlaps with the strategies and techniques of advanced-level tests. To conclude, to answer the question regarding the used techniques that focus on the receptive skills, it should be pointed out that the focus is not on the test strategies and techniques, but rather, the focus is on creating techniques and strategies that guarantee both the examiner and the examined the best performance in the target language because it is the main goal for which the test/exam is designed in the first place. However, students delivering the best performance, no matter how easy it would be, is a very complicated process because measuring receptive competence away from the overlapping nature of the relationship between both the receptive competence and the productive one needs a kind of reconciliation between different kinds of competence due to the varied levels of competence amongst students, as mentioned before. This reconciliation is achieved through devising test techniques and strategies that are to guarantee the best performance in the target language away from this overlap between the different types of competence. For example, receptive competence requires designing techniques and strategies that guarantee understanding and deductive thinking without depending on productive questions (such as writing questions). Techniques and strategies that aim to measure the receptive competence through students' delivery of as little information as possible, in three or four words maximum should be devised, and that is what is meant by the afore-mentioned reconciliation between the different kinds of competence. Based on that, there are many strategies that are concerned with the measurement of receptive skills, and their corresponding levels, such as

multiple-choice questions, copying of information, filling in the gaps, and so many others. Due to the possibility of devising techniques without any overlap between different kinds of competence, I thought it best to point out sources and references[28] that focus on such techniques and their various activities without redundancy. The references allow the study of these techniques for everyone without exception, and they offer the study of these techniques through practice and application, away from useless theorization. These techniques used in setting tests are only the seeds that a scholar can use to develop according to the demands of recent studies, and the variables of language acquisition.

The measurement of productive skills (writing) and the used techniques

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Using this image in the current study is used as an introduction that speaks volumes when it comes to explaining the difficulty of writing for second-language writers/foreign-language writers. For them, writing in a second language/foreign language is neither easy nor is it spontaneous, but rather, it is a complicated process that requires many activities that are introduced through answers to some questions, for example: what do we know about writing? This question is followed by another relevant question: what are the strategies used by good writers?[30] When focusing on the complexity that accompanies the process of writing, I have found out that this complexity is evident in the inverse relationship between the written outcome and its

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[28] To find out more about the techniques and strategies used to set exams, refer to these references provided that you look for techniques that best suit the structure of the Arabic language and its culture.
Ibid. chapter 7. pp. 202-270
Hughes, Arthur. *Testing for Language Teacher.* pp. 142-153, 165-169.
Hidri, Sahbi. *Revisiting the Assessment: The Second Language Abilities: From Theory to Practice.* pp. 289-309.
[29] https://en.meming.world/images/en/6/61/People_Who_Do_Art_meme_2.jpg
[30] Hedge, Tricia, *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom,* p.303

author. That is because there is an inverse relation between the precision of the process of writing based on the linguistic system shared by a linguistic group, and the chaotic state of the human mind. Accordingly, "the process that creates that precision is the same one that wreaks chaotic havoc."[31]

So, writing is a type of thought and discovery that result in a number of strategies that govern the organization of the process of composition. These strategies are considered to be the main tools of the gradual development of the text which include setting goals, generating ideas, information processing, not to mention choosing the right language, making a draft, reading and proofreading the final written outcome, to mention only a few.

So, starting the discussion with the process of writing and its, and its implemented activities is meant to set a road map that would guide me to the best strategy to be employed in setting a test/an exam based on the activities performed by a writer of the foreign language. Naturally, learners taking the placement test have different traits since they come from different cultural, intellectual and physiological backgrounds. That is why I suggest that the exam should best simulate the activities done by the foreign language writer in the process of writing. In other words, goals of the question should be clear in the process of setting an exam/test to ensure that the examined student would be able to organize their information, and that they would be able to use the suitable language in their answers to the exam/test questions. That is due to the fact that the examiner is mainly concerned with measuring the performance that reflects productive competence. Accordingly, the examiner is not at conflict with the examined learner, but the opposite, for the examiner should support the examined learner to guarantee the best performance in the target language, so that the examiner is able to discern and understand the challenges of the examined students, away from any obstacles, before embarking on the journey of language acquisition. Hence, the teacher's work inside a classroom would be the result of the learners' needs, and it would focus on overcoming the linguistic challenges that would already be evident through students' answers of this placement test. This teacher support should be taken into consideration in setting questions that are to measure a learner's productive competence, not out of leniency with the examined learners, but out of encouraging them to take the exam/test. As it is the case with a football player who has suffered an injury during a match, and needs a crutch to help him run again, the learner similarly needs support and encouragement, starting with the placement test, all the way to providing the suitable learning

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[31] Shaughnessy, M. P. (1977). *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p222

environment that would enable them to acquire the target language, and practice it the same way they practice other languages such as their mother tongue or another second language they might have acquired.[32]

After this discussion of the writing process comes a discussion of the strategies implemented in the process of writing, such as strengthening the points of weakness of a written piece and overcoming its challenges such as lack of linguistic competence in writing which prohibits the writer from finding the right words in the target language during the process of composition. As a result, lack of linguistic competence is one major obstacle in the face of performance, not to mention the challenges of following the language system itself during the process of composition. As a result, some studies point out the practical writing strategies that are set according to the mistakes and strategies of the second/foreign language writers. These developed strategies have helped those writers in a second/foreign language to develop their ideas during the writing process without distraction, for some of the learners chose to write the difficult words in their native tongue, and some others decided to leave it blank for the difficult words to continue writing without any obstacles or distractions away from their thought processes. Accordingly, when learners are finished with developing their ideas, and writing them, they would modify the surface structure of the final written piece, and edit their writing according to grammatical correctness, choice of words, spelling, etc.… So, naturally, it is very important for the set writing strategies to follow the students' strategies themselves in the process of writing.[33]

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[32] Supporting the examined student is, by all means, a tool to encourage writing, away from focusing on mistakes that would be devastating for the learner because it would constitute a barrier against writing anything in Modern Standard Arabic. So, here, it is important to use the **conceptual map** used by **Shaughnessy** where he targets defining the patterns that enable the learner to decide how, when and where to use the language, and accordingly pave the way to the examined student to learn without any obstacles. That is due to the fact that this conceptual map for the learner of a foreign language where he performs a productive skill (writing) is like a guiding stick that a blind man uses to walk the road, no matter how well it is paved. For further reading, refer back to:
Shaughnessy, M. P. (1977). *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
Zamel, V. (1983). *The composing processes of advanced ESL students: six case studies*. TESOL Quarterly. pp. 87-165
[33] Zamel, V. *The composing processes of advanced ESL students: six case studies*. TESOL Quarterly
Here, I would like to point out a finding of this study, which is that students who suffer problems in their productive competence (writing) would focus mainly on the linguistic challenges whereas students who are better writer focus on the deeper structure of the language. Accordingly, they would change entire paragraphs, change the punctuation, then they would pay attention to the surface structure of the language, which is represented through grammatical correctness, spelling, etc. I should point out, however, that the learner of a second language is not only at war with the language system, but also at war with the audience for whom he does his best to make ideas and meanings clear according to the system of the second language so they would be able to understand the message that the learner conveys through the written piece. Based on that, after the examiner learner follows the writing rules stated in the introduction, they should be able to place the examined learner in the right level, not

Accordingly, I suggest an introduction that revolves around the process of writing, its strategies, and what it implies of instructions that would help examined students to generate ideas and write them down during the process of composition. These instructions would involve encouraging the learners taking the test to overcome challenges related to choosing lexical items in the target language through the application of the afore-mentioned strategies such as leaving gaps in the text, or writing them in the native language while marking each of those words, and after the learner is done with generating and developing ideas, they would reread their writing to brainstorm, with the purpose of overcoming the obstacles they faced during the initial process of writing such as the choice of words, grammatical correctness, spelling, etc. There is no doubt that these strategies contribute to the reinforcement of the educational process that is based on autodidacts as the center of the educational process. As a result, the learning environment inside the classroom, starting from the placement test, is part of the communicative approach, which is, in my opinion, the most suitable scientific approach for the process of language acquisition, especially in the age of technology and media communication tools that provide multiple resources for learning and broadens the horizons for the language learners, away from one-source materials such as those that focus on the teacher as the sole source of knowledge. Language, in the age of technology and social media, is no longer just "voices that people use to achieve their purposes", but it has also become open, varied and intertwining like a necklace the beads of which are different in color and origins but still they are combined together by one string, and these differences in beads symbolize the different sounds of the language and its secondary grammatical systems shared by each linguistic group that is different from the other group because of their various living spaces. As for the string, it stands for the universality of meaning because the meanings are one, but the structures are different. That is why it is safe to state, based on the traditional language, that structures (the grammars of the languages) are servants of meaning.

As for the speaking skill as the second half of productive competence, it should be restricted to only interviews that are based on the international standards of **ACTFL** as it is the case in all the skills involved in placement

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only through their performance, but also through understanding their writing strategies in the processes of writing and editing.
For further reading, refer to:
Raimes, A. (1993). *Techniques in Teaching Writing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
Raimes, A. (1985). *What unskilled ESL students do when they write: a classroom study of composing*. TESOL Quarterly. pp. 229-258

tests that this study focuses on. So, these interviews would not offer anything new except one comment that can be reviewed in the footnote so that the reader would not be distracted by ideas that differ greatly from this current study, and that can be further researched and looked up through other capable specialists.[34]

The measurement of grammatical competence (determiners of grammatical correctness)

Rules have always been the system that bothers all language learners, be it native speakers or non-native speakers because it disturbs human tendencies towards chaos, and the human longing for freedom and breaking the rules of the system, as if defying the rules of language is the root that grows a tendency to break the system, and reject it in all aspects of life, despite the need for it. Accordingly, understanding the rules of language and using them to produce writing or speech should be processed through a mind that is passionate about meaning, and that holds it scared. That is because structures are only branches, and their root is meaning, and the root of meaning is logic. So, this ongoing correspondence between thought, logic and meaning to build a linguistic structure results in many pits that a language learner falls into when she/he builds their structure. So, if the mind manages, most of the time, to escape the conflict between thought, logic and meaning, that would be the reason a learner escapes the afore-mentioned self-doubt that rears its head in the process of language acquisition (due to rules of language).

This emphasizes the following quote from Pickett: "One of the things I seek to discover more than the linguistic structure is the basic thought process, which is often evident in the sentence structure more than any other aspect of language. I think that if I do not understand that thought process, I would not ever be able to competently acquire language"[35]

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[34] Phonological awareness: it is one of the universal elements that help acquire the skill of reading. It is a highly significant element in acquiring reading and writing. So, the difficulties and challenges of the phonological awareness are bound to result in difficulties and challenges on the road to acquiring the reading skill. It would stand in the way of acquiring new words/lexical items in the target language (which would mainly be morphological awareness in the Arabic language because Arabic is a derivative language, and a learner needs to develop the ability to focus on derivation to enrich their vocabulary bank and their semantic fields). So, not having enough vocabulary could be the result of a lack of phonological awareness as well, which could lead to the disintegration of the whole educational process into insurmountable difficulties the origin of which would be hard to identify because there are no tests that measure phonological awareness in the target language. Accordingly, I recommend a test set by phoneticians, the purpose of which would be to identify the challenges of the phonological awareness that the examined learner would not be able to discover through only the oral interview because the examined learner would follow a behavior of avoidance where they would avoid using words that contain specific phonemes during the interview. For further reading:
Gail T. Gillon. (2018). *Phonological Awareness*, Second Edition from Research to Practice. The Guilford PRESS
[35] Pickett, D. (1978). *The foreign language learning process: an occasional paper*. ETIC publications. The British Council. p.62

This is what Oxford refers to, one way or another, when he stated a number of strategies that second/foreign language learners tend to use through the process of acquiring the target language. These strategies contribute to the analysis of the linguistic structure with the purpose of understanding thought and logic basis. So, the question that comes to mind before setting an exam/a test that measures grammatical correctness is: what do I know about the process of learning rules? More accurately: what do I know about the process of acquiring the rules? I need to have this background knowledge so that I manage to frame the determiners of their correctness within the exam/test. Accordingly, Oxford sets strategies known as **Analyzing and Reasoning**[36] so that they become the best helpers in attempting to answer this question because I have relied on what learners could use of strategies that would help them understand the meaning of a new expression or structure an entirely new one, and these are as follows:

Reasoning Deductively: it means using the rules that are already in store of learners' knowledge (universal grammar) to structure whatever sentences they would build in the target language. It is worth pointing out that this is a type of a linguistic phase. There is no doubt that this smart usage of universal language rules, such as, forming a question which is bound to mess up the arrangement of words in the target language depending on the structure of the question which is also bound to be different than the structure of the question in the learner's mother tongue. So, forming a question in the exam that is attached to the study is the first real conflict for the examined students since it is the first real attempt to break from the memorized expressions and their arrangements in the target language, be it in speech or writing.

Transferring: the strategy of transferring has been one of the strategies that have greatly helped me set a framework for the determiners of Arabic grammatical correctness, especially the common ones, which basically have to do with feminine nouns, masculine nouns, and negation in different sentence structures.

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[36] *Analyzing and Reasoning*: they are a set of five strategies that relate to logical analysis and reasoning. Most of the time, learners use these strategies to understand the meaning of a new expression or to structure a new one. I have mentioned in the corpus three strategies that the study relies on in the exam model attached to the study. So, it is best to highlight them in this footnote: Firstly, there is the strategy of *Analyzing Expressions* which stems from determining the meaning of the new expression through dividing it into parts after using the meaning of all its different parts to understand the meaning of the expression as a whole. Secondly, there is the strategy of Analyzing Contrastively which is the comparison of all linguistic elements (the phonemes, the lexical items and the rules) of the target language with the mother tongue to determine similarities and differences between both language. For further reading, refer to Oxford, R. L. *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know*. Boston, Mass; HEINLE & HEINLE. pp. 46-47

Translating: briefly, it is the use of one language as the basis of understanding another language and use it for production as well. This strategy could be used and benefitted from through perceiving the mother tongue of the learner as a descriptive language that directly contributes to generating new ideas for them in the target language starting from words and expressions to generating entire texts. This is very important when it comes to measuring morphological competence and setting its determiners in a model that has included Arabic word forms, the ones that are set as rules, and the ones that are commonly used.

As a result, the afore-mentioned strategies are included within the system of the mother tongue through the acquisition of the rules of the target language. Since the measurement of grammatical competence is entirely based on creating through the target language, I have preferred to use the target language in the exam model that targets determiners of grammatical correctness (I have set most of its questions, especially the linguistic structures used in the exam questions), requiring at the same time that the output of the exam (the linguistic structures that the examined students would use) would also be in the target language. This could be achieved through relying on many strategies and techniques that are basically embedded within Taking Notes, Summarizing and Highlighting, etc.[37] That is due to the fact that the purpose of the exam is to set the determiners of grammatical correctness after ascertaining that examined students understand them perfectly well even if they drift further away from creating through using the rules of the target language because the purpose is to measure knowledge rather than accumulation, which is the main purpose of end-of-semester exams/tests that measure the information that students have managed to accumulate throughout the semester.

After the focus on the grammar of the sentence, it is best to bear the grammar of the entire text in mind because there is no escaping the structuring of discourse after presenting the raw material for it (rules of sentence structures) because normal linguistic behavior is not conducted through separate sentence structures, but rather, it is successfully achieved through combining sentences together to make up discourse. As a result, measuring the determiners of grammatical correctness has to start from the rules of

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[37] Creating structure for Input and Output: it is a set made up of three strategies that Oxford believes to be significant in both processes of understanding and production using the new language, and they are as follows:
1. Taking Notes: writing the main idea or its topic sentences.
2. Summarizing: writing a summary of an entire text
3. Highlighting: using a set of various concentration techniques such as circling or underlining or using highlighting colors to focus only on important information. For further reading, check Oxford, R. L. *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know.* p.47

sentential grammar as the raw material for making up discourse, and it has to culminate in the grammatical rules of the text which examine the accumulation of meanings in coherent discourse. So, naturally, the question that would arise is: what are the rules of making up discourse? This question is established and it warrants an answer that would help determine these rules and include them in an exam model that tests the determiners of grammatical correctness starting with the sentence and culminating into the grammar of the text.

This leads to the explanation of the rules that are relied on when it comes to text composition, as they were stated in a book entitled *A Communicative Grammar of English:*[38]

1. *Linking signals*: these are demonstrative referential devices that help people, be it in writing or speech, to understand the message through the words and expressions that perform a communicative function, and they usually appear at the beginning of discourse.

2. *Linking constructions*: they include the linking devices used to coordinate and link between sentences such as 'but', 'or', 'if', etc. (and their counterparts in the Arabic language)

3. 'General purpose' links: these include adjectival phrases.

4. *Substitution and ellipsis*: this includes the use of replacement or omission without resulting in vagueness or ambiguity. This technique is used to avoid the repetition of different grammatical components (words, phrases, clauses and repeated content) through the use of pronouns, for example, to refer to nouns and noun phrases.

5- *Presenting and Focusing on Information*: it includes the way through which important information could be highlighted through placing them at the end of the sentence, for example. That is because the adverb, for example, that is part of the main sentence, could contain a reference to the

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[38] This book explains six ways that are used in any language to collect meanings and use sentences to make up spoken or written discourse. In the corpus, I have mentioned five on which the attached exam relies. As for the sixth way, it is no less important than these five, but I have preferred to include it in this footnote to avoid redundancy in this paper. The sixth way is represented through *order and emphasis*, and it includes all the variation in presenting information to create emphasis. As for the other ways, I would like to recommend looking up the book for further research because each way includes many elements that are useful for the analysis of text structure such as *linking constructions*, which depend on three main rules that are *COORDINATION* which means cohesion through the use of linking devices such as 'but', 'and', 'however', etc. The second one is *SUBORDINATION* which is subordinating a clause under a sentence as in the use of conditional devices such as 'if', 'when', 'whereas' or subordinating a concept under a more comprehensive superordinate concept such as referring to a dog using the word 'animal' within the same text. The third and last one is ADVERBIAL LINK which means the connection of two ideas using an adverbial linking device such as the use of 'before', 'after', 'then', 'in order that', 'although', 'as if', etc. I recommend further reading into this so that these rules get to be used in the analysis of Arabic texts and in understanding them. Look up Leech, G. N. and J. Svartvik. (2003). *A Communicative Grammar of English, London*: longman, Third Edition. pp.139-168

added secondary information as a following idea, which is evident in: 'It was raining when we arrived.'

As a result, the framework that was designed to measure the determiners of grammatical correctness in the exam attached to the present study, is based on the process of learning and acquiring grammatical rules, starting from the rules of sentential grammar as the largest linguistic unit, without isolating it from it textual/discourse context, and ending with levels beyond the sentence which include other hierarchical levels, that start with **inter-sentential** relations, then the **paragraph**, then the **text** (or **discourse**) as a whole at the top of the hierarchy.[39]

Contextual Communication through Presupposition and its Semantic Role:

Naturally, when we think about the way language is used, we think of face-to-face conversations, phone calls or gadget-based conversations, which, in the age of technology and social media, are no longer restricted to conversing through the phone or the computer, but they have expanded to include chatting texts/conversations between the participants of the discourse in addition to reading, writing and talking to ourselves in the process. These are most of the scenarios/arenas of language use where people do so many things through language. Since a placement test is a form of exchange since it is a message sent by the sender (the examiner) to the examined student, I have given special attention to the processes that are needed to achieve the desired goals from the test/exam. So, looking for a collective linguistic natural tool of communication is a must because there should be a cooperation between the sender and the recipient to understand the message, which necessitates setting an exam using tools and a language that would enable all learners of different nationalities to answer the exam without any coordination obstacles in language use.

This leads me to choose the English language as the main means of communication in most parts of the test/exam (I have mentioned the reasons for choosing it in the discussion of the measurement of receptive competence). In addition to this, there is a presupposition of the existence of a context that encompasses all social media platforms as a collective universal behavior that it is rare for anyone to not be aware of it. These presuppositions underlying the exam attached to the study come as the cornerstone for building a

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[39] Maslouh S., El-Negm W., & Badawy A. Arabic: from the grammar of the 'sentence' to the grammar of the 'text'. The memorial book entitled 'Abdel-Salam Harun, the scholar, the writer and the investigator'. Kuwait University, Department of Arabic, p.704

Common Ground[40] between me as the examiner and the students taking the exam. That is due to the fact that the presuppositions of the speaker/writer are part of the conversation/communication common background.[41] Based on this point of view, I chose in conversations (presuppositions) some recommendations as a common ground, and I have set them in images that include social-media conversations as an element to create the contextual communication between the examiner and the student. I have also added non-linguistic communication tools (expressive symbols known as *emojis* or *emoticons*) that social media platforms are famous for, not only as a way of creating communication as real and as natural as it is in social media, but also as a way of supporting the examined students, especially in beginner levels that are in desperate need of support, encouragement and empathy. That approach also serves in making meaning accessible and understandable to students, and it would help them produce output in the target language through the skills that are targeted for measurement.

As a result, the communication achieved through context is not only based on the common-ground rule, but it is also based on many rules that are embedded in designing and coordinating meaning according to the **cooperative principle** between both participants of the communicative event. The purpose of the cooperative principle is to use language that is capable of achieving the purpose of communication. So, if the sender's (speaker/writer) aim is to communicate something, they have to phrase words according to the common ground that they believe to be common with the recipient (listener/reader). Whatever is included in that common ground between both participants changes from time to time. As a result, there should be continuous cooperation between both participants of the discourse to achieve the main purpose of communication. This could be conducted through the use of simple clear language, whether it is the medium language or the target language. As

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[40] Common ground: it is the shared information amongst a group of people or in a community that was built around shared practices or shared experiences, such as a community of physicians or engineers or those who speak the English language. So, in a community of ophthalmologists or English speakers, the individuals within this community consider everything that is taken for granted within this community as a common ground. In case some people do not belong to this community, they can find a more general common ground. That is because every individual could belong to several communities at the same time, and some of these communities overlap, such as the community of Arabs of North Africa and the Arabs of the Gulf nations. Some other communities intertwine other communities such as the community of people that are both lawyers and football fans, or the community that is both physicians and movie fans. All of these overlapping intertwining communities result in different common grounds. Refer to: Clark H. H. (2006). *Context and Common Ground*. Encyclopedia of Language & linguistics, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, USA. p.106

For further reading: Clark H.H. (1996). *Using Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Clark H.H. (1992). *Arenas of Language Use*. Chicago U Press, Chicago.

[41] Stalnaker R. C. (1978). *Syntax and semantics 9: Pragmatics*. 'Assertion.' In Cole P (ed.). New York: Academic Press. p.320

for designing and coordinating meaning, there are a few problems that are related to written texts such as the lack of direct communication between both participants of the communicative event. That is why "the process of writing is a process that stands on its own"[42], and it is difficult to decipher its messages without the special knowledge needed for it, or without visual information which explains the scientific reason of choosing non-linguistic communication tools, especially when designing exams that target beginner levels of the target language. That is because the examined students in these exams require support and encouragement through depending on non-linguistic communication tools, the meanings of which are well stored in the cognitive dictionary of examined students. Accordingly, recalling non-linguistic communication tools contributes to understanding meaning since these tools are non-linguistic and they are a phenomenon of social interaction which plays a role in the collective memory that is based on a common ground between both participants of the communication.[43] As a result, this common ground is the root from which designing and coordinating meaning have grown because there is no value in a meaning that is designed without a common ground between both participants of the communication. So, establishing a presupposition of context in the exam attached to the present study stems from an attempt to imitate real-life experiences that are evident through social media tools. This is supported through the use of simple language that is, in turn, supported by non-linguistic communication tools, with the purpose of achieving the highest form of communication-even if it is a hypothetical one- which helps the student be rid of exam-related tension or nervousness (the difficulties that the students taking the exam face, or their fear of making mistakes, or fear of running out of time, etc.) These presupposed hypothetical contexts would also encourage students to interact with the activities organized by the university/center after hypothetically involving them in these activities as participants. Added to that, students are also introduced to historical sites, and celebrities of the target language. The would also be capable of discussing many controversial issues when they reach advanced or outstanding levels, which eventually contributes to forming a positive ***Backwash*** that would encourage the learner to acquire the target language, rather than intimidate them of it.

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[42] Michael McCarthy. (1991). *Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers*, Cambridge University Press. p.149

[43] Istvan Kecskes Jacob Mey. (2008). *Intention, Common Ground and the Egocentric Speaker-Hearer*, Mouton de Gruyter Berlin. New York. pp. 151-162

Summary

• Competence is divided into two types: receptive competence which is about understanding written and spoken material and deducing its meaning. The second type is productive, which is reflected through performance in writing or speaking.

• The gradual nature of placement tests from beginner levels to advanced levels reflects the performance of both productive and receptive skills of the examined students. That is due to the fact that this test (exam) measures the competence of the learner meticulously, with the purpose of identifying their linguistic challenges before placing them in their suitable levels where they would be immersed in learning and acquiring the target language.

• The overlapping of skills in a placement test would result in a failure to measure the gap between receptive competence and productive competence because it is only natural that these skills would be different amongst learners of foreign language due to their focus on a specific skill over other skills, which may be attributed to the learner or the teacher escaping a specific skill, be it for physiological reasons or class-related reasons.

• Competence tests target performance, and they require the examined student to apply the acquired knowledge to perform specific communication tasks. So, these tests are based on functional capability which is not restricted by the educational material that changes with the change of curricula or institutions. That is because the main reason of the placement test is to place the learner of the foreign language in a class that would qualify them to establish functional real-life communication in the target language.

• The linguistic function is the main guide in searching for texts used in the placement test, as well as establishing their topics.

• The performance of the examined student in the target language is the main purpose of the placement test because it would place the learner in their right level, on the one hand, and it would identify the challenges that they face acquiring the target language so as to be able to reduce and eliminate them through their language-acquisition journey on the other hand. So, it is a must to phrase the question using the first or second language that is common amongst all examined learners—a language that would be standing on solid ground, and would make up the foundation from which the examined student would proceed with their answers; especially in beginner levels. That would help establish the performance of the examined students in the target language. It would also ensure the clarity of the question, and would make it

easier for the examined student to understand the questions to guarantee the best performance in the target language without any problems.

- Writing an introduction that revolves around the process of writing, its strategies, and what it involves of instructions would help examined students brainstorm, generate ideas, and write them down through the process of composition. This introduction, for instance, could encourage examined learners to overcome the challenges related to target-language lexical items through using strategies such as leaving a space within the text, or writing the difficult word in the draft using its equivalent from the mother tongue, and putting a sign for each word, and after finalizing the process of generating and developing ideas, the examined student would read the draft to achieve the required brainstorming, while overcoming the difficult challenges that they would have faced in the stage of composition such as the choice of words, grammatical and spelling accuracy, etc. There is no doubt that these strategies contribute to reinforcing the educational process which is based on self-education (the learner turning into an autodidact) because self-education is ultimately the main pillar of the whole educational process.

- The purpose of a grammatical exam is to identify determiners of grammatical correctness after establishing whether examined students understand them or not, even if such an exam would not require production through using the rules of the target language because the main aim here is an aim of knowledge rather than acquisition, which is the case in class tests which measure the information that students manage to accumulate through their learning process.

- The framework that is designed to measure determiners of grammatical correctness, within which the exam attached to the present study is set, is based on the process of learning and acquiring grammatical rules, starting with the sentence as the largest linguistic unit without stripping it of its context, and ending with the grammar that is beyond sentential level, which includes hierarchical levels, the base being ***inter-sentential relation***, then the ***paragraph*** and finally the ***text*** (or ***discourse***) as a whole on top.

- Framing a presupposition of context through using images that contain social-media texts, and supporting them through using non-linguistic communication tools (***emojis*** or ***emoticons***) is included in placement tests under the current study as a message from a sender (the examiner) to a recipient (the examined learner). As a result, the communication achieved through the context is no longer only based on the rule of ***common ground***, but it also expands to several other rules which include establishing and coordinating meaning according to the ***Cooperative Principle*** between both participants of the discourse.

- Involving examined learners hypothetically in university/center-related activities through presupposed contexts helps them invoke a positive backwash that encourages learners to learn and acquire the target language rather than intimidate them from it. That is because all presupposed contexts within the exams use all that is new in the universal world of technology and social media.