

Diagnostic Assessment of Arabic Grammatical Competence Among Future Arabic Language Teachers

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Abstract: The development of grammatical competence is an important component of professional training for future Arabic language teachers. However, the successful completion of grammar exercises or the memorization of grammatical rules does not always indicate the learner's ability to apply these rules accurately in oral and written communication. Therefore, an effective diagnostic assessment should identify not only what grammatical rules students know, but also how they understand, analyze, apply, and correct grammatical structures. This article examines the methodological foundations of diagnosing Arabic grammatical competence among future Arabic language teachers. Particular attention is given to the selection of diagnostic tasks, the identification of typical grammatical difficulties, and the criteria for determining different levels of grammatical competence. The proposed diagnostic framework includes tasks based on grammatical recognition, selection of correct forms, error identification and correction, sentence transformation, and independent sentence production. The article argues that a systematic diagnostic approach can provide more reliable information about students' actual grammatical competence and can serve as a basis for organizing subsequent instructional activities.

Keywords: Arabic language, grammatical competence, diagnostic assessment, future Arabic language teachers, Arabic grammar, *naḥw*, grammatical knowledge, grammatical skills, error correction, assessment criteria.

Introduction: Grammar plays an important role in the development of communicative competence in Arabic. For students preparing to become Arabic language teachers, grammatical knowledge has an additional professional significance. They are expected not only to use Arabic grammatical structures accurately but also to explain grammatical rules, recognize learners' errors, and provide appropriate corrective feedback.

In university-level Arabic language education, grammatical competence is often assessed through traditional exercises such as filling in the blanks, choosing the correct grammatical form, translating individual sentences, or reproducing previously studied rules. Such activities can provide useful information, but they do not always reveal the full level of a learner's grammatical competence. A student may remember a rule but fail to apply it in a new context. Conversely, a

student may select a correct answer from several options without being able to explain why the selected form is grammatically correct.

For this reason, diagnostic assessment should be distinguished from ordinary achievement testing. Achievement testing generally determines how successfully students have mastered previously taught material, whereas diagnostic assessment seeks to identify specific areas of difficulty and the nature of the problems underlying students' performance.

This issue is particularly relevant to Arabic because its grammatical system contains a number of features that may require sustained attention from non-native learners. These include grammatical gender, agreement, case endings, verbal patterns, nominal and verbal sentence structures, the *iḍāfa* construction, and the relationship between syntactic function and word

form. Research on Arabic as a second or foreign language has similarly identified recurring difficulties in areas such as word order, tense and aspect, agreement, verb forms, and grammatical endings.

The purpose of this article is therefore to examine the methodological foundations of diagnosing Arabic grammatical competence among future Arabic language teachers and to propose a structured set of diagnostic tasks and assessment criteria.

1. The Role of Diagnostic Assessment in Arabic Grammar Learning. Diagnostic assessment has an important function at the beginning or intermediate stages of language instruction because it allows teachers to determine students' existing knowledge and identify specific areas requiring further development. In Arabic grammar instruction, this is particularly important because grammatical difficulties are not always visible through general language performance.

For example, a student may successfully understand the meaning of a sentence but incorrectly mark the grammatical ending of a noun. Another student may know the rule of adjective–noun agreement but fail to apply it when the noun changes from masculine to feminine. These two students may receive similar results in a general language test, while their grammatical difficulties are fundamentally different.

A diagnostic approach makes it possible to distinguish between different types of problems. At least four dimensions should be considered:

1. knowledge of grammatical rules;
2. recognition and analysis of grammatical structures;
3. practical application of grammatical rules;
4. ability to identify and correct grammatical errors.

These dimensions are closely related but should not be treated as identical. Knowledge of a rule represents a necessary foundation, while practical application demonstrates whether this knowledge has become an operational skill.

The importance of such differentiation is also supported by research on Arabic learner errors. Studies have shown that learner errors may result from several sources, including first-language influence, overgeneralization, incorrect analogy, literal translation, and incomplete knowledge of target-

language rules. Therefore, a diagnostic test should provide enough information to distinguish between different manifestations of grammatical difficulty.

2. Diagnostic Assessment and Grammatical Competence. Grammatical competence can be understood as the learner's ability to understand and use the grammatical resources of the target language appropriately. In the context of Arabic language teacher education, this competence includes more than the memorization of naḥw rules. It involves the ability to recognize grammatical relations, select appropriate forms, construct grammatically accurate sentences, and explain the reasons for grammatical choices.

For example, consider the following sentences:

جاء الطالب.
رأيت الطالب.
مررت بالطالب.

A student who simply memorizes the three forms may reproduce them correctly. However, a student with developed grammatical competence should also understand why the noun appears in different case forms in these contexts.

Similarly, in:

الطالب مجتهد.

the student should be able to identify the muḥtad and khabar, understand their grammatical relationship, and recognize the nominative marking of both elements.

Therefore, diagnostic assessment should move from simple recognition toward more complex forms of grammatical processing. The learner should first identify a grammatical phenomenon, then select or produce an appropriate form, and finally use the structure independently.

This progression makes it possible to determine whether a difficulty concerns recognition, understanding, application, or independent production.

3. Types of Diagnostic Tasks. An effective diagnostic assessment of Arabic grammatical competence should include several complementary task types.

Grammatical Recognition Tasks. The first group of tasks focuses on the identification of grammatical elements and relations.

For example:

الطالب مجتهد.

The student may be asked to identify the muftada' and khabar.

Another example is:

كتب الطالب الدرس.

The learner should identify the verb, subject, and object. Such tasks are relatively simple but important because they reveal whether students can recognize basic grammatical structures. If a student cannot identify the grammatical function of a word, more complex application tasks are likely to present additional difficulties.

3. Selection Tasks. The second group requires students to select the grammatically correct form.

For example:

الطالبة _____.

- a) مجتهد
b) مجتهدة

The correct answer is مجتهدة because the adjective agrees with the feminine noun.

A similar task can be used to diagnose case endings:

رأيت الطالب / الطالب

The student must select the appropriate form according to the syntactic function of the noun.

Selection tasks are useful because they make it possible to test a particular grammatical phenomenon without requiring extensive written production.

3. Error Identification and Correction. The third group of tasks focuses on the learner's ability to identify incorrect grammatical forms and correct them.

For example:

رأيت الطالب.

The expected correction is:

رأيت الطالب.

Another example is:

الطالبة مجتهد.

which should be corrected to:

الطالبة مجتهدة.

Such tasks have particular importance in teacher education. A future Arabic language teacher must be

able to identify grammatical errors made by learners and understand the reason for the error.

Recent research on Arabic grammar learning has also emphasized the value of diagnostic instruments designed to distinguish between lack of knowledge and misconceptions rather than simply recording correct and incorrect answers.

3. Transformation Tasks. Transformation tasks require students to modify an existing sentence according to a given grammatical condition.

For example:

الطالب مجتهد.

Change the sentence into the feminine form:

الطالبة مجتهدة.

Another task may require changing the subject:

جاء الطالب.

جاءت الطالبة.

These tasks are particularly useful because they require the learner to apply grammatical rules dynamically. A student who has memorized a single sentence may reproduce it correctly, but transformation requires the student to understand the relationship between grammatical forms.

3. Diagnostic Areas Relevant to Uzbek-Speaking Learners. When diagnostic assessment is conducted among Uzbek-speaking students, the content of the assessment should take into account grammatical areas that may present particular difficulties.

One such area is grammatical gender. Uzbek does not have a grammatical gender system comparable to Arabic, while Arabic distinguishes masculine and feminine forms in several grammatical categories. Consequently, students may need additional practice in agreement between nouns, adjectives, pronouns, and verbs.

Another important area is case marking and i'rāb. Uzbek expresses many grammatical relations through case suffixes, whereas Arabic frequently expresses syntactic relationships through changes in word endings. Diagnostic tasks should therefore determine whether students understand the relationship between syntactic function and case marking.

A third area is nominal and verbal sentence structure. Students should be able to recognize the basic

organization of both:

الطالب مجتهد

and:

كتب الطالب الدرس.

They should also be able to produce such sentences independently.

The idāfa construction should also be included in diagnostic assessment. Students need to understand both the semantic relationship and the grammatical form of constructions such as:

الطالب

كتاب

باب المدرسة

Finally, verb agreement and verbal morphology require systematic attention. Research on Arabic learner errors has found difficulties involving verb forms and agreement, demonstrating that grammatical assessment should not be limited to nominal structures.

4. Methodological Significance of Diagnostic Results. The main value of diagnostic assessment is not simply the assignment of a score. Its primary function is to provide information that can guide subsequent instruction.

For example, if students perform well on grammatical recognition tasks but poorly on independent production tasks, the problem may not be a complete lack of grammatical knowledge. Instead, students may require more opportunities to apply rules in meaningful contexts.

If students demonstrate difficulties even in recognition tasks, the instructional focus may need to return to the explanation and consolidation of the relevant grammatical concept.

Similarly, if students consistently confuse masculine and feminine agreement, instructional activities should provide systematic comparison and repeated practice of agreement patterns. If irab presents the greatest difficulty, students should receive additional tasks connecting syntactic function with case marking.

Thus, diagnostic results can serve as a bridge between assessment and instruction. Error analysis provides information about what students do incorrectly, while diagnostic interpretation helps explain what type of knowledge or skill requires further development.

This approach is consistent with research showing that systematic analysis of Arabic learner errors can be used to identify difficult grammatical areas and subsequently inform grammar instruction.

CONCLUSION

Diagnosing Arabic grammatical competence among future Arabic language teachers requires a broader approach than testing the memorization of grammatical rules. Effective diagnosis should examine several interconnected abilities: recognition of grammatical structures, understanding of grammatical relationships, practical application, error identification, correction, and independent production.

A diagnostic task system consisting of recognition, selection, correction, transformation, and independent production activities can provide a more comprehensive picture of students' grammatical competence. It can also help distinguish between different types of difficulties and determine which grammatical areas require further instructional attention.

For Uzbek-speaking learners, particular attention should be given to grammatical gender, i'rab, nominal and verbal sentence structures, agreement, and verbal forms. However, these areas should not be treated simply as sources of errors. They should be considered as diagnostic indicators through which the actual development of grammatical competence can be observed.

The systematic collection and analysis of diagnostic results can provide an empirical basis for improving Arabic grammar instruction in higher education. For future Arabic language teachers, such assessment is especially valuable because their professional preparation requires not only accurate use of Arabic grammar but also the ability to analyze, explain, and correct grammatical structures.

Therefore, diagnostic assessment should be regarded as an integral component of the development of Arabic grammatical competence rather than merely a method of assigning grades. Its systematic application can contribute to more targeted instruction and provide a methodological foundation for further research into the development of grammatical competence among future Arabic language teachers.

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