

Criteria and Levels for Assessing Arabic Grammatical Competence Among Future Language Teachers

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Abstract: The assessment of grammatical competence is an important component of preparing future Arabic language teachers. In higher education, however, grammatical achievement is often evaluated primarily through the number of correct answers in traditional grammar exercises. Such an approach does not always provide a complete picture of students' ability to understand, analyze, apply, and explain Arabic grammatical structures. This article examines the main criteria and levels for assessing Arabic grammatical competence among future Arabic language teachers. Particular attention is given to grammatical knowledge, grammatical analysis, practical application, and error identification and correction. The article also proposes four general levels of grammatical competence: basic, intermediate, sufficient, and high. The proposed criteria can be used to interpret diagnostic assessment results and to identify areas requiring further instructional support. The study emphasizes that assessment should reflect not only students' knowledge of grammatical rules but also their ability to use these rules independently and explain grammatical phenomena.

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

Introduction: Grammatical competence is one of the essential components of professional language competence for future Arabic language teachers. A teacher of Arabic needs to possess not only sufficient knowledge of grammatical rules but also the ability to apply these rules accurately, analyze grammatical structures, identify errors, and explain grammatical phenomena to learners.

The assessment of grammatical competence is therefore more complex than checking whether students can remember individual rules. A learner may correctly reproduce a grammatical definition but still make errors when using the same structure in a sentence. Similarly, a student may choose a correct answer in a multiple-choice task without being able to explain the grammatical reason for that choice.

For this reason, assessment should include several interconnected dimensions of grammatical

competence. It should provide information about what students know, how they analyze grammatical structures, how accurately they apply grammatical rules, and whether they can identify and correct errors.

This issue is particularly important in the preparation of future Arabic language teachers because their professional activity will require them to assess the grammatical performance of their own students. Consequently, the criteria used to assess their grammatical competence should reflect both linguistic knowledge and practical teaching-related abilities.

1. Grammatical Competence as an Assessment Object

Grammatical competence can be viewed as the ability to understand and use the grammatical system of a language accurately and appropriately. In Arabic, this includes knowledge and practical control of various grammatical categories and structures, including nominal and verbal sentences, agreement, case

marking, verb forms, adjective–noun relations.

For example, understanding the following sentences requires more than memorizing the forms:

جاء الطالبُ

رأيتُ الطالبَ

مررتُ بالطالبِ

The learner should understand that the different endings are connected with the grammatical function of the noun within the sentence.

Similarly, in:

الطالبةُ مجتهدةٌ

the learner should recognize the agreement between the noun and adjective in gender and grammatical form.

Therefore, grammatical competence should be considered as a combination of knowledge and practical ability. Assessment should reflect both dimensions.

2. Main Criteria for Assessing Grammatical Competence

For the purposes of assessing future Arabic language teachers, four main criteria can be distinguished.

2.1. Knowledge of Grammatical Rules

The first criterion concerns students' knowledge and understanding of basic Arabic grammatical rules. Students should be able to recognize the main grammatical categories and explain their basic functions.

For example, students should understand the functions of *muftada* and *khabar*, recognize the basic principles of *i'rab*, and explain the grammatical relationship within an *idafa* construction.

However, knowledge should not be assessed exclusively through definitions. Students should also demonstrate that they can recognize the rule in actual language material.

2.2. Grammatical Analysis. The second criterion is the ability to analyze grammatical structures.

Consider the sentence:

كتبَ الطالبُ الدرسَ.

A competent student should be able to identify the verb, subject, and object and explain the grammatical form of each element.

Grammatical analysis is particularly important for future teachers because professional teaching requires an understanding of why a particular form is used rather than simple recognition of whether it is correct.

2.3. Practical Application. The third criterion concerns the ability to apply grammatical rules in actual language production.

Students should be able to construct sentences using specific grammatical patterns, transform sentences, and select appropriate forms in context.

For example, when changing:

الطالبُ مجتهدٌ

into the feminine form, the student should produce:

الطالبةُ مجتهدةٌ

This demonstrates that the student can apply grammatical agreement rather than simply recall a previously memorized example.

2.4. Error Identification and Correction. The fourth criterion is the ability to identify and correct grammatical errors.

For example:

رأيتُ الطالبَ

should be corrected to:

رأيتُ الطالبَ

A future teacher should also be able to explain why the first form is incorrect. This ability represents a higher level of grammatical awareness because it involves analysis, comparison, and conscious application of a grammatical rule.

3. Levels of Arabic Grammatical Competence

The criteria described above can be used to distinguish several general levels of grammatical competence.

Basic Level. At the basic level, students possess limited knowledge of Arabic grammar. They may recognize some basic structures but frequently make errors when applying grammatical rules.

Typical difficulties may include incorrect adjective–noun agreement, inappropriate case endings, incorrect sentence structure, and problems with basic *idafa* constructions.

Students at this level generally require substantial guidance and repeated practice.

Intermediate Level. At the intermediate level, students

understand the main grammatical rules and can use them in familiar and relatively simple contexts. However, difficulties may remain when they encounter less familiar structures or are required to produce language independently.

For example, a student may correctly identify *mubtada'* and *khavar* in a simple sentence but experience difficulties when the sentence contains additional grammatical elements.

Sufficient Level. At the sufficient level, students can generally analyze and apply grammatical structures correctly. They demonstrate adequate control over the main grammatical categories and can identify and correct common errors.

Students at this level can usually construct sentences independently and explain the grammatical principles underlying their choices.

High Level. At the high level, students demonstrate consistent and independent grammatical performance. They can use a relatively wide range of grammatical structures accurately, analyze complex sentences, identify subtle grammatical errors, and explain the reasons for particular grammatical forms.

For future Arabic language teachers, this level is particularly significant because it involves not only correct language use but also the ability to explain grammatical phenomena to other learners.

4. Interpretation of Assessment Results. Assessment results should not be interpreted only in terms of the total number of correct answers. The distribution of errors across different grammatical categories can provide more useful information about students' actual needs.

For example, a student may obtain a relatively satisfactory overall score but demonstrate persistent difficulties with *i'rab*. Another student may have adequate knowledge of case marking but experience difficulties with gender agreement.

These differences are important for instructional planning. A general score can indicate the overall level, while an analysis of error types can identify specific areas requiring additional attention.

Therefore, diagnostic assessment should ideally produce two types of information:

1. a general indicator of grammatical

competence;

2. a profile of specific grammatical strengths and weaknesses.

Such an approach allows teachers and researchers to determine not only how well students performed but also which aspects of Arabic grammar require further development.

5. Assessment of Future Arabic Language Teachers

The assessment of future Arabic language teachers should take into account their future professional responsibilities. Their grammatical competence should therefore be evaluated at a level that corresponds to both language use and pedagogical needs.

A future teacher should be able to distinguish between a grammatical error and an acceptable variation, identify the relevant grammatical rule, explain the error clearly, and provide an appropriate correction.

For example, when encountering the incorrect sentence:

الطالبة مجتهد

a future teacher should not simply replace *مجتهد* with *مجتهدة*. The teacher should also be able to explain that the adjective must agree with the noun in gender and grammatical form.

This ability is closely related to grammatical awareness and should be considered when assessing teacher candidates.

6. Methodological Value of the Proposed Criteria. The proposed criteria can be used in both research and educational practice. In research, they can serve as a basis for designing diagnostic instruments and comparing students' performance before and after an instructional intervention.

In classroom practice, the same criteria can help teachers determine whether students need additional explanation, guided practice, corrective exercises, or opportunities for independent production.

The criteria can also be converted into quantitative indicators. For example, each criterion may be represented by a set of tasks, and students' performance can subsequently be analyzed according to the percentage of correct responses.

Such an approach makes it possible to establish a clearer relationship between qualitative characteristics

of grammatical performance and quantitative assessment results.

Conclusion. The assessment of Arabic grammatical competence among future Arabic language teachers should extend beyond the measurement of memorized grammatical rules. A comprehensive assessment needs to consider students' grammatical knowledge, analytical ability, practical application, and capacity to identify and correct grammatical errors.

The distinction between basic, intermediate, sufficient, and high levels provides a general framework for interpreting students' grammatical performance. These levels can subsequently be operationalized through specific quantitative indicators and diagnostic tasks.

Particular attention should be given to the relationship between overall performance and individual error types. Such analysis can reveal whether students' difficulties are concentrated in areas such as grammatical agreement, sentence structure or verbal forms.

For future Arabic language teachers, grammatical competence has both linguistic and professional significance. They need not only to use Arabic grammar accurately but also to understand and explain grammatical structures and identify learners' errors. Therefore, clearly defined assessment criteria and competence levels can provide an important methodological basis for improving the preparation of future Arabic language teachers and for conducting further experimental research.

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