

**An Assessment Framework of Communicative Arabic  
Proficiency CAP in the Light of Diglossia**

**By**

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## **Declaration of Authorship**

I, Rahaf Alabar, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:

**To my beloved parents ...**

**Amal and Jamil**

**And my dearest siblings ...**

**A'ala, A'laa, Raghad, and Judie**

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## **Abstract**

The key aim of my research is to explore the meaning of communicative Arabic proficiency CAP consulting the assessment stakeholders in the UKHE context. I then propose an assessment framework that resonates with the communicative needs of the UKHE students and considers the diglossic nature of Arabic language. A qualitative approach was followed to explore the concept of CAP in relation to the Arabic varieties and its potential competences in addition to the testing norm and constructs. For these purposes, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine assessment stakeholders who fall into three categories; assessor teachers, teachers, and learners of Arabic as a foreign language in the UKHE context. The research questions revolve around four main areas; the meaning of CAP, the competences that CAP embodies, the constructs through which learners' CAP can be measured, and the suitable norm for CAP assessment. The findings are presented in four sections following the sequence of the research questions; the first section reports aspects like social appropriacy, grammatical accuracy, and cultural and bi-dialectical knowledge as the major attributes of CAP. It also implies conceptualising CAP from a post-method perspective. The second section outlines the socio-linguistic, cultural/intercultural, bi-dialectical and interactional competences as the different components that make up CAP. The third section highlights interaction and culture/inter-culture as the potential different constructs through which learners' CAP could be measured. The fourth section reports the educated native speaker or a L2 user as potential norms to assess the learners' CAP. Following an examination of the research findings in the light of the relevant literature, the UKHE context and the learners' needs, a languacultural assessment framework of CAP is proposed. Its distinctive components are proposing a situated assessment (SA) approach of MSA and the colloquial, an interactional/languacultural construct, and a diglossic competent L2 user (DC2) as a norm of proficiency assessment.

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## List of abbreviations

<b>CAP</b>	Communicative Arabic Proficiency
<b>UKHE</b>	UK Higher Education Context
<b>AT(s)</b>	Assessor Teacher(s)
<b>T(s)</b>	Teacher(s)
<b>L(s)</b>	Learner(s)
<b>ESA</b>	Educated Spoken Arabic
<b>NS(s)</b>	Native Speaker(s)
<b>NNS(s)</b>	Non-native Speaker(s)
<b>ENS</b>	Educated Native Speaker
<b>SA</b>	Situated Assessment
<b>IA</b>	Integrated Approach
<b>T AFL</b>	Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language

# 1

## Autobiography

My research has been inspired by Cummins's statement that,

‘many linguists [...] have argued that language proficiency can be validly assessed only in naturally-occurring communicative contexts’.

(in press, 26-27) cited in Canale (1984: 108).

This statement squares with the idea of language for communication, which in the first place, demands clear identification of the naturally-occurring language in different communicative situations in the case of Arabic. Then teaching pedagogy and assessment practices can be discussed accordingly. The focus of my research is on conceptualising communicative Arabic proficiency in the light of Arabic sociolinguistic situation, and proposing a communicative framework for assessing it in the UK higher education (UKHE) context.

Although my thesis deals with a very specific scope of Arabic language pedagogy, the aspects that have led to this interest are rooted in my personal and professional experience along the past ten years. This chapter offers a reflective account of these aspects that influenced the focus and production of my PhD thesis. They are presented around three pivots; the influence of my degree study on my early career as an Arabic major and teacher, the testing context in the institute I used to work for, and my UK postgraduate experience during the past five years.

### 1.1. My early career

The first turning point in my life was after high school graduation. As a high school student of science, I was expected to commence my BA studies in the same field, but I decided to change my entire academic path when I applied to enrol on an Arabic language and literature course.

Like most life aspects, students' academic choices in my country (Syria) are heavily influenced by people's perceptions and attitudes. In such a collectivist culture, individuals' decisions should take into consideration social preferences. My personal choice, though, was surprisingly very independent from the surroundings' influences, and again was considered a deviation from the social norms.

In fact, I had developed an interest in languages since primary school. I was curious about the aspects of grammar and its relation to meaning, and how language intersects with culture and shape identities. I still recall that one of my primary school teachers used to tell us how powerful language is in making social and personal changes, and in one's way of perceiving the world. I believed in that power back then and continue to chase this belief to the present day.

My university studies focused on both classical and modern Arabic literature and all its genres, along different historical periods of the Middle East and North Africa. This study of literature was coupled with several modules that introduced Arabic linguistics. Considering myself a native speaker of the language that I was studying, it was very surprising to find out how shallow my knowledge about the standard language was, and the amount of forms and structures that are taken for granted. It was a moment of discovery when I realised that my actual native language is the Syrian colloquial and that my knowledge of the standard language was not deep enough. Although this conclusion might not be deemed as surprising now, I remember how much it was back then.

After graduation, I decided to take a one-year MA course in Arabic linguistics, which I believed would allow me to take my interest of Arabic language to an analytical level. The course introduced me to the aspects of Arabic that are of interest to those who seek expertise in Arabic stylistics, syntax and morphology. It challenged my capability to analyse structures and morphological forms and to examine, reason, and then explain the complex elements of linguistic structures and their relations.

Taking part in this course was of great help for my professional career later as a teacher. Right after graduating I was assigned a post as a teaching assistant at Damascus University and as a teacher of Arabic as a foreign language at the higher language institute (HLI) affiliated to it. However, although as a learner of Arabic linguistics I have been taught the formal language, this has not qualified me to teach it. Some say

that being a teacher means that one is made rather than being born; thus learning to be a teacher was for me so highly required. There are two key points that I learned in that period of my life which have contributed to shaping my arguments in my PhD research. The first point is that Arabic nativeness implies the colloquial acquisition, and that the standard language is to be learned, not taken for granted. The other point is that learning the standard language does not qualify one for being a teacher of it; particularly in the case of Arabic. One of my observations during my research in the UK is how common it is that any native speaker of Arabic can teach Arabic even if they are not trained as teachers.

## **1.2. My work experience in the HLI**

When I started teaching at the HLI, there were 30 teachers who held BAs in Arabic language and literature from one of the Syrian universities. They all came to teach directly after they finished their college education with neither teaching nor assessment training. We were all responsible for classroom assessment as a part of our teaching process. The HLI does not provide regular pre-service or in-service teacher education courses, which meant that we needed to manage and survive our classroom practices based on our own default options; the concept that was first proposed by Lortie (1975) as ‘apprenticeship of observation’; which indicates the perceptions that pre-service teachers hold about their teaching. This concept piqued my curiosity to examine the extent to which teachers can exploit this knowledge when it comes to language testing practices. I consider this point in my career the first step on the way to undertaking research in the field of language testing and assessment that led to where I currently am as a researcher, as I explain later in section 1.3.

The other turning point in my academic career was when I was assigned as a teaching assistant at Damascus University. Since then I became more critically involved in teaching and testing practices in the department of Arabic language. I have felt increasing dissatisfaction with the teaching culture and testing practices. As a teaching assistant, I was responsible for developing a set of Arabic placement tests, a task for which I was woefully unprepared. Given the lack of resources for Arabic language pedagogy, the minor interest that has been given to language research across the Arab world and the absence of the experts in the field made this task rather hard. I relied very much on English language pedagogy research; I carried out extensive readings in the

field of foreign language assessment, and shared these resources with the other members of the group that was supposed to complete this task. Through group discussions and each teacher's professional experience we could reach a reasonable level of understanding about language examinations. I was not able to progress with this group work since I was granted a scholarship to commence my postgraduate studies in the UK.

Through my work experience, I had explored the research grounding of Arabic as a foreign language; which I realised was very limited. The only available resource was the American Council on Teaching Foreign Languages (ACTFL). We used to refer to the (1999) version of the Arabic ACTFL proficiency guidelines, and base our curricula and assessment on it. Accordingly, our teaching and assessment content focused mainly on the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA); the formal variety of Arabic only. Our assessment practices were basically summative (assessment of learning)<sup>1</sup>; where we had a few in-house placement tests, in addition to the monthly achievement tests. Following ACTFL, our assessment theory was mainly behavioural<sup>2</sup> functional<sup>3</sup>, which was supposed to cater for our students' communication<sup>4</sup> needs. But a topic of conversation in the teachers' room was always the students' complaints about the difficulties they faced when trying to communicate outside the classroom. Unless the students made a personal effort to learn some Syrian colloquial, they would not feel confident enough to engage in social relations and interactions with the Syrian people. This issue was raised many times with the management of the HLI, but the academic affiliation to ACTFL was more influential in this regard. Until I came to the UK in 2011, teaching and assessment practices in the HLI continued as before. Arabic ACTFL was revised in 2012 in terms of communication in Arabic to start considering the colloquial as part of

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<sup>1</sup> Summative test: a test given at the end of a course of instruction, that measures or "sums up" how much a student has learned from the course (Richards and Schmidt, 2010: 573).

<sup>2</sup> Behavioural objective is 'a statement of what a learner is expected to know or be able to do after completing all or part of an educational programme. One of its characteristics is that 'it clearly describes the goals of learning in terms of observable behaviour'" (Richards and Schmidt, 2010: 51).

<sup>3</sup> When the language content is arranged in terms of functions or speech acts together with the language items needed for them. For example, the functions might be identifying, describing, inviting, offering, etc., in different types of discourse (i.e. speech or writing) (Richards and Schmidt, 2010: 235).

<sup>4</sup>Communication is 'the exchange of ideas, information, etc., between two or more persons' (Richards and Schmidt, 2010: 97).



the language content alongside MSA, but, due to the security situation in Syria, the department of Arabic language was shut early in 2013.

### **1.3. My UK postgraduate experience**

Given my involvement in designing placement tests in the HLI, and the interest I developed in exploring the area of assessment, I was granted a scholarship to do advanced academic studies in this field in the Arab world or Europe. Arabic language pedagogy has not been researched adequately as a foreign language in the Arab world; this motivated me to search for a Master's programme in Europe. In October 2010, at an international conference for English language teaching and learning in Damascus, I met a professor in Applied Linguistics and Language Education, Richard Kiely, to whom I explained my research interest.

In the ensuing email correspondence with Professor Kiely, he suggested that an MA in TESOL would help me drawing on frameworks for TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) to explore issues in curriculum design, teaching methods and assessment in TASOL (Teaching Arabic to Speakers of Other Languages). Thereafter, I started a TESOL programme in 2011.

My experience of the taught courses of the MA in TESOL was one of excitement and commitment. I employed my curiosity about all topics and concepts introduced and read extensively on the subject. My study of sociocultural theory (SCT)<sup>5</sup> and its implications for the language curriculum is an example. I persevered with challenging texts to effectively apply the aspects of SCT theory to address issues arising in the Arabic teaching context; such as using L2 to mediate Arabic instruction, and the role of bilingual dictionaries to facilitate classroom activities at the novice levels.

I then undertook an empirical study about language teachers' assessment literacy for my dissertation. My own story that incorporated designing tests triggered my interest to carry out my research dissertation on that topic. As explained in section 1.2, like all teachers in the HLI, I started my teaching career without any pre-service or in-service

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<sup>5</sup> SCT theory is derived from the work of the Russian psychologist Vygotsky. It emphasises the role that social interaction plays in learning and the nature of language as a communicative activity rather than as a formal linguistic system.

training on teaching approaches. After two weeks of being responsible for classroom teaching, I was required to design a writing test as a part of the mid-course progress achievement assessment. I was completely lost; I did not know where to start from or who to ask. There was no guidebook setting out the 'rules' and my relationship with other teachers was fresh. I remember that even forming the tasks' rubrics was a challenge; for instance, I once asked students "to talk" instead of "to write" about a topic in a writing test; which was criticised by other teachers. Also, choosing the topic that suits the students' level and the criteria of distributing marks were all of a grey area back then. All these instances inspired me to explore the kind of knowledge that shapes teachers' experience, from where they access the assessment information they need, how they manage to design tests, mark and grade, and what is required to improve their literacy. This research was my first professional contribution to the field of Arabic language pedagogy since it includes the aspects of two domains; teacher education and language testing and assessment.

My MA course introduced me to the rich and advanced areas of English language assessment; such as the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), Cambridge examinations, and the research carried on IELTS (International English Language Testing System) tests. Relating this to Arabic language, I found out that apart from ACTFL and the work done in the USA, research on Arabic assessment is very limited, and work on assessment standardisation is usually institutional if it exists. Therefore, I decided to take this issue further in my doctoral studies and discuss the complexities of proficiency assessment in Arabic; hoping that one day we could have an Arabic CEFR.

Supported by my PhD supervisors, I was introduced to some experts in the field from the UK, Qatar and the USA. They asserted that this issue is a major concern for people who work in the field, and that the failure so far in developing a universal assessment research ground of Arabic is mainly due to the lack of interest in that in the Arab world. Creating proficiency assessment instruments which are independent of any curriculum or academic programme is usually costly and time consuming. Other than Arabic ACTFL that is designed mainly for the US context, there is no other scale of proficiency which would suit the general needs of learners of Arabic worldwide. The lack of resources and the absence of an official umbrella that gathers together the experts in the

field besides the scattered research attempts across the Arab countries make it challenging to develop a research ground on proficiency assessment.

To me, teaching and assessment practices in the UKHE context seemed very disparate. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) only, or MSA and the colloquial separately, or integrated were the content of the language taught and tested in most of the UKHE contexts. Yet, what literally struck me was that at some UK universities, the Arabic syllabus for the first-year students of History and Arabic basically comprised lists of MSA vocabulary accompanied with grammatical rules. Assessment tasks were mainly Arabic texts to be translated into English, and vice versa. When I spoke to some students in such contexts, they described their dissatisfaction with their learning outcomes which were mainly formal and decontextualised, and alluded to the struggle they fear they will encounter in their year abroad.

The state of Arabic pedagogy in general and in the UK context has opened my eyes to the pressing need to start an investigation on the value of having a unified pedagogical framework for Arabic that caters for the UKHE context, and corresponds with the students' communicative needs.

#### **1.4. Research questions**

The key aim of my research is to explore the meaning of communicative Arabic proficiency by consulting the assessment stakeholders in the UKHE context. I then propose an assessment framework that resonates with the communicative needs of the UKHE students and considers the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic language.

Four main research questions were posed to explore the areas under scrutiny:

1. In the light of the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic, how is communicative Arabic proficiency conceptualised?
2. What competences does communicative Arabic proficiency consist of?
3. What construct(s) should a testing framework for communicative Arabic proficiency be based upon?
4. What is the role of the native speaker model for testing communicative Arabic proficiency?

## **1.5. Thesis outline**

Chapter 1: looked at my personal and professional interest that has led to researching this area of language testing.

Chapter 2: looks at the contextual issues that underpin my research questions; such as the diglossic nature of Arabic and how it informs the Arabic communicative paradigm I intend to explore. It also provides an overview of teaching and testing practices, teachers and students in the UKHE context.

Chapter 3: reviews the models that have conceptualised Arabic proficiency from a sociolinguistic perspective. It then offers an overview of how foreign language testing practices have been influenced throughout a chronological line of foreign language teaching development. The potential implications of these developments on Arabic language pedagogy are also discussed.

Chapter 4: looks at the methods used in this research by offering the theoretical worldviews which underpin the qualitative paradigm I have chosen. It also describes how the data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, and then analysed and used to propose the framework.

Chapter 5: addresses the first research question; the meaning of the concept of communicative proficiency in the light of diglossia.

Chapter 6: investigates the second research question; the possible competences of which the concept of communicative proficiency consists.

Chapter 7: examines the third research question; the construct/s on which an assessment framework of communicative proficiency should be based. Potential approaches to testing the competences addressed in chapter 6 are also offered, as reported in the data.

Chapter 8: scrutinises the fourth research question; the role of the native speaker (NS) model for testing communicative Arabic proficiency.

Chapter 9: proposes an assessment framework for communicative Arabic proficiency based on the data emerging from this research, alongside my personal perspectives and examination of the relevant literature

Chapter 10: provides the conclusions of this research study in relation to the four research questions, and discusses the implications of the research findings for the field of Arabic language testing in the UKHE context. It also suggests potential directions for future research.

# 2

## Research context

### 2.1. Introduction

Arabic is believed to be one of the less commonly taught languages and, therefore, far less international research has been conducted on its pedagogy, either as a first or as a second language. This makes it considerably challenging to start an advanced research endeavour based on a very shallow academic research basis in relation to the study of Arabic pedagogy in the Arab world or even abroad. Another challenge is some contextual issues that feature the Arabic language in general as well as the profession of teaching it in the UK Higher Education (UKHE) context.

This chapter describes these contextual issues upon which this study is undertaken. The study takes place in the UKHE context where Arabic is being taught. The aim is discussing the formulation of a framework to describe communicative Arabic language proficiency (CAP), taking into consideration its complex socio-linguistic situation. I start with a description of the purposes and methods of teaching Arabic in different contexts. Next, a discussion on the teaching practices and testing situation in the UKHE context is offered, followed by a short description of the existing scales of proficiency I adopt as references in my research. I conclude with some comments on the gaps that my research aims to address.

### 2.2. A historical overview of the Arabic teaching profession

In the early twentieth century when Arabic was taught in the Islamic world, the focus of teaching was mainly on the language of texts, and the medium of instruction was the Classical Arabic. This variety of Arabic ‘functioned as an international language of scholarship, in much the same way as Latin did in Europe’ (Versteegh, 2006: 4).

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the Arab world regained its independence. Due to the increasing political and economic importance of that area to the west, the need for specialists who have a good command of the modern language has increased in

the western countries. Therefore, the profession of teaching Arabic accordingly shifted to non-Arab countries. This period witnessed the replacing of the Classical Arabic with a more modern form of the written script; that is Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) (Versteegh, 2006: 9).

Ferguson (1970) postulated that Arabic was believed to be one of the most difficult languages to learn and so a non-native speaker (NNS) of Arabic cannot genuinely attain the proficiency level of ‘an educated native speaker’ (ENS). The result was a reliance on the audio-lingual and grammar-translation approaches as safe ways of teaching. Accordingly, an intense concentration was placed on teaching grammar with extensive translation exercises from the learners’ first language to Arabic as a target language in various western teaching contexts (Versteegh, 2006).

In fact, in Europe, there was another factor that contributed to the dominance of this method within the profession of teaching Arabic in that period. Political considerations in European countries initially determined the type of Arabic taught, and the way it was introduced. Experts in translation and interpretations were needed to translate documents and interpret at international meetings. Many courses were developed based on Modern Standard Arabic in the German language, at different European Universities which made it accessible only to those who knew German. Otherwise, American textbooks were used in Europe (Versteegh, 2006: 9).

In the last three decades, students from the minority groups in Europe who have a previous knowledge of the vernacular have developed interest in studying Arabic at universities. This brought the Arabic dialects to the university context and changed the classroom situations in many western universities. As a result, many universities considered developing programme courses that teach both, starting from MSA or the dialect, or combining the two varieties by dividing the linguistic skills across them (Versteegh, 2006: 10-11).

Another development in the profession in the past three decades has been relocating Arabic teaching to the Middle East. Students were encouraged to travel to the Middle East to learn Arabic in the region where it is used. The foreign institutes in the Arab countries were the places to which students headed such as the French institute in Damascus and the German institute in Beirut. This option was not available for all students though; therefore, some Arab universities launched TAFL (Teaching Arabic as

a Foreign Language) programmes and took up the task of material developments and teacher training. So far, most of these universities are reluctant to include the vernacular in their curricula despite their students' needs and interests in speaking the Arabic dialects (Versteegh, 2006: 11). Dialectical projects were mainly confined to non-Arabic-native educators in the US who aimed to describe and document the major Arabic vernaculars; and these educators developed materials that set their grammatical rules, dictionaries and syllabi such as the University of Michigan and Georgetown (Versteegh, 2006).

### **2.3. Teaching and testing Arabic in the UKHE context**

Over the past three decades, many British universities developed their own Arabic language teaching materials, which basically considered Modern Standard Arabic as a target language in its spoken and written forms (Dickins and Watson, 2006: 110). At the same time, since the late 1980s, some UK institutions started to consider the diglossic identity of Arabic language and therefore to include the teaching of different varieties of spoken Arabic within the teaching hours, such as the programme taught in Durham University (Dickins and Watson, 2006: 109). The result was new hybrid models of teaching aiming to teach MSA alongside the formal spoken Arabic – the so-called 'educated spoken Arabic'; a concept that first arose in the US context. It is defined as 'an elevated form of spoken Arabic closer to MSA than to a regional dialect, but incorporating the most common lexical and morphological features of Arabic colloquial speech' (Ryding, 2006: 17). This shift was basically towards paying more attention to the goal of speaking Arabic, with the same level of concentration paid to improving learners' abilities in the reading skills, such as the programme course taught in the University of Cambridge (Dickins and Watson, 2006: 110).

The current situation in the UK, according to Kendall's (2014: 2) article entitled *The challenges facing the study of Arabic in the UK* is that 'Arabic is taught as part of a degree course at 16 British Universities'. Wide spectrums of students attend these courses including those who are interested in learning about Islam through learning the language of the Quran. Despite that, it is worth noting that Arabic is spoken in the Arab world by people from other religions such as Christianity and other races such as the Armenians and the Kurds.



### 2.3.1. Students

According to Dickins and Watson (2006: 108), students at the British universities fall within the following groups;

- Heritage learners who come originally from an Arabic background but they are born and raised in the UK.
- People who have an interest in Islam including the converts.
- Students of non-Arab Islamic background.
- People with an interest in Arabic through engaging with an Arabic country for business relations.
- ‘Experienced language learners: ‘who view the study of Arabic as a new challenge leading from their school studies of modern European languages’.

There are varieties of students who are interested in learning Arabic at the British universities. Their needs and background knowledge in Arabic are diverse; however, probably due to the lack of resources, they are not treated as such. For example, heritage speakers of Arabic are usually exposed to their parents’ spoken variety at home since their early childhood. Some might also have some exposure to the formal varieties of Arabic through learning the Quran or following the media. Yet, they still have limited proficiency in their heritage language since they use it very little outside their homes (Albirini, 2016). Also, they have a strong command of English, which limits their heritage language use, in addition to the absence of pressure to use their heritage language in the public sphere (Shiri, 2010). They are also different from Arabic monolingual speakers in two ways; firstly, their Arabic input might undergo attrition as they get older and so have more exposure to the English public sphere. Secondly, they most probably lack the experience that the monolingual has with the diglossic situation of Arabic and its different varieties (Albirini, 2016: 301). Despite that, an Arabic heritage speaker is treated as a non-native speaker in the British universities in terms of knowledge and levelling which might not be suitable, as they still have attachments to the Arabic colloquial, culture, and sometimes to its standard versions as well (Albrini, 2016: 196).

Also, students who have an interest in Islam might have some background Arabic knowledge. They might not be complete novices since many of them try to learn

Arabic in Islamic schools (madrassahs) to acquire some understanding of the Quran. Therefore, changes to the approach of the Arabic language curriculum at the British universities are demanded, probably in a similar way to how the Australian curriculum was recently set out. In the UK, there is one pathway for background of foreign language learners. In contrast, recent developments in the approach to languages curriculum and assessment policy in Australia took place in 2011. The approach identifies three possible 'pathways' for language study; these are mother tongue, background language, and foreign language. It addresses how to recognise the language-learning experience of such different groups of students. It is concerned with the continuously-educational support of the three pathways through the curriculum so that learners make worthwhile gains in language learning. Perhaps, such separated pathways would be useful in the UK context. For each, different Arabic curricula and assessment approaches could be then developed.

### 2.3.2. Courses

According to a report published by the British Academy based on a research day held in 2012, several types of courses that involve Arabic are being taught in different UKHE contexts: 'Arabic with Islamic studies', 'Arabic with another modern foreign language', 'joint honours in Arabic with Modern European Language', 'theology', 'business studies and international relations' (Scott-Baumann and Contractor, 2012: 15).

According to Kendall's (2014: 44) report, in the British Universities, 'Arabic is a catch-all label applied to a broad variety of university courses that vary considerably in the level of sophistication of the Arabic they offer'. She, though, emphasises the need for a more organised and transparent approach that resonates with the students' needs and the type of course they take. She suggests an approach that takes MSA as a foundation for students who have a range of reasons for learning Arabic. Students then can be guided to different 'streams of specialisations' such as Classical Arabic for textual research or 'dialect work' for social science (ibid: 4).

### 2.3.3. Challenges

Kendall's (2014) report lists several challenges that face those who teach Arabic in the UKHE context. One important challenge that I have also observed through conducting my research is the lack of Arabic expertise in the field. This in turn most commonly

influences the reality of teaching. The assumption that a native speaker of Arabic who is already a member of staff can teach Arabic is one aspect that creates such influence. She adds that ‘core language training is a gruelling task and is therefore often passed to native-speaking postgraduates or early career staff rather than trained specialists’, while in reality, ‘even native speakers need to have learnt formal written Arabic’ (ibid: 3). Therefore, ‘no professional qualification requirements exist for teachers of Arabic’ according to Dickins and Watson (2006: 110) in the UKHE context.

#### 2.3.4. Assessment

In a research report published in March 2012, Scott-Buamann and Contractor (2012:16) stated that; ‘BA courses in UK universities usually offer only *ab initio* Arabic’ and do not cater for students with prior learning of Arabic.

One of the report’s implications is that due to the rise of Arabic learning in the UK, a large developed scale of learning competences would enrich the student’s experience, adding that ‘assessment and validation of Arabic could unlock new improved economic possibilities within mainstream sector study and future employment’ (Scott-Buamann and Contractor, 2012: 42).

Through my observations and talks with a good number of teachers and lecturers of Arabic at different British universities and institutes, I realised that teaching and assessment materials are mostly developed in-house, within the context of the department where Arabic is being taught. Most of the testing materials fall within either of two categories;

1. Progress or achievement tests: where the aim is to measure students’ attainment to diagnose their progress or to report in scores that they have reached the required level.
2. Online/oral placement tests: where one skill is usually measured to identify how much knowledge of Arabic a student has before entering any academic course that includes Arabic at university or if the aim was studying Arabic at the affiliated language institute. The online test is most commonly a vocabulary test, or otherwise an oral test where speaking is the only skill under assessment.

During my research journey, I have not come across any kind of proficiency test, or even a standardised scale of competences upon which Arabic competency can be built

in the British universities. The categories of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR: 2001) are mainly used to identify the skills and knowledge that students in this context are expected to be aware of at a certain level. Scott-Buamann and Contractor's (2012: 41) report has recommended that all British higher educational institutions should cooperate 'to provide a varied rich mix of opportunities to learn Arabic for different purposes, at different levels and in different combinations'. It also has emphasised the need to consider a 'standardisation of language assessment levels, using the CEFR for languages as a starting point'.

#### **2.4. Scales of language proficiency**

The majority of the existing scales of foreign language proficiency have holistic definitions for the grades on the scale. The first significant scale of language proficiency was the rating scale of the US Foreign Service Institute (FSI) developed in the 1950s. Many other scales developed subsequently were derived from FSI such as ASLPR (Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings), the ILR (Interagency Language Roundtable) and ACTFL (North, 2000: 13). In 2012, ILR ICC (intercultural competence) skill-level descriptors were produced by the ILR committees for government use. Those descriptors concern the content and form of both verbal and non-verbal communication amongst people from different cultures. Another scale developed by the Council of Europe is the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) that sets comprehensive descriptors of what learners of foreign languages can do at each level of proficiency. In 2012, the Council of Europe has developed the (FREPA) 'Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures'. It provides general guidelines that define intercultural and plurilingual<sup>6</sup> competences in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude. It emphasises the interfaces between regional, social and cultural dimensions of the language. It also highlights the role of the knowledge of culture in intercultural relations and communication.

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<sup>6</sup> Plurilingual competence is used to mean the knowledge of several languages by an individual (Richards and Schmidt, 2010: 442).

In my study, I give careful consideration to the different scales mentioned but I particularly look in detail at Arabic ACTFL (2012), the CEFR (2001) and ILR ICC (2012). The reasons for my choice are:

1. ACTFL editors have considered Arabic as a distinctive language from other commonly taught languages in terms of script and variations. They accordingly set descriptors of abilities, which reflect that. Also, significant work on Arabic pedagogy was mainly carried out on the basis of ACTFL.
2. Although the CEFR aims to describe the learners' level of attainment in the European languages, it is used in the UK universities for identifying Arabic learners' level of attainment.
3. ILR ICC sets the descriptors of intercultural competence based on the ILR and ACTFL levels of proficiency. Although ILR ICC does not outline descriptors that are particularly relevant to Arabic, it would still be useful as it is intended for the representatives of the US foreign institute abroad. This would include those who go live in the Arab states as well.

#### 2.4.1. What are ACTFL and Arabic ACTFL?

ACTFL is considered to be a significant scale of language proficiency originally derived and developed from the rating scale of the US Foreign Service Institute (FSI).

Arabic ACTFL proficiency guidelines are behavioural descriptors of language proficiency levels in each of the four language skills; speaking, listening, reading and writing. They are aimed at learning Arabic as a foreign language. They were created and first published in November 1986 as an adaptation for the academic community of the US Government's Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) skill level descriptors. The second edition was released after revising speaking and writing guidelines to reflect real-world needs in 1999 and 2001, respectively. In this edition, the guidelines described four major levels of proficiency; superior, advanced, intermediate and novice. Novice and intermediate were divided into low, mid and high sub-levels. The third edition published in 2012 identified five major levels of proficiency; distinguished, superior, advanced, intermediate and novice. The addition in this edition was to subdivide advanced level into high, mid and low sub-levels, while the distinguished was left undivided. The direct application of the ACTFL proficiency guidelines is evaluating

functional language ability. Accordingly, Arabic ACTFL was also revised in the same way; the distinguished level was added to the top of the scale, and the superior level was subdivided. Moreover, in its last edition, the shift towards implementing the ‘real-life situation’ concept and applying the aspects of ‘language for communication’ were evident in the scale. It is worth mentioning that the first two editions of Arabic ACTFL considered MSA as the only variety of language to be taught and tested; whereas in the third edition, MSA and formal spoken dialect as described above were the target Arabic varieties.

ACTFL is still the only rating scale that listed a set of behavioural descriptors of Arabic language proficiency with elaborate definitions for each category in the scale. Through a wider look at the context of Arabic language testing, one can notice that research on Arabic as a foreign language is largely seen through the efforts of the American Council on Teaching Foreign Languages (ACTFL). ACTFL was revised in 2012; yet, a number of critiques emerged that were related to ACTFL descriptors; which, from my perspective, have not been dealt with in the latest version of it. These are;

1. Arabic ACTFL does not have mutual agreement on the model that reflects the native proficiency or on a definition of it (Eisele, 2006: 197).
2. No standard notion of what ‘authenticity’ means in the Arabic context is given which might affect the test validity (Eisele, 2006: 197).
3. No clear details given beyond the superior levels, or why the distinguished level was added (Eisele, 2006: 201).
4. Uses specific linguistic forms as a way of discriminating between levels of proficiency, ‘rather than making a holistic judgement about range, accuracy, fluency’ as addressed by North (2000: 36).
5. ACTFL does not clearly define the notion of the ENS used as the norm against which the non-native learners are judged.
6. The last edition of ACTFL (2012) divides the superior level into three sub-levels but no description of these new invented ones for Arabic or for any other language is provided.
7. In Arabic ACTFL (2012) I have not come across any reference to intercultural competence as a component of communicative proficiency either in the descriptions or in the examples provided within the scale.

8. One more critique that I have regarding Arabic ACTFL in general is the failure in addressing a clear diglossic content that learners are required to know in each level. In the context of British universities where learners come from diverse backgrounds and learn Arabic for different reasons, these two particular issues should be addressed and dealt with in the process of formulating a framework of proficiency.

#### 2.4.2. What is the CEFR?

The CEFR or the Common European Framework of Reference is a taxonomic framework that consists of a set of descriptors used to describe the levels of performance of the learners of European foreign languages. This guideline was developed by the Council of Europe between 1989 and 1996 to provide a common explicit elaboration for the objectives, content and methods of teaching and assessment.

The CEFR (2001) describes what language learners have to achieve in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively and how their knowledge and skills should be assessed in a foreign language. According to this framework, learners are divided into six groups according to the level of proficiency.

- A) The basic user consists of A1 beginner and A2 elementary,
- B) The independent user consists of B1 intermediate and B2 upper intermediate, and
- C) The proficient user level consists of C1 advanced and C2 mastery of proficiency.

CEFR (2001) is the scale where the levels of performance of the learners of Arabic are evaluated and measured in the UKHE context. Graduates most commonly are expected to reach the **C1** level after they finish their degree. One of the critiques directed at the CEFR is that it is a six-level scale that was found to be inadequate in some cases. As a solution to this issue, some countries have added sub-levels to the original scale, which can negatively impact the international comparability (Martyniuk and Noijons, 2007: 6).

In relation to the Arabic context, the CEFR can be useful as a reference but several adjustments should be made to accommodate the differences of the Arabic language from the European languages; namely script and language varieties.

- a) Script: the levels' division of the CEFR implies a mutual type of script that is the Latin, while Arabic is a Semitic language and has a completely different alphabetical system. Therefore, A1 level for the learner of a European language does not resonate with A1 level of the learner of Arabic. The time a learner of Arabic needs to become a proficient A1 user might not be identical to the time the users of other languages need.
- b) Language varieties: the CEFR does not contain references to languages that have a diglossic nature such as Arabic. The variety to be used according to the social context need to be identified clearly.

Like ACTFL, the CEFR takes the NS as a norm for measuring the learners' levels of proficiency: yet it states that the mastery level (C2) that represents the end-state of proficiency in the CEFR gloss is not meant to reflect NS or near NS competence. It is rather intended 'to characterise the degree of precision, appropriateness and ease with the language which typifies the speech of those who have been highly successful learners' (CEFR, 2001: 35).

#### 2.4.3. Where is my research located?

As this chapter has shown, the UKHE Arabic context seems to lack precise mutual principles of Arabic proficiency in terms of teaching and testing. The existing scale of Arabic proficiency ACTFL does not have a clear theoretical framework that defines the content of Arabic proficiency. It also has limitations in corresponding to the UK university students' needs and to the reality of Arabic language use. Therefore, in my research I propose a framework that attempts to bridge these gaps and which provides a grounding from which a scale of Arabic proficiency can be formulated. I aim to suggest a framework that is based on a clear construct, corresponds with the varieties of the UK university students' and their needs, and resonates with the British universities' teaching objectives. First, though, before this can be achieved and a useful framework constructed, key theories are identified and discussed.

There are two types of theoretical standards that any foreign language learning framework should have; content standards and performance standards (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project: 1999: 27). Content standards refer to what learners should know and be able to do, while performance standards describe what language tasks learners at various levels of proficiency should be able to carry out



(Messick, 1994). In order to identify the content standards of a framework of Arabic proficiency, an exploration of what Arabic proficiency means in the light of its varieties should be carried out. Also the performance standards in each level should be identified so that it becomes clear what should be tested in each level.

The next chapter is a theoretical review of the factors that influence the process of conceptualising Arabic proficiency. It therefore starts with a discussion of the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic, its influence on Arabic language pedagogy, and its relevance to the concept of communicative proficiency.

# 3

## Literature Review

### 3.1. Introduction

This research sets out to develop a framework upon which CAP can be assessed in the UKHE context. It investigates how such a framework would take into account the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic as well as communicative language use. Developing a standardised framework for testing Arabic proficiency is associated with three main concerns; the first one is the features of the Arabic content that reflect the diglossic situation for it would influence the selection of tasks that any assessment tool would contain. The second concern relates to the assessment-based construct upon which the framework can be based. The third one is associated with the norm to which the framework should conform; whether it is the NS of Arabic or any existing alternative. As such, three aspects of this framework need to be discussed – content, construct and norm – which are related to its validity. Therefore, this chapter provides the theoretical ground that paves the way for this framework to be formulated through elaborating several aspects; I first discuss the complexity of diglossia in identifying the aspects of which Arabic linguistic proficiency comprises. The aim of this step is to identify the language content of the assessment framework upon which classroom instruction and test design can be based. Then, a review of the existing models of proficiency and the construct on which each model is based is undertaken. Finally, the implications of these models on Arabic language proficiency are elaborated and discussed.

### 3.2. Diglossia and proficiency

This section discusses the different varieties of the language that should be included in an assessment framework of Arabic proficiency. The significance of this step lies in the attempt to clarify and identify the content of the language that needs to be taught and tested; in order to address the framework's 'content validity'. In language testing,

'content validity' refers to 'any attempt to show that the content of the test is a representative sample from the domain that is to be tested' (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007: 6). That is, a test's activities should be representative of the target domain and of the larger universe of tasks of which the test is assumed to sample. Therefore, and since a proficiency framework is intended to provide a profile of students' attainment and indicate the particular modes where deficiencies lie, content validity is considered important in this case (Weir, 1990: 25).

Carroll (1980:67) argues that, to achieve content validity, we should identify and describe the test takers, analyse their communicative needs, and specify the test content based on their needs. The following lines explore the linguistic content that can be included in a communicative proficiency framework of Arabic in the light of diglossia.

From my perspective, communication reflects the actual use of the target language to carry out meaningful interactive tasks. It implies the appropriateness in using the language according to the situation at hand, the interlocutors, and the social setting. Successful communication requires engagement with and critical reflection on the cultural aspects of the target language and cultures and backgrounds of those who use it. Conceptualising communicative proficiency of Arabic requires identifying how Arabic is used in actual communication and exploring how to approach teaching, and assessing it in the light of its actual use. Further detail on this point is given in section 3.2.

Whenever Arabic linguistic proficiency is discussed, the linguists tend to conceptualise it in the light of the existence of different varieties of Arabic. The lack of consensus on that theoretical conceptualisation is reflected in the different models of Arabic varieties, which is illustrated later in sections 3.2.1, 3.2.2 and 3.2.3.

In the literature related to Arabic language proficiency, linguists like Parkinson (1985), Allen (1989), Health (1990), and Alish (1997) tend not to speak of what Arabic linguistic proficiency means; rather they discuss the type of Arabic instruction in the classroom and whether it should be confined to MSA or expanded to be bi-dialectal.

The varieties that Arabic language comprises has been an ongoing debate amongst the researchers. Consequently, discussion of Arabic proficiency seems to be confined to one component; which is the diglossic competence. The approach I follow here is to review

the models of Arabic varieties and take a step further to explore what other components may best reflect the concept of Arabic proficiency.

The term 'Arabic' is applied to a number of speech-forms across the Arab countries. Despite there being many and sometimes essential differences among those forms, they still share the title of 'Arabic language varieties' (Beeston, 2006: 1). Those dialects or 'vernaculars' are almost entirely spoken forms of language. There is only one fundamental division of these varieties, which is what has been called 'MSA' Modern Standard Arabic; the written form of the Arabic language. Therefore, each country in which Arabic is an official language has been described as a diglossic speech community where two varieties of a single language exist side by side.

Diglossia is originally defined by Ferguson (1959: 435) as follows:

*'DIGLOSSIA is a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any section of the community for ordinary conversation.'*

This definition implies that one language can have two varieties that are used alongside each other in one community. The high variety (H) is the formal and most prestigious that is used in religion and literacy for example. The low variety (L) is a kind of speech-form that is used in informal situations.

When comparing this definition with the situation of Arabic language, one can find that this definition only offers a distinction between two varieties of a language; the high and the low, while, in Arabic, each variety can be classified into two or more kinds; for instance, the high variety which is mainly the written form of Arabic language has at least been categorised into two kinds: CA the classical Arabic and MSA the modern standard Arabic. In the low variety of Arabic, however, one can say that there are plenty of language varieties used in everyday communication in the Arab countries which can

differ from each other in terms of lexis and style. Therefore, and according to Ryding (1991: 213),

*‘The situation in Arabic can be viewed not as exceptional, but as one extreme on the spectrum of natural language development. It exhibits widely divergent regional varieties linked by history and culture to a common written standard but at the same time diffused by the centrifugal forces of great geographical distance and the influence of substratum languages’.*

After Ferguson’s definition of diglossia, new theories have since emerged that explain diglossia in terms of levels. Such subsequent works have dealt with Arabic as a language that consists of more than the two varieties of Ferguson; introducing a new vision that examines those varieties on their potential existence along a continuum. Following that NSs of Arabic modify their speech when more than one colloquial is being spoken, some linguists such as Blanc (1960) and Badawi (1973) have identified several varieties between *fushhā* and *ammiyyah*; whereas others believe that there is only one variety with no agreement on whether the basis is *fushhā* or *ammiyyah*.

I argue with Fishman (1967) that it is inadequate to identify two varieties to account for the complexity of Arabic diglossia. I rather argue that the number of varieties that exist between Ferguson’s (1959) two-way dichotomy is large. In Arabic, there is the Classical Language that exists in the Quran and the ancient texts, MSA, which represents the contemporary formal form in addition to a big number of dialects. Moreover, a series of hybrid varieties can emerge when mixing MSA and any colloquial; which Arabic NSs do. Therefore, when talking about diglossia in my research, I indicate this complex sociolinguistic situation which implies a significant number of intermediate varieties that have no rigid boundaries in between. Further detail on this point is offered later in this section, and in section 9.4 of chapter 9.

It is also worth noting that in my research I use MSA to refer to the standard variety of Arabic that is used contemporarily in books, newspapers in writing as well as in formal speeches. *Ammiyyah* on the other hand, is an umbrella term for a range of varieties with local features, whether social, regional, religious etc.. It also represents any variety of Arabic being spoken in a particular Arab state. This variety is inter-intelligible amongst

the speakers in that particular state. I use the terms dialect, vernacular, and colloquial to refer to *ammiyyah* in my research. Despite the difference between the three terms, they are used interchangeably to express the definition I provided of *ammiyyah* in the TAFL community which also aligns to the way it appears in the emerging data

### 3.2.1. Models with several varieties in between *fushā* and *ammiyyah*

Blanc (1960) and Badawi (1973) proposed intermediate levels between H and L starting from their noting that some people shift between H and L, especially when speaking, but usually ‘they do not shift the whole way, resulting in levels which are neither fully H nor fully L’ (Bassiouney, 2009: 14).

#### Blanc’s model (1960)

Blanc analysed an Arabic discourse produced by four NSs who come from four different Arabic-speaking countries through an inter-dialectical conversation. Blanc found out that analysing conversational Arabic segments is complex and cannot easily be explained by the current descriptive linguistics’ techniques. That is because, surprisingly, each of the speakers used one variety through their conversation. The situation as Blanc described was that ‘it is the exception rather than the rule to find any sustained segment of discourse in a single one of the style varieties alluded to’ (Blanc, 1960: 81).

Blanc used two strategies to describe how NSs switch between the different varieties of Arabic to carry out such mutual conversations. These strategies are “*Levelling*” which operates when the interlocutors substitute some of their vocabulary with that used in the other dialects to accommodate other interlocutors’ speech, and “*Classicising*” when they use more prestigious vocabulary or expressions borrowed from the Classical Arabic.

Based on that, Blanc (1960) distinguished between five stylistic variations of Arabic language using the variable of formality as a criterion on which his division is based.

1. *Plain colloquial*: that is any local dialect

2. *Koineized*<sup>7</sup> *colloquial*: which avoids localism
3. *Semi-literary colloquial (elevated colloquial)*: that is a highly classicised variation
4. *Modified classical*: that is classical Arabic with a blending of dialects
5. *Standard Classical*: that is pure classical Arabic

Blanc's division seems to assume a multi-level continuum but at the same time tends to consider each of the five levels as a neat category, which does not appear to be the case in a mutual conversation. It is also not clear what standard classical means in this classification as the formal written form of Arabic includes the language of the Quran and the literary texts in addition to the contemporary or media Arabic which have some differences in terms of lexicon.

#### Badawi's model (1973)

In a sociolinguistic study of contemporary Egyptian Arabic, Badawi (1973: 92-93) distinguished between five varieties used in every fully functioning linguistic community:

1. Heritage classical: this is the CA (Classical Arabic) the language of Quran, and the Arab literary heritage. It is a written language taught in traditional institutions like in Al-Azhar University in Egypt.
2. Contemporary classical: this is what is called MSA (Modern Standard Arabic). It is used in news bulletins, and usually read aloud from texts.
3. Colloquial of the educated: this kind of category is a colloquial influenced by MSA, which might be used for serious discussions by the well-educated, but, is not normally written.
4. Colloquial of the enlightened (basically educated): this is a kind of a daily form of speech that is used by people who have got the basic level of education.

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<sup>7</sup> **Koinéization:** is a process through which dialect differences become reduced, for example when people speaking different dialects move to a new area and the variety spoken in that place after a time becomes a more common variety with fewer features associated with the specific dialects of those who migrated there (Richards and Schmidt, 2010: 168).

5. Colloquial of the illiterates: this is characterised by the absence of MSA influence. It is used in some children' shows and comic situations.

However, Badawi says that those five levels do not have clear permanent boundaries between one another, but rather fade into one another like the colours in a rainbow (1973: 95).

Meiseles' model (1980)

Through an investigation of spoken Arabic in the radio, Meiseles (1980) recognised four levels based on the idea that the potential existence of several varieties does not invalidate the dichotomous nature of Arabic. Also, any text's orientation cannot help but be one of the two basic language systems, *fushā* and *ammiyyah* (Meiseles, 1980: 22-23). The levels proposed are:

1. *Literary Arabic (LA)*: which corresponds to both; *Heritage* and *Contemporary* of Badawi's model.
2. *Substandard Arabic (SsA)*: a form of language that involves 'many deviations from LA norms and much admixture of dialectical features' (ibid, 125).
3. *Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA)*: defined by Meiseles as 'the current informal language used among educated Arabs, fulfilling in general their daily language needs. It is also the main means of Arabic inter-dialectical communication, one of its most important trends being its inter-comprehensibility among speakers of different vernaculars' (ibid: 126).
4. *Basic vernacular*.

The table below shows categories of the three models;

Table 1: Models with several varieties in between *fushā* and *ammiyyah*

	<b>Blanc's model (1960)</b>	<b>Badawi's model (1973)</b>	<b>Meiseles' model (1980)</b>
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<b>Written form</b>	Modified classical	Modern standard	Literary Arabic
<b>Spoken form</b>	Semi-literary colloquial		Substandard Arabic
	Koineized Colloquial	Colloquial of the educated	Educated Spoken Arabic
		Colloquial of the enlightened	
Plain Colloquial	Colloquial of the Illiterate	Basic vernaculars	

### 3.2.2. Models with one variety in between *fushā* and *ammiyyah*

In addition to the multi-level continuum models, which sit in opposition to Ferguson's dichotomy, some other linguists have argued for the existence of only one variety between the H and L levels proposed by Ferguson. The reason is that each of the intermediate varieties proposed in the previous models is either *fushā*- or *ammiyyah*-oriented.

In a study of the lexical relationships between the major Syro-Lebanese varieties, Cadora (1965) proposed *Intercommon-Spoken Arabic* (ISA) as an intermediate level between Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Spoken Dialectal Arabic (SDA). He defined it as a 'mixed spoken language of relatively uncodified, somewhat unstable, intermediate forms' (Cadora, 1965: 134).

Bishai (1966) conducted an empirical study of records of an Arab unity debate where delegations from Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Tunisia were involved. He discovered that only colloquial elements were used in the speech. Apart from that, the types of language used

have the morphological and syntactical features of the ‘apocopated classical Arabic’<sup>8</sup> (Bishai, 1966: 322). Accordingly, he suggested the existence of the *Modern Inter-Arabic* variety that is a blending of elements of MSA and dialects. According to him, it is the form ‘used in various inter-Arab meetings which include representatives from different countries of the Arabic Middle East’ (ibid: 320).

Based on a study of six language varieties, Ibrahim (1986: 115) argued for the need to ‘maintain a clear distinction between standard and prestige language in Arabic’. Ibrahim (1986) proposed the *Supra-Dialectical Low* variety (SDL) and described it as ‘a thriving supra-dialectical L (SDL) based on the speech of such urban centres as Cairo, Damascus and Jerusalem; which can be compared to, say, general standard English with such major varieties as standard British, American, and Australian English’ (ibid: 120).

Ryding (1991) described what she has called *Formal Spoken Arabic (FSA)* as ‘a supra-regional, prestige form of spoken Arabic practical as a means of communication throughout the Arabic-speaking world’ (Ryding, 1991: 212). Ryding’s FSA is identical to *the Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA)* proposed by El-Hassan (1977) and further researched by Mitchell (1986).

ESA ‘draws upon both MSA and Colloquial Arabic’ according to El-Hassan (1978: 32) and is created through the ‘interplay between written Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) and vernacular Arabic(s)’ as stated by Mitchell (1986:7).

This kind of hybrid version of MSA and the colloquial might imply that ESA can be different based on the region where it is spoken: that is,

- a) ESA refers to the spoken form of Arabic even if it includes features of MSA. Therefore, it is ‘extremely difficult to find in published form examples of ESA’ (Mitchell, 1975: 78).
- b) The differences between the regional ESAs create interest of mutual intelligibility, so when speakers of different regions carry out a conversation, they modify their speech to accommodate other interlocutors (Mitchell, 1986: 9).

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<sup>8</sup> Classical Arabic without its case and state endings (Bishai, 1966: 322).

- c) ESA represents the spoken form of Arabic while MSA is the print form of it (Badawi, 1973: 149).

Table 2 below shows the varieties proposed by this type of models.

Table 2: Models with ONE variety in between *fushā* and *ammiyyah*

	<b>Fuṣḥā-based</b>	<b>Ammiyyah-based</b>
<b>Cadora (1965)</b>		Intercommon-spoken dialect (ISA)
<b>Bishai (1966)</b>	Modern inter-Arabic variety	
<b>Ibrahim (1986)</b>		Supra-dialectical low variety (SDL)
<b>Ryding (1991)</b>		Formal spoken Arabic (FSA)
<b>El-Hassan (1977)</b>		Educated spoken Arabic (ESA)

The implications of all the above-mentioned models on Arabic pedagogy were that they were confined to focusing on teaching and testing the written form of Arabic with a tendency to avoid any kind of colloquial features in most cases; or at best cases to teaching the two separately with less emphasis on the colloquial. In addition, ESA or FSA was argued against because it is ‘inherently difficult to work out a complete system’ of it due to its instability as suggested by Badawi (1985: 20). In fact, Badawi (1985) has defended teaching MSA only or primarily to the NNSs of Arabic in all skills including speaking, suggesting an apocopated MSA (MSA without its case and state endings) in an attempt to minimise the language distance between MSA and ESA (ibid: 21). However, the result is an inaccurate version that leads to an inaccurate version of MSA as it produces types of speech that are not grammatically acceptable as suggested by Younes (2015: 49).

In daily life, the spoken form is a hybrid version of different varieties of Arabic; where the linguistic distance between the standard Arabic and the other levels of dialect increases, or decreases, according to many social variables such as the topic, the level of education of the interlocutors, and the degree of the conversation's formality, among others. The use of language in Arabic-speaking communities cannot be limited to MSA and the written form of the language when the teaching objective is communication. Teaching MSA exclusively as a target language and neglecting the dynamic part of using language in real-life situations turn Arabic into a static system that can only be accessible through reading documents and papers. Moreover, this issue appears to seriously concern learners of Arabic, particularly those who learn at one of the Arab states. I personally heard many complaints and worries from my students relating to their reluctance in communicating with Syrians using MSA since the expected reaction at its best is laughing and asking for repetition. Assuming the NS understood the message delivered by the learner; that learner himself or herself in this situation 'will not understand anything said to [him / her] outside the limited MSA linguistic register they have mastered' (Health, 1990; 43); which means a loss of some learning opportunities that they have moved countries to get.

### 3.2.3. Arabic as a continuum

In contrast to the previously discussed models, some linguists in the past two decades have tended to think of the language of Arabic speakers as a mixture of styles without a tendency to set boundaries between these styles.

Holes (2004), for example, considered the regarding of Arabic as a diglossic language as 'a misleading oversimplification' describing the style of Arabic native speakers' speech as 'one of constant style shifting along a cline at opposite ends of which are 'pure' MSA and the 'pure' regional dialect, more accurately conceived of as idealized constructs than real entities' (Holes, 2004: 49).

Mejdell (2006) explained the complexity of this diglossic spectrum, stating that the linguistic features resulted in the interaction between MSA and that the colloquial 'may be correlated with dimensions of context and style - the informal-formal cline, the casual-careful cline, unplanned vs. planned discourse, and of mode/medium, i.e. spoken vs. written. The diglossic variable, i.e. those features with binary (or more) variant

contrasting H and L, are potential markers of stylistic and functional differentiation and variation' (Mejdell, 2006: 4).

It is worth noting that Ferguson published an article in 1996 accepting the concept of 'continuum' itself but disagreeing with the idea of neat categories whether it was one intermediate or one multi-level variation, which might include ESA as Younes (2015: 12) has suggested.

The application of this conception of continuum is what many linguists (Abboud 1971; Younes, 1990; Al-Batal 1992) have spoken of as an integrated approach (IA) to teaching. Abboud (1971: 4) stated that 'an alternative solution to the problem of which form of Arabic to teach may lie in an approach where the colloquial and MSA are integrated into one course'. Wilmsen (2006) has advocated this approach and suggested starting with the vernacular as a foundation in an integrated programme. Wilmsen (2006: 134) stated, 'the default should be to begin with the vernacular, ideally two full years, with the instruction in the formal written code (*fuṣḥā*) beginning to be worked into the curriculum at the start of the second year'.

Younes (1990, 2015) is also in favour of IA and has developed a programme in Cornell University based on this approach. To the best of my knowledge, this programme is only used at the University of Edinburgh in the UK. The model of IA assumes that the written and the spoken forms of Arabic are not two separate systems or independent of each other, but are rather complementary or 'two sides of the same coin' that 'form one system of communication' as Younes (2006: 150) has suggested.

Interestingly, Younes adopted LEA (Younes, 2006) or LESA (Younes, 2015) as the spoken variety as the foundation on which the programme is based. LEA is identical to LESA, the former stands for Levantine Educated Arabic and the latter stands for Levantine Educated Spoken Arabic. Both correspond to the 'Vernacular of the Educated' variety proposed by Badawi (1973) as mentioned earlier. LEA represents the 'variety that educated speakers from the Levant (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine) use when communicating with one another and with educated speakers from other parts of the Arab world' (Younes, 2006: 150). On the other hand, the written form adopted is CF, the Contemporary *Fuṣḥā*; the first category of the multi-level model of Badawi (1973).

The implication of IA in the classroom is that the type of form used is mainly dependent on the skill; so, reading and writing take place only in *fushā* while listening is an integration of *fushā* and LEA and classroom instructions and conversations would be carried out in LEA only. Integrated teaching starts from the novice level where *ammiyyah* is considered the foundation for speaking and then the higher the level of the learners the more necessary becomes the move between *fushā* and *ammiyyah* (Younes, 2015: 32-33).

The linguists who adopted the Integrated Approach have made a direct reference to the concept of mutual intelligibility. Ibrahim (1986: 121) stated that ‘ESA varieties have wide comprehensibility beyond the geographical areas in which they are spoken’. Younes (2015) also emphasised this because ‘the bulk of vocabulary and grammatical structures are shared among them’ and that what he has called ‘the inter-dialectal intelligibility’ increases when ‘the percentage of shared features increase with education, geographical proximity, exposure to the mass media and entertainment outlets, and interaction with speakers of other varieties’ (Younes, 2015: 19). It can be concluded from this statement that formal education is looked at as a variable that facilitates mutual comprehension since it minimises the localism associated within each of the dialects. This aspect is emphasised in Ezzat’s study (1974: 51) of mutual intelligibility where he has concluded that

*‘the preceding analysis of the phonology, grammar and lexis of ESA proves that there are common linguistic features among Arabic dialect that warrant their mutual intelligibility. We have seen that an educated Egyptian like myself can understand an Algerian, a Lebanese, a Jordanian, or a Bahraini. Besides, the random choice of speakers from different and mutually remote Arab countries presumably gives us a miniature of the total inter-dialectal situation among educated Arabs in the whole Arab world’.*

Based on these studies on inter-dialectal intelligibility (Ezzat 1974; Ibrahim 1986) alongside the idea of the comprehensibility of the Levantine beyond the geographical areas where it is spoken, LEA was chosen to be the foundation of the integrated approach (Younes, 2015).

On the other hand, part of the study that Soliman (2014) has carried out was on the extent to which Arabic dialects are mutually intelligible when used in an inter-

dialectal setting. Conversations of 12 NSs of different Arabic dialects were recorded and analysed. Soliman concluded that in such inter-dialectal informal settings, each of the NSs has relied on their own dialect to interact and that borrowings from MSA were very few. Consequently, the level of comprehension would rely greatly on the extent to which the interlocutors are familiar with the colloquial being spoken. Soliman (2014) also pointed out that there was no connection identified between her participants' level of education and their borrowings from MSA. Her findings contrast those of earlier studies; which decreases the role of formal education that was believed to facilitate the inter-dialectal communication.

After reviewing the various models that have dealt with the concept of diglossia in relation to Arabic instruction, one can see that consensus is missing. In fact, there are several issues here, which need to be considered and then dealt with before starting any kind of discussion on proficiency or formulating any assessment framework.

First of all, I strongly believe that much more research and documentation of MSA and dialects is needed to establish the parameters of Arabic functions and further define the nature of the linguistic rules that are useful for communicative purposes. More studies are also demanded to describe the claimed mutual features shared amongst the dialects.

Secondly, in the light of the three types of models explained above (Ferguson's H and L, the multi-level continuum- the medium one variety between H and L, and Arabic as a continuum), the most relevant model to the concept of communication seems to be the last (Arabic as a continuum) since I regard it to be the closest to the language in use. It is also worth noting that unlike the other two approaches, the integrated approach is the only theory that is conceptualised in the light of Arabic proficiency that also considers students' needs of communication. This is clear in the statement that Younes (2015: 33) has made in this regard: 'The main goal of the programme is to prepare students for real proficiency in Arabic right from the beginning, including the sociolinguistic skill of using each variety of the language in its proper context'.

Thirdly, none of the models has made any reference to how the different varieties can be assessed; neither was there any discussion on assessing proficiency and the construct upon which the assessment can be based.

In my research, I give careful consideration to the arguments in support of the integrated approach (IA). However, I do have some reservations in relation to certain elements; particularly when it comes to conceptualising proficiency and assessing it in the UKHE context. They can be outlined as follows:

- I. In the classroom: Younes (2015: 43) suggests that in a truly IA context, learners are introduced to the grammar of LESA to be used actively in speaking; that is, the grammar of MSA would be learnt in reading for ‘passive recognition’ and to be used in writing. This in his perspective would offer the learners an easier system of grammar since the grammar of the colloquial is much simpler. I see some contradiction in these statements since grammatical rules can be activated in either speaking or writing. That is to say, requiring learners to reproduce the *fushā* structure in writing does mean that learners are actively learning it. As such, learners in this case are introduced to two different grammatical systems at the same time and that would make it challenging for the novice to carry out. For example, at the novice level, learners might find it difficult to learn the way a present tense is conjugated in MSA, which is different from the way pronounced in the Levantine dialects.
- II. IA imposes one type of the colloquial to be integrated with *fushā*, which is the Levantine. Even though this choice might have valid reasons in that the Levantine is widespread and understandable by most Arabs, I still have some concerns in relation to the UK context. The place of the learners’ year abroad is not confined to the Levant area particularly in the past five years due to the security situation in the countries located there. Most universities send their students to Egypt, Jordan and Morocco where they can or cannot communicate with people depending on their level in the colloquial. So, IA with its LESA does not seem to correspond with the students’ needs in the UKHE context.
- III. Also, many other issues remain vague in relation to this approach; a) how can this LESA be defined; given that the Levant region covers four Levant Arab states, where, in each, tens of various dialects are being spoken? b) to what extent it is reliable to assess LESA in oral production when it is not coded? and c) how valid would it be to replace MSA or the colloquial with any medium variety; LESA in the case of IA.



Therefore, I believe that adopting any of the models discussed in section 3.2 or proposing any new model should consider the following aspects that seem essential for assessing proficiency:

### *1. Communication and language in use*

Communicative competence is known to be the ‘knowledge of not only if something is formally possible in a language, but also the knowledge of whether it is feasible, appropriate or done in a particular speech community’ (Richards and Schmidt, 2010: 90).

Teaching Arabic purports to enable learners to communicate in all possible means – oral or written, which means the communication can be interrupted when a language component is missing. An approach that avoids the bias towards the textual aspect of the language and looks at the varieties as two colours of one spectrum is required. Some linguists have even considered that communication at certain situations cannot be carried out without the colloquial. Wilmsen (2006: 131) for example, stated, ‘communicative Arabic is largely vernacular Arabic’. Several experimental studies such as Benlap (2006), Palmer (2007) and Shiri (2010) have indicated that most students are interested in learning Arabic for interacting with NSs. According to Younes (2015: 24), this implies that ‘learning to communicate with native speakers means learning to speak an *ammiyyah* variety since that is what native speakers use to communicate’. Moreover, neglecting the colloquial component of Arabic language in both fields – teaching and testing – would lead to an incomplete language system as a pedagogic basis of Arabic curricula, syllabi and course books. Consequently, several language functions and cultural aspects that are usually carried out in the colloquial variety would be missing in such systems.

### *2. Authentic assessment*

Authenticity is an essential principle of assessment including when language is assessed; the test should be authentic and reflect the cultural reality (Bachman 1990; Brown 2004). Authenticity in language testing is ‘the extent to which test tasks correspond to language use in a non-test (i.e. target language use) situation’ (Richards and Schmidt 2010: 42). Brown (2004: 28) emphasised the authenticity of test tasks and that their features should correspond to the way the target language is used in actual

situations. The implementation of the concept of authenticity in language testing is reflected in using natural language, selecting meaningful topics, and choosing contextualised linguistic situations. We need an approach that reflects an authentic context where the language use in the classroom corresponds to the way the language is used in the Arabic context. It seems essential to consider using the variety that best suits the social situation at hand; particularly when it comes to oral production.

### *3. Validity and reliability of the assessment instrument*

Fulcher and Davidson (2007: 12) defined validity as ‘the degree to which we are justified in making an inference to a construct from a test score’. Validity concerns the extent to which an assessment instrument samples ‘content validity’ of the language that is meant to be measured and that this kind of language is being assessed based on a theory that is appropriate to the demands of actual use of the language, or ‘construct validity’ (Paltridge, 1992: 246). To maintain validity, several aspects should be considered for designing an assessment framework of CAP; this includes identifying the Arabic variety to be assessed in each skill, the competences under assessment in each task, and a measurement theory through which these competences can be observed and measured. Another aspect that should be considered when choosing the assessment model is the consistency of measuring the content of the language reliability. According to Fulcher and Davidson (2007: 30), ‘reliability’ concerns choosing the instrument’s tasks that are reflective of the measurement theory ‘construct’ and are simultaneously consistent in terms of the results they reflect if variables like time and context changed. For instance, to maintain the framework’s reliability, it should be clearly identified what language is acceptable and what is not when measuring each skill, and that the tasks used clearly refer to that.

In conclusion, any attempt to conceptualise CAP should accord with students’ needs of communication and so be based on an adequate communicative teaching/learning model that considers the sociolinguistic complexity. Also, approaches to proficiency assessment in Arabic should consider the principles I discussed for effectiveness and consistency. The assessment framework I propose in chapter 9 shows how these

principles contribute to the identification of the framework's construct and competences.

### **3.3. Proficiency in Arabic**

As mentioned in section 3.2, the concept of what learners of Arabic should learn or be able to perform in order to successfully communicate has always been conceptualised in the light of the sociolinguistic complexity which is essential as a good start. However, attempts to take this further to explore the other components of language proficiency seem to be missing in the context of Arabic pedagogy in both the UK and in the Arabic-speaking countries.

There have been a few studies conducted individually in different Arabic teaching contexts on proficiency but none of them seems to refer to what testing Arabic proficiency would require. More details in this regard are offered later in this section. Hence, it would be useful to first review the studies conducted on Arabic proficiency, following which an exploration on how the concept of language proficiency is discussed in the literature is offered.

Studies in the field of Arabic proficiency in general and in assessing it in particular are very few outside the US context. Most of these studies are based on ACTFL, particularly those whose aim was developing a proficiency test or a placement test rather than discussing a scale of attainment descriptors. The sociolinguistic status of Arabic had not been taken into account either in teaching or in assessment until the ACTFL 2001 version was released.

In a study on preparing language proficiency tests for non-Arabic speakers, Alhabibi (2013) reported that there were two attempts to construct a unified standardised test to measure proficiency in Arabic for Speakers of Other Languages; the first is Hanna (1968 as cited in Alhabibi 2013) constructed by Sami Hanna, and the second is the test of the University of Michigan (1974 as cited in Alhabibi (2013). After these tests, To'eima (1987 as cited in Alhabibi 2013) conducted a study on the use of test to measure language proficiency among students in Arabic with some American universities. It is considered one of the first studies that aimed to measure proficiency in Modern Standard Arabic for Speakers of Other Languages.

In 1988, Al-Sheikh discussed aptitude tests, and provided a comprehensive test to measure proficiency in the Arabic language to non-native speakers (NNSs) in three language skills. The content of the test is the verses of the Quran and the Prophet's hadiths. Al-Sheikh has followed the guidance of the paper-based TOEFL that measures English proficiency. Al-Sheikh's test consists of three sections; listening, grammar and writing, and reading and vocabulary. Neither speaking nor essay writing was assessed in this test. The test was meant to target those learners who are interested in learning the Classical Arabic mainly for Islamic textual purposes.

Since the first version of ACTFL descriptors was released in 1986 – as discussed in section 2.3 – the literature on Arabic pedagogy shows that there are very few studies conducted in the light of proficiency and mostly based on ACTFL. It is worth noting that although ACTFL descriptors are a turning point in this research area; one can argue that they are still very context-specific and behavioural, and they use the educated native speaker (the third category of Badawi's 1973 levels) as a norm of proficiency, which is seen by some linguists to be idealistic.

In a study conducted in 2008, Haridi defined proficiency as 'the efficiency in performing an action' (2008: 8) and discussed the language proficiency standards required in language distance-learning programmes for non-Arabic speakers. Those standards are derived from a number of previous studies, including the Common European Framework of Reference for foreign languages, and those that dealt with proficiency standards in the foreign languages association, ACTFL.

In 2011, Shoman carried out a research study that aims to formulate a model of the intercultural competence of Arabic language. The model incorporates two varieties, MSA and the Egyptian colloquial, and the learners are free to choose the one they want to use for oral communication. The main focus of this study was on the relationship between culture and proficiency and the role of the diglossic competence in developing the learners' intercultural competence.

Alhabibi (2013) carried out a study that discusses the potential ways of designing a placement test in all language skills taking into consideration the components of language proficiency. The study has taken ACTFL (1989) in its first version as the basis of discussion; which implies that MSA is the only targeted variety

In 2015, Younes identified the proficiency aspects of the IA approach whose theory was developed earlier by Younes (1990) and AL-Batal (1992). Younes (2015: 33) stated that IA is aimed at preparing learners ‘for real proficiency in Arabic right from the beginning, including the sociolinguistic skill of using each variety of the language in its proper context’. Despite critique provided in section 3.2.2, I think this approach is the clearest in terms of declaring several components of which proficiency comprises, such as the sociolinguistic one. Younes (2015: 25) has also made it clear that IA takes the ‘educated native speaker ENS’ as a model of proficiency where non-native learners are required to master the following;

- a) The listening skill in both *fushhā* and *ammiyyah* separately and interactively.
- b) The speaking skill in *ammiyyah* for ordinary conversations, taking into account that *fushhā* might be needed in advanced levels for formal talks.
- c) The reading skill in *fushhā*.
- d) The writing skill in *fushhā*.
- e) The skill to ‘navigate successfully between the two language varieties according to the situation and the linguistic function.’

In conclusion, attempts to discuss the ways of scaling proficiency descriptors or creating standardised Arabic tests are highly self-developed and cater for the contexts for which they were designed. As shown so far, the components that should be included in a model of communicative language competence are by no means agreed on. Nor are adequately developed theories of communicative language use available, particularly in the Arabic context. I am aware that this might be the case for other languages as well, but unlike Arabic, research on some other languages such as English is much more advanced and there are some significant models that have been discussed and adopted which, in my opinion, research on Arabic might benefit from. Therefore, there is a crucial need to investigate the available theories and hypotheses of language use in the broader FL field.

#### **3.4. Models of language proficiency**

The nature of language proficiency has been theoretically discussed and empirically investigated whenever there was an attempt to construct measures of language proficiency. Scholars have debated this concept and tried to address an appropriate way

to conceptualise it and to explore its relationship to other constructs. A number of theoretical models have been presented to account for the construct of language ability and performance. In this section I discuss approaches to defining and interpreting proficiency as a theory aimed to underpin the development of the existing models of proficiency.

The purpose of this section is to explore what construct/s has/have been adopted to conceptualise proficiency from different pedagogical perspectives. The reason for that is to obtain the framework's construct validity and then the validity of any test based on it. When a question about what a test measures is asked, information on construct validity is regarded as central. Anastasi (1982: 144) defines construct validity as 'the extent to which the test may be said to measure a theoretical construct or trait [...] It derives from established inter-relationships among behavioural measures [...] focusing on a broader, more enduring and more abstract kind of behavioural description'. She stresses that any construct measured by a test can be defined in terms of the operations carried out in creating test validity. She also emphasises that

*'construct validation requires the gradual accumulation of information from a variety of sources. Any data throwing light on the nature of the trait under consideration and the conditions affecting its development and manifestation are grist for this validity mill'* (ibid: 144).

Therefore, it seems essential to gather enough information and data in the process of validating the framework, to be able to adequately define the construct to be measured.

The pedagogy of language teaching and testing has been theorised through various perspectives including the formal, the communicative and the post communicative.

#### 3.4.1. Formal perspectives

From formal perspectives of language pedagogy, the focus is mainly on grammatical approach that 'is organised on the basis of linguistic forms ... (i.e. phonological forms, morphological forms, syntactic patterns, lexical items) and emphasizes the ways in which these forms may be combined to form grammatical sentences' (Canale and Swain, 1980: 2).

Accordingly, the first observed method in foreign language teaching theories called the 'Grammar-Translation Method' (G-TM) was developed. This method was essentially based on two aspects; learning grammar correctly through rules, and studying how to understand language structure and translation. This naturally has resulted in the dominance of the written-form language focus, since the goal seemed to be working out the structure of the target language rather than speaking it. Therefore, 'once basic proficiency was established, students were introduced to the advanced study of grammar and rhetoric' (Richards and Rodgers, 2014: 4). This area of language teaching methodology has had a major impact on the definition, nature and components of language proficiency. The predominant emphasis on teaching grammar has implicitly conceptualised proficiency to entail only grammatical aspects, lexis and translation. Accordingly, what has constituted proficiency is 'language forms' which is the knowledge of morphology, phonology, syntax, and semantics. Since then foreign language pedagogy has been developed to build those linguistic aspects, which constitutes, according to Chomsky (1965), the learner's grammatical competence. This aspect is part of the linguistic theory proposed by Chomsky (1965), which also makes a distinction between 'competence' and 'performance'. The former refers to 'the linguistic system that an ideal NS of a given language has internalised, whereas performance mainly concerns the psychological factors that are involved in the perception and production of a speech' (Canale and Swain, 1980: 3).

In the 1950s, another teaching method named the 'Audio lingual' emerged from research that associates learning with behavioural psychology in the US (Richards, 2002; Richards Rodgers, 2014). According to this method, language learning is perceived as a 'process of habit formation' relying on memorising target language patterns and learning them through using dialogues and drill (Richards, 2002: 22). It derives from structural linguistics and emphasises learning grammar and phonetics. It also stresses that sentence patterns and basic structure must be learned in context and produced accurately through drill and practice in the target language (Richards Rodgers, 2014: 67). Its weakness lies in the notable difficulty of transferring the learnt structure and language patterns from classroom to real communication (Richards and Rodgers, 2014: 72). Also, Chomsky (1966) rejected the structural linguistics and the behavioural theory of language learning. He stated that 'language is not a habit structure', it rather involves 'innovation' and 'formation of new structures and patterns' (ibid: 153). His

theory of generative grammar came to alternate the behaviourist theory of language learning and to emphasise that language sentences cannot be learnt by ‘repetition’ and ‘imitation’. They are rather ‘generated by the learners’ underlying competence’ (Richards and Rodgers, 2014: 72).

Soon after Chomsky proposed the definition and aspects of his linguistic theory, sociolinguists and advocates of communicative approaches of language learning criticised the ground on which this theory is built. Hymes (1972: 60), for example, criticised the competence-performance distinction for ignoring the aspect of appropriateness of socio-cultural, verbal and situational contexts in which it is used. Wesche (1983:41) also objected to the idea of the grammatical competence and the ideal native speaker model.

Based on such pedagogy, approaches to Arabic language teaching emphasised textual skills at the expense of the oral, and this maybe explains privileging MSA over the colloquial in all skills including speaking (Wilmsen, 2006: 125).

#### 3.4.2. Communicative perspectives

According to communicative perspectives, language pedagogy is basically built on the ‘language is for communication’ theory. This idea has been debated and elaborated in terms of the definition of communicative competence and its components.

Throughout the past decades, there has been much advancement in the direction of developing a more precise definition of what is meant by communicative language. Literature offers a chronological account of the theoretical evolution of the term ‘communicative language’. Many models have defined this concept such as the framework proposed by Canal and Swain (1980) the model of Bachman and Palmer (1996) and the description of components of communicative language competence in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, 2001). As the following lines show, many linguists have presented their different understanding of the notion of communicative competence. However, the diversity in opinion amongst them is due to the aspect of communication on which linguists have put emphasis (for example, cultural, interactional, etc.).



I propose here to review the work of a small number of linguists, because I consider they have contributed to the development of the concept of Arabic communicative competence.

Canale and Swain (1980) assumed that communicative competence is based on socio-cultural, interpersonal interaction, to involve creativity, to take place in a discourse and socio-cultural context, and to involve use of authentic language (Canale and Swain, 1980: 29). Therefore, in addition to the grammatical competence, they propose one more as an essential component of their model of communication; that is the 'sociolinguistic competence'. According to them, this competence consists of two sets of rules; a) socio-cultural rules of use which specify the ways in which utterances are produced and understood appropriately and b) discourse rules: in terms of cohesion (the grammatical links) and coherence (appropriate combination of communicative functions) of groups of utterances.

The complexity of the sociolinguistic situation of the Arabic context implies that the sociolinguistic competence is of great relevance to the conceptualising of Arabic communicative competence. But at the same time, as is shown later in section 3.5.3, studies that consider the cultural and intercultural aspect of the Arabic language are still limited to the exploration of the ways of including it in curricula. I believe that much more work should be carried out on how to derive benefit from the intersection between the colloquial and intercultural knowledge to prompt and assess learners' communicative proficiency. Research on Arabic discourse is also scant and limited to written texts of MSA, which has resulted in the privileging of MSA into the different spoken Arabic vernaculars (Fakhri, 2012: 146).

In 1995, Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrel developed their model of interaction among components of communicative competence. This model comprises four main competences; discourse competence, socio-cultural competence that corresponds to Canale and Swain's (1980) sociolinguistic competence, in addition to what Murcia and Dörnyei (1995) have called the actional competence and the strategic competence.

'Actional competence', according to them, is the kind of knowledge required to understand communicative intent by informing and interpreting speech acts and speech act sets' while 'strategic competence' consists of avoidance strategies, stalling strategies, self-monitoring strategies and interactional strategies (Murcia Dörnyei, 1995:

9). I argue that the strategic competence is essential for conceptualising Arabic communicative competence since it is needed for interactional purposes as well as for switching between or mixing the two Arabic varieties in certain contexts.

Kramsch (1986) considered a type of knowledge to be a major component of communicative competence, which is the 'interactional competence'. She defined it as the ability to process and to negotiate the intended meaning, anticipate the listener's response and possible misunderstanding, clarify one's own and others' intentions, and finally arrive at a communicative decision (Kramsch, 1986: 367). She argues that talk is an interactional process between the interlocutors; thus the responsibility should not be assigned to an individual. Rather it is a shared activity among the participants.

I consider this competence crucial to maintain the authenticity of communicative speaking tasks, and the various real-life social contexts which a non-native speaker of Arabic gets exposed to and is required to deal with. Maintaining authenticity in linguistic tasks implies maximum exposure to the target language in order to conform to the naturally occurring learning. This implies that, in an Arabic context, if the authentic setting is to be represented in the classroom, one or more dialects should be used in the classroom as a medium of instruction or a means of interaction. In assessment, tests' rubrics and students' responses to the tasks should mainly be in Arabic. In oral assessment, the diglossic competence is essential for assessing communication in authentic settings. This makes the oral testing system particularly complex and challenging; yet testing MSA only would definitely not reflect the test's authenticity, which affects its validity particularly if the targeted tests' construct was communication

Byram (1997) developed what is called the model of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC): ICC emphasises the learners' ability to communicate with people from different cultures, languages, ethnicities and genders. The core aspect that shapes this kind of competence is *culture*. In addition to the linguistic competence, the sociolinguistic competence and the discourse competence, Byram (1997, 2008) indicates the emphasis on some other non-linguistic elements; such as a) attitudes that refers to the learners' curiosity and openness towards each other's cultures; b) knowledge of social groups and their products and practices; c) skills of interpreting and relating; d) skills of discovery and interaction, and e) critical cultural awareness and

political education. Byram (2008: 82) attempts to relate these five 'savoirs' of the intercultural speaker to the objectives of intercultural competence. Therefore, a breakdown of attitude 'savoir etre' would be related to the learners' willingness to seek out equal opportunities with others, discover their perspectives and interpretations of certain cultural phenomena, and be ready to question values in cultural practices. Knowledge 'savoir' would have to do with the learners' historical and contemporary knowledge about the interlocutor's country, as well as knowledge about the geographical space of one's own country and also about the social distinctions in one's own country and one's interlocutor's. Skills of interpreting and relating – 'savoir comprendre' – would be connected to the learners' ability to identify areas of misunderstanding in an interaction and to 'mediate between conflicting interpretations of phenomena'. Skills of discovery and interaction – 'savoir apprendre/faire' – may relate to the ability to identify significant references within and across cultures, and to use an appropriate combination of knowledge to interact with interlocutors from different cultures. As for the critical cultural awareness and political education, Byram (2008) connected this 'savoir s'engager' to the learners' ability to draw upon knowledge and skills to analyse and interpret values of events and documents, and to become involved in intercultural exchanges, interact and negotiate them when necessary (Byram, 2008: 230-233).

This model not only concentrates on the relationship between language and culture but also emphasises the learners' attitudes towards and critical knowledge of their culture and other learners' cultures. In fact, the relationship between language, nation and culture has been conceptualised and discussed within the invention of the term "linguaculture" by the German Philosopher Herder in the eighteenth century, as reported by Risager (2014). Freidrich (1989: 306) defined 'linguaculture' as "a domain of experience that fuses and intermingles the vocabulary, many semantic aspects of the grammar, and the verbal aspects of culture".

Agar (1994) modified the term 'linguaculture' to 'languaculture' because, according to him, culture in the latter 'is about meanings that include, but go beyond, what the dictionary and grammar offers' (Agar, 1994 cited in Risager *et al*, 2014: 105). In turn, Risager (2007: 227) states that there are two positions of looking at the relationship between language and culture; a) neutrality: implies that language as a functional

system can be culturally neutral, and that it can be studied without reference to the cultural context of use, and b) inseparability: stresses the relationship between language and culture and that language cannot be studied in isolation from its culture. She proposes a third position that is based on two principles; language and culture can be separated and language is never culturally neutral.

These kinds of intercultural models would make a great contribution to offer the NNSs of Arabic a better understanding of how language, culture and politics are related in the Arab world. However, as Haeri (2000: 61) states; ‘on the whole, the many implications of the language situations have not yet been systematically pursued. As such, a series of basic and important questions remain unposed’. Yet, I still think that the intercultural or the languacultural competence can still be employed in teaching and testing Arabic in the process of teaching and testing certain language functions. So, for example, to provide learners with practice in developing their cultural and intercultural competence, we can use functions like comparing certain cultural aspects of the target language and reflecting upon their native language.

The model of language proficiency that is adopted and used for the European languages is the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, 2001) as a basis for teaching and assessment. Communicative competence in this framework comprises three basic components; language competence, sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence (discourse, and functional). The interesting point about the CEFR model is that each component consists of a detailed definition of content and the ability to use and express this content. It is also the only model among the previously mentioned that has indicated the functional competence as a subcomponent of the pragmatic competence. It is concerned with the functional use of linguistic resources (production of language functions, speech acts) (CEFR, 2001: 13-14).

Based on this notional functional communicative trend, an approach to syllabus design was developed. This approach contrasts the structural, which argues that learning, occurs when learners know about the system of the language, whereas the functional-notional assumes that the learners should be able to know how to use the language (Ho, 1981: 325), which directly relates to appropriacy. Materials based on the functional notional approach are organised to determine the ideas that learners are expected to express through the target language (Wilkins, 1976). The implications of this approach

within the context of Arabic would be that the learning should not be confined to the religious contexts or for abstract academic purposes. The learning should inevitably involve MSA and the colloquial, since appropriacy can be achieved by adapting language to situation and to interlocutor, register and genre.

As discussed in section 2.3, the CEFR is referred to in the UKHE context of Arabic teaching for setting objectives of learning and identifying the learners' level of attainment in most universities. Therefore, it is considered when formulating the CAP framework.

#### 3.4.3. Post-communicative perspectives

After a long time of favouring CLT and considering it an equivalent to 'good teaching' (Ur, 1996:6), other perspectives of language learning, teaching and assessment have appeared to replace/complement the CLT debates. The attribute of this pedagogy is a tendency to being selective in terms of the teaching methods. Rodgers (2001: 4) terms it as "method synergistics" or a "disciplined eclecticism" since, according to Mitchell and Myles (2004: 261), because 'there can be no one best method'...which applies at all times and in all situations, with every type of learner, we recognise that the diversity of contexts requires an informed, eclectic approach'.

Klapper (2003: 34) expressed several concerns with CLT, that are basically focusing on pedagogy that favours meaning at the expense of form, the consequence of which is that the learners' inaccuracy becomes systematic. Schmidt (2001) argues, however, that this shift towards focusing on forms should not be a global approach; rather, it should emphasise certain forms that can be realised by the learners in an input. That is, learners' attention should be guided towards noticing linguistic items within a structure instead of raising their awareness of grammatical rules. In this era, in terms of language production 'output', Swain (2000) emphasised that the output of the target language should enhance fluency but also raise students' awareness of their knowledge of both written and spoken forms of the language. Lyster (2007: 126-136) called for a 'counterbalance approach' that strikes a balance between the form and meaning orientations; which is believed to strengthen the learners' intentional awareness of both alike. It also 'emphasizes a flexible and relatively balanced integration of content-based and form-focused instructional options'. This resonates with Spada and Lightbown's

(2008) integrated approach of form-focused instructions within communicative activities to help learners realise certain features of the input that would help them acquire these features. Cummins (2000) also suggested a teaching-learning model that focuses initially on meaning presented by a comprehensible input, and then comes the emphasis on form by raising awareness on language forms, and finally comes the learner's use of the language drawing on their personal perspectives. The tension between accuracy and fluency can also be seen in the test design, where the level of complexity in a test's tasks can identify on which of the two areas of performance the test is focusing; fluency or/and accuracy. Skehan (2009) assumes that a trade-off approach between the two would weaken the hypothesis which predicts that a raised level in one performance area would deplete attention to the other one.

The challenge in task design remains in exploring ways where tasks can be manipulated to produce performance which maximises complexity, accuracy and fluency even though these three areas may compete with one another according to Skehan and Foster (2012).

The Task-based Approach (TBA), for example, focuses on the knowledge about the language, as well as on the communicative aspects of it through a particular linguistic task. The task can be oriented towards communication or towards learning linguistic rules that will enable the learner to participate in more advanced tasks. Problem-solving activities such as 'going shopping' can represent an authentic situation (Skehan, 1998: 95), and actively engage the learners in their learning experience, allowing them to look back on it in a negotiated way through language.

The lexical approach suggests that lexicon is the basis of language while grammar is assigned a subsidiary role. As such, a lexical chunk, which is a set of words in a structure, should be the central element on which language teaching should be based. The focus of this approach is directed towards the naturally occurring language and involves intensive and extensive input through reading and listening activities. It brings into play the role of translation through first and second language comparisons (Lewis, 1993).

Neurolinguistic programming (NLP): As defined by Revell and Norman (1999: 14), NLP is a 'collection of techniques, patterns and strategies for assisting effective

communication, personal growth and change, and learning’ and ‘a means of achieving intra-personal and inter-personal excellence’. This approach greatly emphasises the learner’s self-belief in making a significant change in life and in learning. Learners are encouraged to establish clear goals and maintain excellent positive qualities of behaviour that lead them to excellence.

**Multiple intelligences theory:** Developed by the psychologist Gardner (1983), the theory of multiple intelligences suggests that human beings have numerous intelligences that work together these are interpersonal intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, linguistic intelligence, musical intelligence, spatial intelligence, bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence, and naturalist intelligence. In the pedagogical practice, this theory purports that if these intelligences are brought together and employed effectively in language teaching, they create a motivated learner who is more engaged in the learning process, more willing to take risks, and more encouraged to think critically (Puchta and Rinvoluceri, 2007). Support for this also comes from developments in neuroscience.

**America’s Content-Based Instruction (CBI) (Stryker and Leaver, 1997):** or Europe’s **Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Coyle *et al*, 2010)** involves subject teaching through a second language, and therefore emphasises using the target language from the very beginning as a real means of communication and a medium of instruction. It aims at ‘empowering students to become independent learners and continue the learning process beyond the classroom’ (Stryker and Leaver, 1997: 3). It is based on the idea that the information in the subject task provides a context for using the target language, which in turn develops and enhances the target language resources. This means that CLIL very much relates to the learners’ agency and draws on their previous knowledge and experiences. It also aims at developing and maintaining multilingualism where dominant and minority languages coexist (Serra, 2007).

In fact, there has been continuing debated over the use of the target language as the only means of instruction since the early years of communicative teaching pedagogies. The L1 exclusion debate, according to Macaro (1997:91), can be talked about from two positions; *Maximal* and *Optimal*. The former sees no pedagogical values of using the learners’ L1, and so that the classroom instruction and interaction should be completely in L2. The latter implies some value in the learners’ L1 and specifically for ‘knowing

when using code switching will have a negative impact'. In contrast with this standpoint, particularly in bilingual contexts, teachers and learners have been encouraged to do 'translanguaging' as a valid means for classroom instruction and interaction. According to García (2009: 140), it is 'an act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages in order to maximise communicative potential'. According to her, it goes beyond code-switching strategies to become a mode of 'hybrid language use'.

In the post-method approaches, a move towards constructivist theories of learning has emerged. Manion, Cohen and Morrison (2004: 167) state that "at heart there is a move away from instructing and instructivism towards constructivism" where the classroom becomes a place where "teachers are facilitators of learning" and "learning is a social, collaborative, and interactional activity" (Manion *et al*, 2004: 168).

The features of this beyond-method era can be summarised in three pedagogical principles suggested by Kumaravadivelu (2001: 544-454):

1. PARTICULARITY: post-method pedagogies are 'context sensitive' and 'location specific' and are relevant to a particular politics in a particular society and to a particular context in a particular milieu.
2. PRACTICALITY: they seek to bridge the gap between theory and practice by encouraging teachers to create their own theories and practice what they have created.
3. POSSIBILITY: they bring people's experiences and previous knowledge to the pedagogical setting for 'identity formation' and 'social transformation'.

The implications of this new move on conceptualising language proficiency is that attention is paid to the learners' social, cultural and interactional competences but that the same focus is also put on their linguistic competence. The learners' awareness of form and meaning and the relationship between the two is essential in producing accurate output – be it written or spoken.

Moreover, bringing translation back into play enhances bilingualism or even multilingualism in some cases through comparing the mother tongue with the target language. Furthermore, there are grounds for believing that translation is a very



important language function and should be considered when identifying what the upper-intermediate or the advanced learner of Arabic is required to perform.

Significant attention is also given to the authenticity of learning opportunities not only in the activities held in the classroom but also through carrying out linguistic tasks outside the classroom. This implies and facilitates the idea of authentic test's tasks in foreign language contexts in general and in an Arabic context in particular, where authenticity plays a crucial role in conceptualising foreign language proficiency.

There is an orientation towards exposing the learner to the naturally occurring language by learning certain lexical chunks, which would include daily expressions, occasional greetings and literary or local proverbs. Arabic language in all its varieties is rich in this regard, and mastering that would be very much related to social appropriateness.

Empowering learners' agency and reinforcing their positive qualities would help them in the year abroad to create their learning opportunities in a certain Arabic society. These positive qualities such as tolerance, openness, confidence and critical thinking would support creating autonomous learners with intercultural repertoire.

In this regard, Byram's (2008) ICC contrasts with the touristic-oriented pedagogy implemented by the communicative perspectives and empowers the notions of learner agency and identity construction, and encourages the learner to speak 'as oneself through a second language'. Ushioda (2009) also argues against the earlier versions of CLT took a more functional approach with learner positioned in a 'tourist' relationship rather than in something much more personal and culturally based. She considers that second language learners should be looked at as people who are 'necessarily located in particular cultural and historical contexts' (Ushioda, 2009: 216).

In addition to that, in the Arabic context where cultural meanings and signals are encoded in the speaker's utterance, culture that can be grasped from the linguistic speech should not be ignored at all. That is to say, the cultural aspects are not only embedded in the written form of the language but also in the spoken forms and dialects, and sometimes the local dialects reveal culture in a more realistic and explicit form. Therefore, if the socio-cultural competence is to be considered an essential and

fundamental component of a learner's proficiency, it should be linked with the diglossic context.

In the post-method pedagogy, assessment can be perceived as an integral component of the learning and teaching process. Assessment for learning (formative assessment) seems to have a significant role in this learning environment. Ross (2005: 319) puts it as follows; 'assessment episodes are not considered punctual summations of learning success or failure as much as ongoing formation of the cumulative confidence, awareness, and self-realisation learners may gain in their collaborative engagement with tasks'. As recent contributions to the literature on second language assessment would suggest, summative assessment (assessment of learning), which is usually represented in achievement, placement and proficiency tests, has started to integrate the modes of formative assessment as an ongoing process (Davison, 2004).

There is one concern I have in assessing proficiency in the post-method approaches, particularly in CLIL. The nature of assessment in CLIL is dual since it incorporates binary learning outcomes; ones related to the subject area and ones related to the target language. This challenge needs to be taken into account because it would influence the test validity.

In order to talk about an Arabic proficiency test in the light of the diglossic nature of Arabic language, we would need to carefully identify what to test, how to test, who tests, what type of tests to use, and the function of the test, among others.

### **3.5. Implications of models on Arabic language proficiency**

Several implications for the Arabic context can be inferred from the different perspectives of FL pedagogies. They can be outlined as follows:

#### **3.5.1. Arabic linguistic competence**

Before adopting any model to be considered the basis of this study, a definition of Arabic linguistic competence should be provided, and then a decision can be made on the most appropriate and relevant model to Arabic features and testing needs and requirements. Ryding (2008: 225) argues that the linguistic competence of the Arabic NS is complex and culturally contextualised. From a perspective of a NNS, she states

that ‘the range of spoken competence covers an extraordinary spectrum of social, cultural and geographic variants’. This statement addresses briefly the complexity in unpacking the features of linguistic competence of an Arabic NS; listening comprehension skill is a good example.

In daily life situations, a non-native speaker who lives in an Arab country is exposed to various spoken forms of Arabic that involve not only the dialects in all their levels but also MSA and the classical language at times, with a good deal of rich cultural references. An example is listening to a local radio channel in an Arab capital where this listening task requires comprehending a hybrid form of spoken language that consists of dialectical vocabulary put and organised in MSA structure, or vice versa. This all makes it rather complicated to determine the level of comprehension a NNS is required to reach in a particular social situation at a certain level. Consequently, MSA appears not to be an authentic variety when it comes to the conversational language in all situations, and proficiency in MSA means proficiency in reading and writing, not in the interactional spoken negotiating context of the language. Opinions on conceptualising Arabic proficiency in the light of the existing varieties are discussed in chapter 5.

### 3.5.2. Model of Arabic NS

There are different views of what a NS means not only in relation to Arabic but also to foreign languages in general. For instance, the definition of NS can be traced back to Bloomfield (1933: 43) who states, ‘the first language a human being learns to speak is his native language; he is a native speaker of this language’. Davies (1991:1) suggests that a NS of any language is the one who ‘knows what the language is [...] and what the language isn’t [...]’. Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2000: 150-161) state that a native speaker can be the one who acquired the language 1) by early childhood exposure, 2) by virtue of being a native user, 3) by being educated in the target language, 4) by being an exceptional learner, or 5) through long residence in the adopted country. Later on, Davies (2003: 210-214) also provided six ways to define any NS. They include the NS

1. in childhood,
2. with intuitions about idiolectal grammar,
3. with intuitions about the Standard Language grammar,
4. who is capable of producing fluent spontaneous discourse,

5. who is uniquely capable to write creatively,
6. who is uniquely capable to interpret and translate into their L1.

On the other hand, Cook (1999: 186) refers to the English NSs and suggests that ‘many native speakers are unaware how their speech differs from the status form, as shown, for example, in the growing use of nonstandard between you and I for between you and me even in professional speakers such as news readers’. Cook (1999) also challenged Davies’ category of the NSs’ unique ability of interpretation and translation; which does not apply to all NSs since not all of them are bi-linguals or multi-linguals. Therefore, and according to him, a native speaker is only the one who acquires the language in their childhood

In fact, despite the disagreement on how to define a native speaker, foreign language theories and pedagogies still consider it as a norm for measuring FL learners’ levels of attainment. The existing scales of language proficiency such as ACTFL take the educated native speaker ENS as a top level of proficiency regardless of whether that is achievable or not. The CEFR also relies on the NS model for scaling the proficiency descriptors in all levels: yet it states that the mastery level (C2) is not meant to conform to any aspects of nativeness or near-nativeness, as mentioned in section 2.4.2. It rather specifies criteria of precision and appropriateness that should characterise the production of successful language learners (CEFR, 2001).

In his intercultural model, Byram (1997: 11) argues against using the NS as a model for two reasons; the first is a pragmatic educational one, which is the problem of creating an impossible target and consequently inevitable failure. The second one is that using NS as a model would show the learner as an incomplete NS. It would also imply that ‘a learner should be linguistically schizophrenic’, as they should seek to become accepted as a native speaker by other NSs. That would separate the learners from their own culture and get them to acquire a native socio-cultural competence and consequently a new socio-cultural identity, whereas one of ICC’s objectives is to let the learner speak for oneself in the second language, bringing up their own culture, identities and social contexts.

Cook (2012) established the model of multi-competence, which refers to the knowledge of more than one language in the mind of the L2 user. It views the L2 user as a ‘whole

person' rather than a 'monolingual native speaker'. Cook's argument is based on the potential implication of the NS model, which is that interaction is put in the hands of one group (NSs) and this would give them the power over the other group (NNS learners), which should not and would not be the case of language use. The alternative suggested by Cook (2012) is a successful L2 user's model to compare the learners with; either by developing a more flexible version of the NS, or by establishing descriptors of a non-native model. However, Cook (2002: 335) states,

*'at present there are no adequate descriptions of successful L2 user goals. It may of course be that no single L2 user goal will suffice but that, rather like English for Specific Purposes, teachers need in principle to specify where, when and why each student needs to use the second language before settling on their goals. But the logic is nevertheless that teachers should aim at getting people to use the second language effectively'.*

Cook seems to be putting the task of identifying the successful L2 user in the teachers' hands. He points out that the decision would be made based on the learners' needs and effective language use.

In Arabic ACTFL, it is clearly stated that the educated native speaker (ENS) is the norm that identifies the level of a non-native proficiency. However, I agree with Ryding's argument that the Chomskyan notion of "ideal native speaker", especially when the speaker is an Arab, is extremely broad and very hard to achieve. The elaborative, expressive and culturally bound competence of an Arab NS makes it rather challenging for a non-native speaker to approximate unless there are clear stages of attainment (Ryding *et al.* 1995: 225).

There is no doubt that adopting the NS as a criterion has had a great impact on the way of teaching and testing; for instance, most of the Arabic programmes teach Arabic (MSA) to NNSs in exactly the same way that they do to the NSs. Let us take teaching grammatical rules as an example and see how this influences the way it is tested. I illustrate this by introducing the argument posed by Nielsen based on Faerch *et al.*'s (1984) definition of four different types of language rules;

- a) *Linguistic rules: established to account for language data, formulated in linguistic terminology, and belonging to a specific model of language description*
- b) *Psycholinguistic rules, which are psychological entities, activated by individuals when they produce language, these are not organized in the same way as linguistic rules.*
- c) *Native rules, that is rules used by native speakers, or rules that aim at being descriptively adequate, for the performance of native speakers; and*
- d) *Interrules, used by learners for a foreign language, or formulated for the benefit of foreign language learners (Nielsen, 1996: 229)*

Nielsen (1996: 230-233) argues that in the TAFL context, studies focus on identifying, teaching and testing the native rules because very few studies discussed what Arabic psycholinguistic rules might be, and even fewer talked about the interrules. Consequently, the majority of Arabic programmes ended up focusing on teaching the native rules in a native-speaker teaching style; where a non-native speaker should employ a series of mental processes in order to produce an accurate utterance under time pressure, which a beginner learner for example will definitely not be able to manage in a real-life communicative task. Therefore, and because communication success is dependent on the learner him/herself, learners' strategies should be identified, developed and improved in order to carry out communication by relying on quicker mental techniques such as association and automatisisation. Practically speaking, even the existing proficiency scale of Arabic (ACTFL) that is based on the concept of the "well-educated native speaker as a criterion" does not really reflect that in the descriptors. ACTFL has chosen to define the NS in a way that is based on the knowledge of MSA and one formal variety of dialect which is, in my opinion, realistic but not reflective to the generalisability the scale claims, since Arabic nativeness is far wider and deeper.

To conclude I would say, in a diglossic context, that the concept of NS can be sensitive and problematic. Thus, in my perspective, since the interrules and intercultural rules are not yet studied and identified, we should clearly say who counts as a norm for scaling proficiency descriptors and which types of competences formulate this norm. This issue is explored and discussed in more detail in chapters 8 and 9.

### 3.5.3. Arabic Culture

The *Alkitab* series (Al-Batal, Brustad, and Tunisi, 1995) was the first set of books to incorporate Arabic language and culture. As reported by Shoman (2011:28), Al-Batal as an ‘advocator for integrating culture in language instructions, has emphasised that one of the main problems in presenting culture in Arabic curricula is the absence of clear cultural objectives to be introduced and assessed’.

Al-Batal (1988: 445) listed a set of Arabic cultural objectives that he considers relate to Arabic; they include:

1. ‘the ability to recognise and/or interpret major geographical features of the Arab countries;
2. the ability to recognise and/or interpret major historical events pertaining to the Arab world;
3. the ability to recognise and/or interpret major aesthetic monuments of the Arabic culture, including architecture, literature and the arts;
4. the ability to recognise and/or interpret active everyday cultural patterns (e.g., eating, shopping, ways of greeting people, entertainment, sports, music, etc.);
5. the ability to recognise and/or interpret passive everyday cultural patterns (e.g., marriage, customs, education, politics, etc.);
6. the ability to act appropriately in everyday situation;
7. the ability to use appropriate common gestures;
8. the ability to evaluate the validity of generalisations about the Arab culture’;

He also added

1. ‘the ability to recognise the main principles of Islam, and the role it plays as a major component of Arab culture;
2. the ability to use the appropriate level of language, i.e., Modern Standard Arabic (*fuṣḥā*), or colloquial (*ammiyyah*), depending on the conversational situation’.

Shoman (2011: 29) in his turn carried out a study to formulate an ICC Arabic framework for study-abroad programmes that integrates MSA, ECA Egyptian Colloquial Arabic and the cultural aspects of the language. As he stated, the framework is based on an objective indicated by Al-Batal (2008), which is the ability of the student

to choose the variety to use MSA or ECA according to the situation and the ability to switch between the different Arabic varieties is regarded as an indication of the learner's cultural competence as a central component of the ultimate level of proficiency.

In his study, and as he stated, Shoman adopts the ICC concept to produce a lingua-cultural framework for teaching and assessing Arabic language and culture. The core aspects of his framework are the following;

- *Developing the learner's ICC with its four dimensions: knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness.*
- *Developing the learner's ability to recognise and produce different Arabic categories.*

He adopted an adapted version of Badawi's (1973) model of Arabic varieties and added one more variety which is 'Arabic influenced by foreign languages' which makes a new model that contains six levels of Arabic language. However, Shoman (2011: 47-48) emphasises that there is no magic formula to enable the learner of Arabic to switch between the different varieties of Arabic to resonate with a certain social context. To overcome this problem, he suggested that the interaction that is meant to be based on the framework he proposed is moved from the classroom context to a more natural context where the learners get to interact with NSs through field trips, where they can be put in various circumstances, situations and fields. The aim, in his opinion, is building a learner's better understanding of the host culture and language in use.

Shoman tested his framework through designing and administrating a course based on it. The course incorporated the six varieties of Arabic illustrated earlier. Nevertheless, as he states, the course has not included a theme of classical Arabic, as he does not regard it to be a spoken language as it can only be orally recited in specific contexts. Moreover, the variety that he added to Badawi's model – "Arabic influenced by foreign languages" – was meant to be included in the course. However, according to Shoman (2011:85), 'the study's scope did not allow for basing this variety on a corpus rather than observations'.

Shoman reported that the results were satisfying in terms of participants' recognition



and production of the different varieties of Arabic. The participants showed developed strategies of switching and mixing between the varieties; although he indicated that the process of developing these skills particularly when it comes to production is longitudinal, albeit promising. He also emphasised that the learners still need to do a great deal of work 'to approach near native-like proficiency in code-switching and code-mixing' (ibid: 79).

Through associating the Arabic varieties with ICC dimensions, Shoman also concluded that developing either one (ICC; or the knowledge of different varieties) 'will result in the other's development and consequently a higher proficiency level' (ibid: 81). That is to say, the more the intercultural awareness of the learner improves, the higher the linguistic-dialectal competence becomes, and vice versa. In both cases, the result will be a higher level of the overall proficiency.

In my perspective, the importance of this study lies in that it paves the way for the culture and even the intercultural aspects to be incorporated in Arabic pedagogy. That is because the issue of Arabic diglossia and the culture loaded in its varieties is a key in teaching and testing. It is also of great significance that the course designed in this study based on an intercultural framework of Arabic has been empirically examined, and the findings reported showed a correlation between the learners' ICC competence and their level of proficiency in addition to the attempt to develop the learners' multi-dialectal competence in terms of recognition and production. Yet, what I have realised is that a model of 'a native-like proficiency' has been aimed at although that was not explicitly mentioned, whereas one of the core aspects of the ICC model (Byram, 1997) is creating an L2 user of the language rather than looking at the learner as an incomplete native speaker. This might appear as a discrepancy between Shoman's theoretical framework and the research account.

One more point of note is that Shoman opted for an adapted version of Badawi's model to add a variety of Arabic that has been influenced by foreign languages in addition to maintaining Classical Arabic as a variety to be taught and tested for a study-abroad programme. However, as Shoman stated, neither CA nor the other variety were included in the course for the reasons mentioned earlier. For me, this is very natural given that CA is a variety that exists in very specific contexts and for learners whose purpose is to learn it to understand the Quran or the Arabic ancient literature. Obviously, it can be

taught in a reading text, but at the end it is not a language for communication in a study-abroad programme as Shoman himself concluded. As for the other variety, I tend to disagree with considering this as a variety of Arabic language that should be taught or tested. The influence of foreign languages on the spoken form of Arabic very much depends on the context, the country or even the capital where an Arabic dialect is spoken. Although I am not aware of studies that highlighted this issue, visiting many Arab countries, being exposed to mainstream media in each Arab country, and with some observation, I postulate that the influence of foreign languages on the Syrian-Damascene Arabic for example is very limited compared to the Lebanese or more specifically the Arabic spoken in Beirut. It applies to a country like Egypt where Shoman's study took place in comparison to Morocco that is heavily influenced by different languages, which makes it hard for non-Moroccan Arabs to understand. That is to say, the fact that some spoken dialects are influenced by foreign languages can be put under the intercultural rules of the language and then taught as such rather than considered a new variety of Arabic.

One aspect not focused on much in this study is the cultural elements reflected in the written language. This is despite the fact that the model has considered MSA as well alongside the colloquial. Literary texts, stories and essays are also rich in cultural references. Cultural and intercultural competences can also be developed and tested through reading part of a poem or writing a critical essay about a particular social phenomenon, and that also should be exploited.

Brosh (2013) investigated the extent to which teaching Arabic proverbs in the classroom promotes the students' awareness of Arabic culture, and their intercultural skills. The study was carried out through classroom discussions and observations of 34 undergraduate students followed by a questionnaire and unstructured interviews. One of the significant findings was that learners' exposure to and engagement with the meanings beyond Arabic proverbs introduced the learners more deeply to Arab culture and promoted their opportunities of reflection on their own values and beliefs.

SharafEldin (2015) proposed an intercultural framework that increases Arabic learners' awareness towards culture. His framework indicates three main aspects: 1) the importance of cross-cultural knowledge for successful Arabic learning and teaching; 2) introducing culture through language activities in the classroom across the different

levels; a) basic: through ‘day by day life, families, schools and living conditions, relationships with companies, celebrations, dating and marriage traditions’; etc... and at b) progressed and middle levels: ‘generations, transport, topographical variables, purchasing, historical backdrop of workmanship, music, films, etc..’ (SharafEldin, 2015: 115); and 3) the role of literature in promoting learners’ intercultural skills, and hence why literary texts should be part of classroom activities. He states, ‘literature additionally engages students’ creative ability, particularly when they are confronted with the dissection of fiction, show or verse’ (SharafEldin, 2015: 116).

One general observation across these studies is that "Arabic culture" seems to be viewed in singular terms, as a homogeneous entity, which gives a ground for further exploration in the interviews, as is discussed in chapters 6 and 7. Overall, the intercultural approach to teaching and assessment does not seem to be researched adequately in relation to Arabic pedagogy; that is particularly true in the case of Arabic language assessment. In the light of the literature that I am aware of, most of the work on it was developed in the USA. Despite the existence of ILR (2012) intercultural guidelines (ICC), they were not meant to particularly relate to Arabic language only.

### **3.6. Testing language proficiency**

In language testing and assessment, researchers have come to rely on models that elucidate the constructs on which grades or scores of assessment instruments can be interpreted which directly relate to test validity. Therefore, and for testing language proficiency, different models have been developed based on different terminologies. Namely, we have what is called models of language proficiency, communicative competence, or communicative language ability (CLA). A model is essential because it helps articulate the 'theoretical rationale' for a proficiency test (McNamara, 1996: 48), and 'relate the meaning of specific test performance to language competence and ability for language use' (Fulcher *et al*, 2007: 51). It is also important because it provides particular aspects to which certain meanings are attached and tested – that is to say a model is the basis on which an instrument can be tested on validity. In other words, a model can be looked at as source of potential constructs for specific testing purposes. Therefore, I look at several important models in the history of language teaching and

testing starting from reviewing approaches to testing plus some key terms that relate to scaling language proficiency.

### 3.6.1. Approaches to language proficiency testing

There seems to be two ways of approaching language testing; psychometric-structuralist approaches and psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic approaches as classified by Spolsky (1976). Davies (1978) argued that approaches to testing seemed to fall along two ends; an analytical one interpreted in discrete items test, and an integrative one represented in tests like cloze and dictation. He went on to say that no test could be wholly analytical or integrative. He states that,

*'The two poles of analysis and integration are similar to the concepts of reliability and validity. Test reliability is increased by adding to the stock of discrete items in a test; the smaller the bits and the more of these there are, the higher the potential reliability. Validity, however, is increased by making the test truer to life, in this case more like language in use'* (Davies, 1978: 149)

Weir (1990: 2) agrees with this idea and argues that in practice, most tests contain elements of both types either in the test format or the assessment procedures adopted. Nevertheless, I make a distinction between the two approaches in terms of the particular focus they represent.

#### a) The psychometric-structuralist approaches

The advantage of testing 'discrete' linguistic points as Weir (1990: 2) states is that they yield data which are easily quantifiable as well as allowing a wide coverage of items. However, although this kind of test is efficient when it comes to marking that is associated with objectively scored tests, they fail in terms of the construct they seek to measure, particularly if they were testing proficiency. Oller (1979: 212) outlines these deficiencies in terms of the construct validity of this form.

- *'Discrete point analysis necessarily breaks the elements of language apart and tries to teach them (or test them) separately with little or no attention to the way those elements interact in a larger context of communication. What makes it effective as a basis for teaching or testing language is that crucial properties of language are lost when its elements are separated. The fact is that in any system*

*where the parts interact to produce properties and qualities that do not exist in the part separately, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts ... Organisational constraints themselves become crucial properties of the system which simply cannot be found in the parts separately'.*

Morrow (1979) argued for assessing the elements of language in the context of language use. According to Morrow, when proficiency is assessed, it would be more valuable to test the knowledge of the language and the ability to use the rules by using discrete elements appropriate and related to a particular context. Morrow (1979: 145) puts the point as follows:

- *'Knowledge of the elements of a language in fact counts for nothing unless the user is able to combine them in new and appropriate ways to meet the linguistic demands of the situation in which he wishes to use the language'.*

b) The psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic approach

In contrast to the discrete point tests that are considered insufficient indicators of language proficiency, the psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic approach as termed by Spolsky (1976) was adopted. According to Oller (1979), the advantage of this approach is that it went beyond the measurement of a limited part of language competence carried out by discrete point tests with the latter's bias towards testing the receptive skills, whereas tests like cloze tests and dictation can assess integrated language skills, which is closer to the actual process of language use. Oller (1979: 3) states that:

- *'The concept of an integrative test was born in contrast with the definition of a discrete point tests. If discrete items take language skill apart, integrative tests put it back together. Whereas discrete items attempt to test knowledge of language one bit at a time, integrative tests attempt to assess a learner's capacity to use many bits all at the same time, and possibly while exercising several presumed components of a grammatical system, and perhaps more than one of the rationally recognised skills or aspects of skills.'*

There are some concerns related to the validity of this kind of measures such as cloze and dictation tests. Cited in Weir (1990: 4), Alderson (1978a) demonstrated that in tests like the cloze test – if it is to be considered a test – 'results are affected by altering the

point where the deletions are started from'. Weir (1990: 5) also states that there is evidence in the literature that the format of a task, which an integrative test may include, can unduly affect the performance of some candidates which makes it necessary to design more than one task in order to measure one particular construct. Moreover, Weir goes on to say that 'there is empirical evidence that cloze correlates only moderately with tests of written production' (1990: 6). Furthermore, as claimed by Morrow (1979), such tests assess underlying ability (competence) rather than actual performance. Carroll (1980b: 9) draws the same conclusion and argues that the cloze test 'is still essentially usage-based. The task does not represent genuine interactive communication and is, therefore, only an indirect index of potential efficiency in coping with day-to-day communicative tasks'.

Following Davies' (1978) argument on the defects resulting from adopting either of the two approaches in test design, and given the deficiencies in evidence for validity and/or reliability that each provides, a further investigation on a satisfactory paradigm that ends that conflict and achieves the purposes for which a test was designed is needed, whichever the approach to test the design was.

In a context where the aim is to test communicative skills, it is important to identify the tasks that best represent the actual use of Arabic, and which remain consistently assessable. For example, a learner of Arabic living in an Arabic-speaking country would sit alone watching TV or listening to the news, but also would most likely be in a place where they negotiate prices or engage in a debate or in a conversation. In the former situation, listening comprehension is the task the learner is required to do, whereas the latter would be assessing many other competences, such as linguistic competence, sociolinguistics competence, interactional competence, strategic competence, alongside comprehension. Therefore, I think the integrative testing would be more reflective of the construct that this kind of proficiency test would aim to measure. The discrete-point tests are perceived to relate to the cognitive-academic side of the language proficiency, while integrative testing is equated to assessing basic communicative skills (Cummins, 1983). Despite this, I do not personally think that this would be the situation of all the test tasks meant to assess the written form of the language. A journalist learner might need to conduct interviews with people and then report this in writing; or they might discuss with others a piece of news that they read in a newspaper. That is to say, the approach to testing can go back and forth between skills and tasks to assess the multi

facets of formal proficiency. As such, the task ‘should sample the kind of language it is aiming to measure (content validity)’ and ‘it should reflect a theoretical view of language appropriate to the demands of the future language performance (construct validity)’ as suggested by Paltridge (1992: 246). Discussions on the approaches to proficiency assessment in Arabic are provided in chapters 7 and 9.

### **3.7. Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed the complexities involved in conceptualising the concept of CAP and in formulating a framework of the competences which it consists of. The diglossic nature of Arabic, the lack of consensus on the attainments’ attributes of the levels of language proficiency, and the absence of clarity in identifying the varieties that a learner of Arabic is expected to produce all make it challenging to start the discussion on testing proficiency in Arabic. I have chosen to start exploring the aspects of a potential framework of proficiency that reflect the sociolinguistic image, and suit the context of teaching and testing Arabic in the UK. To set the pillars of this framework, an explanation of what communicative proficiency means should first be provided. Then the competences which the concept of proficiency comprises must be clarified. Approaches to assessing it in a way that reflects the actual use of Arabic in the light of its sociolinguistic situation also need to be explored. The next chapter describes the methods I have used to explore these pillars. It offers an explanation of the assumptions that underpin the methodology of this research and the procedures followed for data collection and analysis.

# 4

## Research methods

### 4.1. Introduction

This part of my thesis looks at the research design, which includes procedures followed to conduct this research, and choices adopted for data collection and analysis. It first outlines the research questions, and explains the way they were shaped. It then describes the methodological choices made in the study by offering the philosophical grounds that underpin my choices of a qualitative research paradigm and semi-structured interviews as a method. Next, it describes the pilot study that was conducted before the main data collection took place, outlines the participants' backgrounds, and explains the approaches I followed to analyse the data. It finally addresses the research ethics, validity and reliability.

#### 4.1.1. Research questions

The theoretical discussions of my research revolve around the theory of communicative proficiency and what it means when it comes to Arabic language given its diglossic nature. It assesses how the potential competences, of which CAP comprises, would be reflected and implemented in a framework of language proficiency. Therefore, an investigation on these areas was carried out through explanations and illustrations from practitioners (assessor teachers, and teachers) in the field, and through experiences and opinions of learners in the UKHE context. The next procedure was reading the pre-existing scales of language proficiency; namely CEFR (2001), Arabic ACTFL (2012), and ILR ICC (2012), discussed in sections 2.3 and 9.7.1, in the light of the emerging data. Then, the descriptors and components of these scales were looked at to outline the potential descriptors and testing specifications of the proposed framework.

To investigate the areas in concern, I posed the following research questions:



1. In the light of the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic, how is communicative Arabic proficiency conceptualised?
2. What competences does communicative Arabic proficiency consist of?
3. What construct(s) should a testing framework for communicative Arabic proficiency be based upon?
4. What is the role of the native speaker model for testing communicative Arabic proficiency?

Each of these research questions was split up into more detailed sub-questions trying to elicit the participants' experiences. Two interview schedules were developed and used to conduct semi-structured interviews with assessor teachers (ATs), teachers (Ts) and learners (Ls) of Arabic in the UKHE context. One schedule was targeted at ATs and Ts (Appendix 1) and the other was designed to prompt Ls to speak about their experiences within the framework of the research questions (Appendix 2). It is worth noting that the four research questions were ultimately asked to all participants with some modification to the rubrics in the Ls' interview schedule in response to the pilot study's outcomes. This is explained in more detail in section 4.6.

#### **4.2. My philosophical approach**

I conducted this research holding a social constructionist view. This view led to my methodological choice of qualitative research, and the data collection method I followed to explore my research area of knowledge.

Constructionism or social constructionism is an anti-realism philosophical approach. It holds that the objects under testing 'exist only in relation to our interpretations of them as they are locally constructed' (Fulcher, 2014:431). Constructionism as termed by Fulcher is a 'postmodern approach that does not ask about truth, but wishes to uncover the historical and cultural reasons that led to the currently dominant version of truth' (Fulcher, 2014: 435). It brings a critical approach to knowledge which, according to constructionism, is contingent (ibid, 2014).

From my perspective, social constructionism is a philosophy that values three key aspects: a) *plurality* – a notion that holds inside the multiplicity of complex aspects and factors that simultaneously contribute to articulate a particular phenomenon; b) *participation* – a recursive and dialectical action where the phenomenon is studied with others rather than on or to others; and c) *alteration* – in the spirit of participation, a

phenomenon is subject to collaborative examination in order to make the necessary change(s).

I considered those three aspects to explore proficiency in the area of my research because proficiency is considered a complex notion that comprises multiple components that are still contested, e.g., linguistic, sociolinguistic, cultural, strategic, interactional, and so on. Therefore, in order for them to be unpacked and identified, various perspectives and sources of knowledge should be drawn from; existing scales of language proficiency are one source, assessor teachers, teachers and learners' opinions and analyses are another, in addition to my own analysis as a researcher. The process of analysis should be dialectical and recursive because I believe that when a phenomenon is examined by multiple sources, a new product of knowledge would be generated, which I think should be examined again and evaluated on its validity and applicability in the real world.

As Creswell states, 'truth is what works at the time' (2009: 11) and therefore, it is conducive to consider every piece of knowledge within its time, context, nature and origin. That, in my opinion, applies to the existing scales of language proficiency. ACTFL for example has been criticised as suitable only for a tourist model of learners (Byram, 2000: 705).

I also believe, as social constructionism assumes, that individuals seek understanding of the surrounding; they create and develop multiple meanings of their practices and experiences. Adopting this perspective, my research relies on the participants' views where they can construct the meaning of the issue under scrutiny (CAP) within a particular context (UKHE). My aim as a researcher then is to make sense of the meaning of others' views rather than starting with a theory. Proficiency as a phenomenon is not a taken-for-granted reality, but it is rather uncovered through interaction between several social agents. Hence, we cannot always take anything as absolute, certain and permanent and then seek to generalise. Instead, in my point of view, we can collaboratively examine, explain, interpret and change and even expect further re-examination and change.

Bachman (2006: 182-3) suggests that when a researcher observes some phenomenon in the real world, he generally does this because he wants to describe, induce or explain something on the basis of this observation. That 'thing' is what can be called a

‘construct’. The idea of proficiency; the core concept my research is investigating, is believed to be an abstract construct that is assumed to exist in the heads of test takers; yet, it is a concept that is operationalised in such a way that we can make inferences about it by observations (Fulcher and Davidson, 2007: 7-8). What proficiency looks like and what components make it are multi-dimensionally constructed (socially, psychologically, and politically). Those dimensions intertwine to articulate the phenomenon and bring it to existence (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). I do believe that proficiency is a complex concept that is constructed by several factors; for instance, society, historical period, context and policy. The notion itself is abstract but there are different observable variables, such as fluency, accuracy, and interaction, and so on. Those variables are also socially constructed, and may be understood differently by different social actors.

Fish (1995: 253) argues that ‘all knowledges are equal in value’ and that ‘the facts emerge only in the context of some point of view’. This implies that language utterance is no longer assessed in relation with an external reality (Fulcher, 2014), since language use becomes more relevant to our instant attempts to deal with the surrounding or other people’s experiences (Rorty, 1989). So, there is no right or wrong, success or failure. Language becomes no more than ‘new forms of life constantly killing off odd forms’ (ibid: 120), and that ‘what we are left with is the transient social construction of meaning on an interaction-by-interaction basis’ (Fulcher, 2014: 435).

### **4.3. Research methodology**

Based on my own perceptions and beliefs reflected in my philosophical view explained in section 4.2 I opt for a qualitative strategy of inquiry as the paradigm of my research.

Qualitative methodology is ‘an inquiry process of understanding’ where the researcher develops a ‘complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting’ (Creswell, 1998:15). Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 3) claim that qualitative strategy involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach: ‘This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them’.

My use of qualitative methodology allows my search to focus ‘upon different issues and [approach] them in different ways’ (Cohen *et al*, 1989: 8). I select this paradigm because its emphasis is on exploring what is particular rather than what is general. Therefore I adopt it in order to get in-depth data in relation to proficiency theory and complexities for my research from diverse perspectives. Also, selecting qualitative methodology can be a pragmatic choice. Due to the exploratory nature of my study, research questions of this study could not be answered through quantitative methodology; the aims were to draw insights and thoughts about the topic of testing communicative Arabic proficiency on which scant literature exists. The reports presented in section 2.3 that describe Arabic practices and challenges in the UKHE context piqued my interest in exploring this context further but this time from the perspective of those involved in teaching and testing practices. These practices that may differ due to the institutions’ different policies might influence the content of teaching and testing; MSA or bi-dialectical in the Arabic context. I wanted to explore my participants’ opinions despite these different institutional policies, hoping to reflect the actual needs of the context and the learners in the proposed framework and call for change.

#### **4.4. Testing and qualitative research**

The field of language testing for most of its history has been grounded in different quantitative approaches (Fulcher, 2014: 2); because it was believed that ‘one of the most important objects of measurement . . . is to obtain a general knowledge of the capacities of man by sinking shafts, as it were, at a few critical points’ (Cattell and Galton, 1890: 380 in Fulcher, 2014: 2).

However, in his paper *The-state-of-the-art*, Bachman (2002) argues that the field has witnessed evidence of maturity over the last 25 years in terms of practices, ethics and factors that influences a test’s performance. Furthermore, Lazaraton (2000) and Lazaraton and Tylor (2006) argue that the development was evident in the methodological domain of researching language testing over the last 15 years. Lazaraton and Tylor (2006: 1001) state that ‘testers have come to recognise the limitations of statistical methods for language assessment research’ Therefore, qualitative methodology was opted to ‘design, describe, and validate language tests’.

There has been a shift to qualitative research in language testing and I consider my work to be situated within this shift.

#### **4.5. Rationale for choosing semi-structured interviews**

My research design follows a qualitative approach where semi-structured interviews are used. The semi-structured interview is a method used to ‘examine an issue related to a certain group of individuals; those people can be interviewed at some length to determine how they have personally experienced the issue under investigation’ (Creswell, 2009:18).

The reason I selected semi-structured interviews to conduct my research is that my research investigates testing proficiency in Arabic; an area of knowledge that has not been addressed adequately in the field of Arabic language pedagogy. Nevertheless, it is part of the teaching practices in general and in the UKHE context in particular. It was demanding to opt for a paradigm that allows for deep exploration of the theoretical perspectives that shape these practices. As explained in Chapter 2, approaches to Arabic teaching and testing in the different UKHE institutions are disparate. So, I needed an empirical research to report the views of those who are involved and show the diversity of opinions that result in this disparity. I was also concerned with the points of intersection between these views, and in creating a narrative that makes sense through comparing and contrasting them. This required a method that corresponds to these demands, and reflects the interaction between me as a researcher, my participants, and the complex topics of my research. The interview is a co-constructed activity that allows us to obtain data through an interactive way. It is epistemologically linked to social constructionism; the philosophical view I hold to conduct this research. Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 52) suggest that interview is ‘a meaning-making occasion’. Participants in an interview inevitably co-constitute meaning collaboratively, and ‘the meaning of what emerges is then actively constructed within interview interaction’ (ibid, 1995: 52). The interview is also a dynamic process that attempts to probe respondents’ experiences to create a deep discourse not only to gather information (Douglas, 1985).

My interviewing approach in relation to social constructionism implies that both the interviewee and the interviewer are inevitably active, and involved in constructing meaning in the interview, as Holstein and Gubrium (1995) suggest. The interview

process is dynamic and dialectical, and does not rely only on questioning and eliciting responses. Interviewees are not treated as sources of knowledge awaiting discovery. They are rather co-constructors of knowledge in cooperation with the interviewer (ibid: 1995). This perspective influenced my interview style including questioning techniques I used to probe such as 'Could you explain ... / What do you understand by .... / Am I right in thinking that you ... / Does that mean that ...?'

During the interview, I tried to establish a 'climate for mutual disclosure' (Douglas, 1985), where I showed willingness to give my opinion and to share my deep thoughts, to reassure the interviewees and facilitate their reciprocal revelations. This fostered my social constructionist approach to interviews. I also used the semi-structured interview, a method that allows interviewees freedom to express their views in their terms, and that provides comparable data.

I used only semi-structured interviews to gain access to the participants' perceptions about CAP. Nevertheless, throughout I maintained a comparative and an interpretive approach to analyse my participants' opinions within each group and across the three groups. I compared and contrasted the nine responses to show the convergent and divergent positions of points made around CAP.

#### **4.6. The data collection process**

A qualitative approach was used to collect data through individual semi-structured interviews, which is one of the most commonly used qualitative methods in small-scale research. The process of data collection went through two phases. Firstly, a pilot study was conducted to trial and improve upon the research design; and secondly, after carrying out some modifications based on the pilot study, the main data collection process took place.

##### **4.6.1. Pilot study**

The aim of the pilot study was to examine my methodological choices and to work out the procedural variables that might affect the emerging data; such as feasibility, time, sample size, and the efficiency of interview schedules.

The initial context of this study was the Higher Language Institute (HLI) at Damascus University – Syria. Thus, the pilot study was conducted with a teacher who belongs to

that context and a learner who had learning experience in HLI. In HLI, Arabic courses were based on Arabic ACTFL due to the various American courses the institute used to host.

It is worth noting that the interview schedule that was trialled was based on the four research questions listed in section 4.1.1, adding to that the Ts' opinions on ACTFL; since it is the proficiency scale used in HLI (Appendix 9). Therefore, several testing activities based on ACTFL and provided in the Arabic ACTFL (2012) guidelines were selected, and the teacher was to reflect on these activities. This question was not initially asked to the learner as it was believed to be particularly technical and to require background knowledge about testing which, most likely, the learner would not have. The initial aim of my entire research was discussing the criteria of proficiency on which the ACTFL scale is based with the Ts, and offering a critical revision of it; and identifying the strengths and deficits of the scale and suggesting any necessary modification, reconsideration or improvement. After that a new version of ACTFL that corresponded to the HLI context and the communicative purposes in Arabic was to be produced.

Breaking down the research questions, two interview schedules were developed and sent by email to two types of participants; a teacher and a learner. The two schedules investigated the same research questions of course, but the difference between the two schedules lies mainly in the way the rubrics were worded. The learner's interview questions aimed at drawing on their experiences to respond, while the teacher's questions aimed at reflecting on their practices. Ultimately, each of the questions posed to the teacher was put to the learner but in different words. For instance; to answer the first research question that is:

In the light of the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic, how is communicative Arabic proficiency conceptualised?

Breaking down this research question resulted in a number of sub-questions (Questions c, d, and e in Appendix 9). One of them was: what do you understand by proficiency in general and Arabic language proficiency in particular? Whereas, the question posed to the learner was: do you consider yourself proficient in Arabic? Why/why not? (Question e in Appendix 9).

The teacher was a female native speaker of Arabic who had eight years of experience in teaching Arabic in different contexts and countries. (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon), and holds an MA in Applied Linguistics from a UK University. The learner was a female lawyer who learnt Arabic in many countries such as Syria and The Sudan for communicative purposes and in the UK and Belgium for academic purposes.

The interview schedules were sent by email to the teacher and the learner a week prior to the interview date. Then, the teacher's interview was conducted through three sessions of online synchronic chat via social networks due to the security situation in Syria. The data were originally collected in Arabic, translated into English, transcribed and analysed. It is worth noting that the teacher – herself a speaker of both English and Arabic – checked the translation for accuracy. The learner's interview took place in London through a face-to-face interview in English. Then the data collected were transcribed and analysed. The data derived from both interviews were reread in English and then coded for themes.

The pilot study proved useful to familiarise myself with the topic, the process of conducting interviews and prompting rich responses, and also to work out time management. Most importantly, though, the pilot study allowed me to deeply reflect on the research questions and how they could be best reflected in an interview schedule. Accordingly, several modifications were carried out which are referred to in the following section, 4.6.2.

#### 4.6.2. Methodological modifications based on pilot study

Firstly, to provide an adequate communicative assessment framework of Arabic proficiency, the initial plan was to discuss the criteria of proficiency on which Arabic ACTFL scale is based. However, this was ultimately abandoned due to two reasons; a) the study was primarily meant to take place in HLI, Syria as mentioned in section 4.6.1. This was changed due to the security situation in Syria which resulted in the shutdown of the department of Arabic language in HLI, and the migration of most of the lecturers involved. b) ACTFL is not used in the UKHE context as a reference for Arabic proficiency, and thus it sounded unfamiliar for most of the participants. Therefore, I took it as a reference for designing the assessment framework, but gave more focus to the CEFR for levelling and describing categories of proficiency because it is the one followed in the UKHE context as shown in section 9.7.1.



Secondly, I worked on rewording the interview questions to make them more intelligible and to elicit rich responses that draw on experiences while avoiding abstract questions and terminologies. Also, in case a use of any terms was needed or expected to come across in conversation, I prepared a briefing paper that contained an overview of the research aims and questions. It also provided a list of definitions of some technical terms that my research questions would refer to; such as construct, competences and communicative skills (Appendix 4).

#### 4.6.3. The main data collection process

The following sub-sections comprise a description of the journey I embarked on for the main data collection process. It begins with a reminder of the research context and the participants, and continues with ethics, validity and reliability.

The research context: as explained in Chapter 2, this research study was conducted in the UKHE context, a context of recent rapid growth in demand for Arabic language learning, in particular across university-wide language programmes. There are now (2016) almost 60 UK universities teaching Arabic language, including 16 that offer degree programmes (single or joint honours, undergraduate or postgraduate) in Arabic Studies. Those courses most likely consider MSA for their teaching and testing practices in terms of the four skills. A few universities such as the University of Cambridge and the University of Edinburgh consider teaching and testing a dialect alongside MSA. As explained in section 2.3, learners in this context are various and study Arabic for different purposes, such as heritage learners, non-Arab Muslims, and experienced language learners. The CEFR categories are used to identify the level of those learners.

Target population and sampling criteria: the target groups of interviewees are ATs, Ts and Ls of Arabic as a foreign language. In total, 14 individuals were interviewed but ultimately nine interviews were chosen which I believed best corresponded to the sampling frame of this study. My sampling frame – which is ‘whatever is being used to identify the elements in each sampling unit’ (Sapsford and Jupp, 2006: 28) – is based on some specific criteria for each group of participants;

1) Assessor teachers (ATs): who are experienced teachers in the UKHE context but are also specifically involved and experienced in (placement/proficiency) test design,

construction, validation or evaluation 2) Teachers (Ts) of Arabic as a foreign language who have at least two years of experience in Arabic language teaching practices at the UKHE context. 3) Learners (Ls) of Arabic who have studied Arabic in the UK and in one of the Arab countries.

The initial rationale behind collecting data from two different categories of participants (ATs and Ts) was getting insights on proficiency from an assessment perspective. I had presumed that the data emerging from the assessor teachers would reflect a clearer vision on the evidence criteria that should be used to judge the quality of learners' performance in all different levels. That would bring attainment objectives and assessment judgments into alignment in each level of proficiency. Whereas, the teachers would be able to identify the most relevant and useful language that learners might encounter at the right stage in their learning. Accordingly, the teachers were interviewed to inform the language content in each level of proficiency based on its relevance to the UK learners' needs and backgrounds and to the learning context. Data collected from the assessor teachers was expected to contribute to the language content holding an assessment vision which would indicate what content can be assessed and based on which construct or norm.

However, there were no significant distinctive elements between the data collected from the two categories. Both have spoken about proficiency from a teacher position where classroom practices and activities were the basis of their responses. Despite that, in-depth assessment-oriented insights were captured in the responses but that was not category-driven.

Participants' profiles: Each three of the nine interviewed participants fell within a different group of interviewees. Given pseudonyms, they can be listed as follows;

#### 1. Assessor teachers

**Luna:** is a lecturer of Arabic at one of the UK institutions with 34 years of experience. She did her BA in Arabic and French. She learnt Arabic at university and spent a year abroad in Egypt where she learnt the Egyptian dialect. She has a teaching English qualification, a postgraduate diploma in linguistics and many other professional development courses. She also has attended many training courses on teaching Arabic as a foreign language, but she has no formal pedagogical or assessment kind of training.

Luna is responsible for teaching two types of students; those who take an MA course in translation and that is mainly designed for Arabic NSs, and the undergraduate so-called NNSs of Arabic. She has been through many experiences on which variety of Arabic should be taught. She has tried teaching MSA and the dialect separately, and together and she ended up teaching MSA only mainly for resource reasons. She is involved in all testing practices that are normally expected in any teaching process; but she is also responsible for conducting a placement test when students who apply to the university are of different levels of entry. The levels she used to identify and teach are beginner, intermediate and advanced.

**Fida:** is a lecturer of Arabic at many UK universities now. She had been teaching Arabic as a foreign language for more than 26 years. Within her teaching career, she has been involved in preparing Arabic curricula and syllabi at the different institutions that she has worked for. MSA and the Levantine colloquial are mainly the varieties of Arabic that she is an expert at. Also she has always been responsible for testing practices during her work as a teacher, and also for preparing tests at the university where she has been working for the last six years now. Fida tests her students in the four skills in different types of courses; namely the diploma in Arabic, Arabic proficiency, and credited Arabic courses. Recently she has been mainly involved in designing and conducting placement tests that are meant to put students in the right level. The variety of Arabic tested is normally MSA in the four skills and sometimes one of two dialects (Levantine and Egyptian) based on the student's learning needs. The CEFR is the basis on which the level of students is decided.

**John:** is a lecturer of Arabic at one of the UK institutions with 30 years of experience. He considers himself to be 'one of the most experienced teachers of Arabic in the UK' given the many universities he worked for in addition to the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office. He did his degree in Arabic at a UK university followed by a Master's degree and a qualification in teaching English to adults. He started his teaching career as a teacher of English but had been teaching Arabic for 30 years non-stop. For the past seven years, he has been teaching different levels of Arabic students at one of the UK universities. His students are those who want to study Arabic for business purposes and also those who want to have a career in Arabic; so, they either do a degree in Arabic or take an intensive Master's programme. He teaches his students of both courses MSA with a dialect in an integrated approach. The integration involves teaching

the two varieties together through blending two linguistic skills for carrying out a single task; for example, students might be asked to read a passage in MSA and discuss it in a colloquial. He carries out all kind of testing practices that are usually required for good teaching process. In addition to that, he does an online oral placement test where he identifies students' levels of entry if they were not beginners. He designs and processes tests which are based on the integrated approach he follows in his teaching, where these tests consist of two parts; one is written and that is in MSA, and the other one is an integration of the two varieties, MSA and Levantine/Egyptian, primarily in the speaking and listening skills.

## 2. Teachers

**Walid:** is a teacher of Arabic a UK university with 16 years of teaching experience in different contexts in the Middle East and the UK. He did his BA in Media and an MA in Psycholinguistics of Second Language Acquisition and Bilingualism at the UK University he is currently teaching at. He had taught different varieties of Arabic at different higher education contexts in the UK starting with Classical Arabic, then MSA, and dialects. He has attended an in-service development course related to teaching the international students in general, but received no training on language pedagogy.

**Farah:** is a native-speaker and teacher of Arabic with two years of UK experience. She is currently teaching at one of the UK universities and at the foreign office. She completed the first two years of her degree in English language and literature and then moved to the United States and graduated with a degree in political science. She has taught English as a foreign language in the Middle East where she was subject to a great deal of in-service training. She returned to the USA to get some training on teaching Arabic as a foreign language and attended several conferences and workshops in Cairo and the USA. In the UK, Farah has done a Master's in English language teaching and obtained a CELTA certificate. She has international experience of teaching Arabic in different countries; the USA, Turkey and the UK. Her students are mainly university students, young professionals, and diplomats. She teaches two varieties of Arabic; MSA and the Levantine colloquial.

**Iman:** is a teacher of Arabic at an Arabic language centre that is affiliated to a UK university; she has seven years of experience. She did her BA in Science and obtained a qualification in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language at the university that she is

working for now. Iman mentioned that there are varieties of students in the language centre; those who are doing postgraduate studies in certain fields where speaking and understanding Arabic is a requirement. There are also students who want to seek job opportunities in the Middle East in addition to the heritage learners whose aim is to engage with their language, religion and culture. At the moment, Iman is teaching a “proficiency course”, and another course called Diploma in Arabic; which is, based on her description, ‘an intensive whole year long course that brings only high calibre students’ being selected by a test followed by an interview. As a coordinator of the Arabic Department in that Language Centre, she has chosen to teach MSA and the Egyptian colloquial on that course; with more focus given to MSA. Therefore, the students who take that test are required to complete a written part which includes grammar and reading comprehension in MSA, while speaking and listening tests involve integrated tasks of MSA and the Egyptian colloquial.

### 3. Learners

**Naya:** is a learner of Arabic who is interested in languages in general and in Arabic in particular. Her purpose of learning Arabic is to get a degree in this language and seek a professional career through that later on, probably in one of the Arab countries. She spent her year abroad, as part of the BA programme, in Morocco. The University she is doing her degree at offers MSA as the formal variety of Arabic teaching. She also only learnt MSA in the institution she was sent to study at in Morocco. She has not received any formal teaching on Moroccan dialect, and the only way she familiarised herself with this spoken form was through interaction with people there. She has moved to Bahrain after completing her degree in Arabic, where she is teaching at a Bahraini school.

**Yaman:** is a heritage learner of Arabic, who was born and raised in the UK. His purpose of learning Arabic is Islamic, historical and cultural at the same time. He has been learning Arabic informally for eight years with big gaps in between, so it has not been intensive learning. He did a term of Arabic language at one of the UK universities as a requirement of his Masters in journalism. He also studied MSA for a short period of time at a language school in Cairo at one of his summer holidays to Egypt. His interest in learning Arabic started with the Egyptian colloquial and then that progressed to memorising verses of the Quran and also picking up MSA from going to that school,

the course he has done in the UK and also from listening to news. He has not received any formal teaching on the Egyptian colloquial and the only way he developed his speaking was through interaction with people in Cairo. He considers that he is better in the colloquial than in CA or MSA.

**Glen:** is a learner of Arabic at one of the UK universities. He has done his degree in Oriental studies and taken Arabic as a part of that course. He spent his year abroad in Syria where he practiced and improved his knowledge of the Levantine colloquial and MSA as well. The varieties of Arabic he was simultaneously taught were MSA and the Palestinian colloquial, where reading and writing was carried out in MSA and speaking was only in the Palestinian colloquial. In Syria, he learned the Syrian colloquial alongside MSA. His purpose of learning Arabic started with academic reasons and then after he converted to Islam he became interested in religion and Quranic studies. He has just completed his PhD in Medieval Arabic at a British university. Glen considers himself to be fluent in MSA and the Levantine dialects after his many visits to different Arab countries in the Levant area.

The interviews' procedure: two interview schedules were developed based on the four research questions listed in section 4.1.1. Similar questions were asked of each interviewee, and supplementary questions were also asked when appropriate.

At an early stage of the main data collection process, I had decided not to ask the Ls about the fourth research question, that is related to the role of the NS model for testing Arabic proficiency. That was because I presumed that this topic is particularly technical and testing-oriented, and may require background knowledge about language pedagogy which learners might not have. Later on, after observing the diversity in the ATs' and Ts' responses in this regard, I decided to carry out follow-up interviews with Ls and ask them if they aspire to any norm in learning Arabic. Ultimately, the four research questions were put to the three groups of participants through three interviews per group of participants and three additional follow-up interviews with the learners only.

The focus of the two interview schedules was the same; the key points of the four research questions were all covered through a list of inquiries. However, the questions put to the ATs and Ts were slightly different from those posed to the Ls in terms of the way the questions were worded and the terminologies used. As explained in section 4.6.1, this approach proved useful and practical in the pilot study just to avoid using

testing terminology in the learners' interviews and to produce more intelligible rubrics. For instance, in an attempt to answer the second research question mentioned in section 4.1.1

What are the possible competences of which the concept of CAP consists?,

one of the questions put to the ATs and Ts was;

Describe one of your students who you thought was proficient in Arabic, and another one who you thought was not. What sort of skills has the proficient one developed as opposed to the less proficient one? (Appendix 1), while the question asked to the learner was;

From a self-assessment perspective, how do you identify your level of Arabic? On which criteria do you base your response? Which kind of knowledge do you think you have or you think you lack? (Appendix 2).

Similar to the pilot study, the interview schedules were sent by email to the participants a week prior to the interview date. A briefing paper with terms used in this study and their definitions was also sent with the interview schedules (Appendix 4). The participants were asked to give feedback on the schedule and to get back to me in case there was any kind of ambiguity or for any inquiry. The interviews with the ATs, two of the Ts, and the Ls were conducted in English, transcribed and then analysed, whereas a mixed variety of MSA and the Syrian colloquial was used to conduct an interview with the third teacher, Walid, based on his choice. The emerging data were translated into English, the translation was checked by two Arabic and English speakers on its accuracy and appropriateness, and then the analysis process took place.

The table below summarises the process of data collection which includes the interviews' language, dates and duration. The first two rows are information about the data collected during the pilot stage, while the other rows represent the main data collection.

Table 3 Summary of the process of data collection- interviews

Interviewee	Interview language	Interview date	Interview duration	Process	
<b>Pilot stage</b>					
<b>Teacher</b>	Mawia	Arabic	20/05/2014	2h	Upon their preferences, the teacher was interviewed in Arabic, and the learner in English. The teacher's data was then translated into English, and then checked by her. The data collected from both was analysed as a pilot study, which was presented to a Goldsmiths panel in December, 2014 as part of an MPhil/PhD upgrading process.
<b>Learner</b>	Sirin	English	09/06/2014	1h, 30 min	
<b>Main data collection</b>					
<b>Assessor Teachers (ATs)</b>	Luna	English	17/02/2015	1h, 20 min	The three interviews were transcribed in English and then checked by a proof-reader. The three participants have not responded to my offer to check the transcription of their interviews.
	John	English	21/05/2015	1h, 13 min	
	Fida	English	12/05/2015	1 hour	
<b>Teachers (Ts)</b>	Walid	Arabic	20/03/2015	1 hour	This is the only interview that was conducted in Arabic upon Walid's preference. It was then translated into English and checked for accuracy by a bi-lingual (English/Arabic) translator. Walid has not requested to



					check the transcription either.
	Iman	English	14/05/2015	1 hour	These two interviews were transcribed in English and then checked by a proof-reader. No check requested.
	Farah	English	31/03/2015	1h, 19 min	
<b>Learners (Ls)</b>	Naya	English	20/02/2015	50 minutes	The first three research questions were covered in the first interview with each one of the learners. A follow up interview was conducted later-on to discuss the native speaker as a norm.  Yaman is the only participant who responded to my offer to check the transcription and had no comments on it.
			16/11/2016	16 minutes	
	Yaman	English	18/02/2015	1 hour	
			16/11/2016	10 minutes	
	Glen	English	18/03/2015	45 minutes	
			23/11/2016	10 minutes	

#### 4.7. Approaches to data analysis

After listening to the recordings and selecting the interviews to be used in this research, the process of analysis started by transcribing and translating the emerging data, and then coding it for themes and categories.

##### 4.7.1. Translation and transcription

All the interviews of this research were mainly conducted in English, based on each of the participant's choice. As mentioned in section 4.6.3, only the interview with the teacher Walid was carried out in Arabic, as per his preference.

The transcribing process involved listening to the audio recordings and writing out what was said in English. The one interview that was conducted in Arabic was first written out in Arabic on a paper, and then translated into English. The original Arabic language in which this interview was carried out was not used for transcribing. Some Arabic words mentioned in the English recordings were italicised and the closest translations in English were provided in parentheses. The translation was checked by a speaker of Arabic and English on the accurate account. At his request, one of the learner interviewees (Yaman) read the interview conducted with him after it was transcribed.

It is also worth noting that in the excerpts quoted for analysis, there were some words that are occasionally used by the participants in Arabic. Following the DIN 31635 transliteration system for Arabic alphabet, those words were included in the excerpt after being Romanised. A chart of the Arabic alphabet, its IPA equivalent and the transliteration characters is provided in Appendix 8.

#### 4.7.2. Steps of analysis

The steps in qualitative analysis included a) preliminary exploration of the data by a close reading through the transcripts, b) translating into English the data collected in Arabic, c) highlighting the potential sub-headings related to the research questions, d) coding the data by segmenting and labelling the transcripts, e) gathering together of segments of data from different sections of the data transcripts that are relevant to a particular category, f) developing themes by putting similar codes together, g) connecting and interrelating themes, and finally, h) comparing and contrasting all the themes of data that have been assigned to the same category. The benefit gained from doing the last step that is called the ‘constant comparative method’ is clarifying what the categories that have emerged mean, as well as identifying sub-categories and relations among categories (Sapsford and Jupp, 2006: 253).

The table below provides examples of codes and data that I initially identified across the three transcripts.

Table 4 Examples of codes and relevant data provided by each category of participants

Examples of codes	Participants	Relevant excerpts from data
<b>Bi-dialectal knowledge and its relevance to proficiency</b>	AT, Luna	<i>"I would find it hard to imagine a proficient student who didn't know the dialect". "We expect them to be proficient in the different areas of life, and that's what dictates which variety they use"</i>
	T, Walid	<i>"I think those dialects should be included in Arabic syllabi so that learners don't feel or think they're learning different languages but rather they are getting exposed to different registers". "Even if the student spoke the dialect very fluently but wasn't able to read, I can't say he is a proficient user of Arabic".</i>
	L, Naya	<i>"I don't know how you can be called a proficient user of Arabic if you can't understand ammiyyah. I don't think it does proficiency".</i>
<b>Aspects of cultural/ intercultural awareness</b>	AT, Fida	<i>"Using the language is not only understanding it; using it means where he can get his political information, where he can get his poetry information for example, where he can get things to do with environmental things, so he needs to know all the sources of the language, to know how to refer to it, so this is a type of culture he needs to know. This is the type of culture he needs to be aware of".</i>
	T, Farah	<i>"If you're talking to your friend which statement would you use and then put options like your highness, your majesty, or hey you. That's an important aspect of the language".</i>
	L, Glen	<i>"It would be nice to read some Syrian novels and of course watch some Syrian TV and that kind of thing. That seems safer than taking classes of the details of Syrian culture and more different Syrians do in their lives".</i>
<b>Proficiency and communication</b>	AT, Luna	<i>"Proficiency is communicative plus. You can be communicative without being proficient, but you can't be proficient without being communicative, that's how I see it".</i>

	T, Iman	<p><i>“Everybody was learning the language because they want to communicate in the language”.</i></p> <p><i>“If someone can communicate, it is not necessarily proficient in other skills, so the skills go together and this is where we go back to the communicative approach of teaching”</i></p>
	L, Yaman	<p><i>“Even speaking in very broken colloquial Arabic, I think it allows you to express this hidden side to language, which is more emotion and even hand gestures and a kind of intonation and rhythm and stuff”.</i></p>

#### 4.7.3. Categories of analysis

Four research questions shaped the focus and discussions of the interviews; the concept of CAP, its features and how to test these, and the norm for assessing it. In order to cover and elaborate these topics through the process of analysis, the qualitative data were initially classified to include four categories, which can be outlined as follows:

- The meaning of CAP
- Competences of CAP
- Testing CAP (construct and assessment criteria).
- The role of the NS model for assessment

Each of these categories was discussed in a separate chapter of data analysis. Through the process of analysis, several themes have appeared repeatedly across the four categories, such as dialectical knowledge, interactional aspects, authenticity, and inter-dialectical intelligibility. Those themes were discussed under the category where they appeared in the discussion. Accordingly, the categories and themes can be listed as follows:

1. Conceptualising CAP
2. Competences of CAP
  - a. Proficiency and communication
  - b. Cultural awareness
  - c. Dialectical knowledge
3. Testing communicative proficiency

- a. Interactional aspects
  - b. Authenticity
  - c. Inter-dialectical intelligibility
4. Model of native speaker

The following four chapters provide an analysis account of the emergent data that fall under these four main categories.

#### **4.8. Access, ethics and informed consent**

Access: gaining access to the participants, particularly to the ATs and Ts, was one of the most challenging tasks I encountered while conducting my research. This was attributed to several reasons; the first relates to the sampling criteria I provided in section 4.6.3 that framed my choice on the ATs; background experience in placement/proficiency test in the UKHE context, which seemed to significantly lack expert staff in this field. The other reason was that many of the people I contacted either did not turn up for the interview or had not agreed that their responses would be recorded. More interestingly, I received some responses where participants agreed to contribute before they received detailed information about the research aims and questions. Some subsequently considered the topic too complex for them to talk about as it needs a great deal of preparation. Ultimately, I managed to gain access through my supervisor's professional relations with those in the field and through attendants of conferences I have met.

Ethics: There were two main ethical challenges my research encountered.

The first was subjectivity in my research design that cannot be eliminated from qualitative research. The approach I followed was to create a balance between participants' responses, and my personal beliefs by referring back to the existing literature across my data collection and analysis processes. Secondly, at the beginning of the interviews, the participants were required to talk about themselves, describe their professional experience, and describe where they worked. To uphold the rights of the participants to be protected, their names were not mentioned in the recordings and their identities were anonymised.

Informed consent: attempting to guarantee promises of confidentiality and anonymity made to my participants, an informed consent agreement was developed and signed by

each of the participants and me. The consent form states that participating in this research interview is voluntary and that responses will be audio-recorded. The participants agreed on that and also on publication of the emerging data as part of this PhD thesis, and for conferences and presentations (Appendix 3).

#### **4.9. Research validity and reliability**

The criteria for judging a qualitative study differ from those for quantitative research. In qualitative design, the researcher seeks believability, based on trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) through a process of verification rather than through traditional validity and reliability measures and the accuracy of the researcher's account (Maxwell, 1992).

To establish the validity of this research, I followed strategies that Dörnyei (2007) and Creswell (2009) provide: a) asking the respondents to give me feedback about the instrument and to highlight any weaknesses of the research – this is called ‘respondent validation’; and b) giving an in-depth and rich description in reporting the findings. To achieve the research reliability, I ensured that the transcripts do not contain obvious mistakes and I constantly compared data with the codes and the defined themes.

#### **4.10. Autobiographical reflection**

The journey of this research was undertaken driven by a mix of courage and curiosity. This research would not be completed unless I developed a curiosity towards exploring new concepts and making connections to theories of foreign languages. I have gained understanding of the nature of research that can be cyclical and messy at the same time, tedious sometimes but rewarding at other times.

Gaining access to participants was the biggest challenge that my research encountered. This was due to the lack of experts in testing Arabic language in the UK, in addition to the limited knowledge and experience of teachers in testing. Although this proved a bit of a disappointment at the beginning, it emphasised the significance of my research for establishing a research ground in testing in the Arabic domain.

The research study has introduced me to new areas of knowledge and new dimensions of thinking. Being a native speaker of the language and qualified in teaching the language does not always play an advantageous role in making the best decisions. Most

of the time, the knowledge about the language can be taken for granted, and would prevent the researcher from thinking from the perspective of an outsider. However, an important strategy in the research was my ability to step back, think and decentre myself at times to make appropriate decisions.

The research process has provided me with ideas that helped me examine my own professional beliefs and values as a researcher teacher. Having taught Arabic in a way that I thought was communicative although based on MSA only makes me more curious now to examine the applicability of the proposed framework and to observe potential outcomes.

#### **4.11. Conclusion**

This chapter provided a comprehensive account of the procedures followed prior and during the data collection process. It started by setting the philosophical approach that grounded my methodological choice of how to conduct the research. The method used was also explained throughout the process of data collection, and a grounded description of the participants' backgrounds and their professional trajectories that might have shaped their responses was also offered. Ultimately, the methods of data analysis were presented and an outline of the categories of analysis were provided, which shapes the next four data analysis chapters. In the next chapter, I begin by addressing the first research question, following which I present and analyse my participants' views regarding the concept of CAP.

# 5

## Analysis 1: Conceptualisation of CAP

### 5.1. Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapters, one of my research objectives is to explore the concept of communicative proficiency in Arabic in the light of its sociolinguistic situation. This research takes place in the context of United Kingdom Higher Education (UKHE) where Arabic as a foreign language is being taught and tested. It adopts a qualitative approach to collect data through individual semi-structured interviews with three assessor teachers, three teachers and three learners of Arabic as a foreign language within this context. The selection criteria and background of these participants were presented in section 4.6.3 of the methodology chapter. Data emerging from the interviews are presented and analysed within the following four chapters, in each of these I address a research question, analyse the responses, and then provide discussions and interpretations in the light of literature.

There are four questions this research is addressing and seeking to answer; these are

1. In the light of the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic, how is communicative Arabic proficiency conceptualised?
2. What competences does communicative Arabic proficiency consist of?
3. What construct(s) should a testing framework for communicative Arabic proficiency be based upon?
4. What is the role of the native speaker model for testing communicative Arabic proficiency?

This chapter focuses on how the participants conceptualise communicative proficiency and its linguistic features given the diglossic nature of Arabic. It addresses the first research question:



RQ.1: In the light of the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic, how is communicative Arabic proficiency conceptualised?

## 5.2. Conceptualisation of Arabic proficiency

ATs and Ts were asked to explain what they understand by Arabic proficiency and to describe the features of their proficient and non-proficient student users of Arabic (questions 3 and 4 in Appendix 1), Learners were asked to reflect on their understanding of proficiency and to self-assess their level of proficiency accordingly (questions 4 and 5 in Appendix 2).

### 5.2.1. Assessor teachers' responses

**Luna**            **Luna** was asked to describe how she understands proficiency in general.  
She said;

*“Whenever I meet the word proficiency, it normally represents the level the student has reached, so you have beginners, intermediate, advanced proficient. So, it’s very hard for me to think of it like a grade-one proficiency”.*

In her reply, Luna seems to refer to different levels of attainment – *“have beginners, intermediate, advanced proficient”* – which would imply that each learner can be proficient in their level.

The description of the proficient user of Arabic that she has given was put as follows; *“I would say, they can live and work successfully in an Arabic speaking environment, at the personal level and at the work/job level [...] they’d be proficient in Standard Arabic and spoken, because we expect them to be proficient in the different areas of life”.*

Luna associated proficiency with the learner’s ability to produce different varieties of Arabic, since for her a proficient learner should be *“proficient in the different areas of life”*.

She added that they *“need to be able to read particularly and sometimes write in Arabic and speak, but also [be] proficient in personal relations, then they would speak one of the varieties from the dialects”*.

The concept of proficiency according to Luna was related to a number of aspects; a) it is skill-oriented: the learner needs to be able to read, write and speak in Arabic; and b) personal relations: this would refer to social interaction and oral production which I think is emphasised by the third aspect that is c) the ability to speak one of the Arabic vernaculars.

I asked her to give an example of a student of hers whom she does not consider has proficiency in Arabic:

*“I’ve got in mind a student, who speaks Moroccan at home, [...] She just hasn’t got into fuṣḥā enough [...], but if you speak to her you can feel that her setting, her working out, how to conjugate this verb because she’s not fluent; you can see the hesitance when she speaks, and a lot of grammatical inaccuracies”.*

This learner is not a proficient user of Arabic, according to Luna, due to her linguistic inaccuracy in *fuṣḥā*.

She clearly said that if a learner *“got the message across but made errors, that’s not proficient. [...] and also lack of awareness that she’s made some grammatical mistakes. Most speakers who are proficient are aware that they made a mistake, whereas for a non-proficient doesn’t think it’s important to concentrate...”*.

Luna indicated the lack of linguistic awareness of this particular learner, which led her to the judgment she formulated about that learner’s level of proficiency. It seems to me that Luna is referring to her student's language awareness in terms of accuracy (i.e. the student is aware that she has made mistakes in her production of Arabic).

Going through Luna’s responses presented so far, one could realise some contradiction in her statements. She first referred to “beginner, intermediate and advanced proficient” which would imply that she does not perceive the concept of proficiency to be a single level. Yet, when she gave an example about one of her students who has no proficiency in Arabic, she described one who speaks Moroccan fluently at home with errors in *fuṣḥā* as a *non-proficient* user. Perhaps in her description she was referring to the highest level of proficiency; against which she described her student.

Two points that stand out in Luna’s data: The first is *accuracy*: Luna seems to put emphasis on the linguistic accuracy and does not consider the ability to communicate

albeit inaccurately way as an indication of a good level of proficiency. The linguistic features she referred to include being an accurate communicator and having a good level of linguistic awareness. Klapper (2003) expressed concerns over producing systematic inaccuracy in learners' production as a consequence of favouring meaning over form for communication. Swain (2000a), Lyster (2007) and Spada and Lightbown (2008) called for a balanced concentration on fluency and accuracy and at the same time for raising learners' awareness in both the spoken and the written forms of the language. As discussed in section 3.4.3, this tendency to find such balance between these two linguistic constructs fall under the post-communicative/post-method approaches of teaching foreign languages where focusing on form was brought back under the spotlight (Schmidt, 2001).

The second point emerging from Luna's data is *appropriacy* in using the language variety according to the context: Luna points to an existing relationship between the learner's levels of proficiency and their ability in both the standard and the spoken varieties of the language. Her understanding of Arabic proficiency is more relevant to the variety of Arabic that suits the context where the language is used. Derived from CLT theory, appropriacy appears as a core principle in conceptualising proficiency. It can be achieved by adapting language to situation and to interlocutor, register and genre (Wilkins, 1976). It is also linked with the multi-cultural dimensions of the language that cross linguistic boundaries (Brumfit, 2001: 52).

Speaking about the appropriate variety of Arabic to be used in the right context, one could argue that Luna's way of conceptualising proficiency also draws on the post-method pedagogy. In fact, the importance of communicative context was central to CLT from the beginning but has been emphasised more in the post-method pedagogy. One important principle of this pedagogy would be that it is 'context-sensitive' and 'location specific' as suggested by Kumaravadivelu (2001: 544-545).

Overall, Luna seems to conceptualise proficiency in connection with the post-method pedagogy highlighting accuracy and appropriacy as linguistic features of proficiency. Her reference to the diglossic nature of Arabic appeared clearly in her linguistic conceptualisation of proficiency. This shows the diglossic competence as both, a linguistic and a communicative component of proficiency.

**Fida** was asked to explain how she conceptualises language proficiency in general. Her response was:

*“My understanding of proficiency is that a student can speak, listen, and read like they can say ...I won’t say quickly but confidently, without a need to refer back to the dictionary and without need to tell you to repeat the listening again [...] and with speaking, they should be able to communicate confidently and answer any questions and try themselves to ask questions themselves without any like hesitance or anything”.*

Like Luna, Fida seems to refer to the different abilities across skills when conceptualising proficiency. Her statement also appears to emphasise the interactional basis of communication represented in speaking confidently, and asking and answering questions. Her response resonates with Kramsch’s (1986) assertion that interactional competence refers to the learner’s ability to negotiate meaning, and anticipate and clarify the listener’s responses in order to achieve successful communicative tasks.

Regarding the thoughts on Arabic proficiency, she stated:

*“For Arabic there is one more thing I would like to add which is the colloquial itself, which is the communicative language [...] they should know, in my opinion, at least two types of colloquial language like, say, Egyptian and Levantine, Levantine and mağribi (Moroccan)”.*

Fida also goes a bit further to identify the level of the dialectical knowledge she is expecting a proficient user to obtain. She added:

*“They should be aware of two of the other languages, not necessarily to be proficient, but to reach at least an intermediate level in speaking and listening in the colloquial”.*

In her explanation of whom she thinks is a proficient user of Arabic she said;

*“To be proficient you should know most of the vocabs, all structures of the sentences; you need to know all sort of topics, like political, like even poems, poetry – all types of materials they can be around”.*

Fida seems to be linking proficiency to the linguistic abilities a learner should obtain; namely vocabulary, grammar and a wide range of language structures and styles represented by the word ‘topics’. She also seems to refer to “genres” as an important

indication of proficiency. “Genre” is defined by Martin (1992: 505) as a ‘goal-oriented social process’ and is based on systematic functional linguistics (FSL) (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). In fact, the importance of genres was recognised in CLT, but has gained greater prominence in post-communicative/post-methods pedagogy (e.g., Kumagai and Iwasaki, 2016: 109-110). Drawing on two theoretical notions, “genre” and “multiliteracies”, they suggested that FL curricula should follow a ‘genre-based plurilinguistic/pluricultural multiliteracy approach’ to create learners who can critically read and write language and world. This approach is based on the critical analysis of ‘the whys and hows of textual conventionality’. It also ‘teaches learners normative practices of various genres’, and helps them understand the deviations from norms that writers take to resonate with their writing intentions (ibid: 110).

I then asked Fida to give an example about one of her students who she thinks is not a proficient user.

Fida: *“She came from far away, I think she came from Scotland, she is proficient, and she wants to learn more [...] she doesn’t need to work out the patterns, she knows and she opens the dictionary straightway and place where the word is, so I think it is a hint that’s telling me she’s proficient now, she knows how to refer to the information very quickly, she also knows the relationship between the patterns and the meaning in Arabic”.*

I: *“...and did she speak any dialect? How many dialects did she speak?”*

Fida: *“Yes, she understands, because she’s got some friends, she knows colloquial from one of her Syrian friends she has; she speaks with her in colloquial and she travelled a lot. She knows how to speak Tunisian, she almost understands Tunisian”.*

Similar to Luna, Fida seems to put emphasis on the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary for a learner to be proficient in Arabic, in addition to the knowledge of MSA and two other dialects. Her responses imply a relationship between proficiency and linguistic knowledge in each skill, where writing though was not mentioned. She stated that this is her understanding of the concept of proficiency for all languages, but also added the dialectical knowledge as an essential component of Arabic proficiency and related it to another concept, which is communication. From her identification of the level of proficiency she expects a proficient user of Arabic to obtain, one can conclude

that she looks at proficiency as one grade, unlike Luna, where the student needs to have an intermediate level of dialectical knowledge in speaking and listening in two Arabic spoken forms but not necessarily be proficient. This might go back to the course she teaches now – Arabic proficiency – where students of this course are all advanced or higher.

Overall, Fida's responses seem to highlight two aspects. The first is the linguistic knowledge as an important component of proficiency -grammar, vocabulary and morphology. This side of knowledge has been emphasised in the literature of all eras of language pedagogy; it can be traced back to Chomsky's grammatical competence (1965), Canale and Swain's communicative model (1980) and many other models in the communicative and post-method eras. A reason for Fida's focus on this kind of knowledge could be related to the proficiency course that she teaches, as mentioned earlier. The variety taught in this course is MSA, the formal written standard variety of Arabic, where the core aspects of proficiency would be this linguistic knowledge to help build the learners' linguistic competence.

The second aspect highlighted by Fida's responses is multi-dialectical knowledge; that is, the knowledge of MSA and at least two other spoken forms with a focus on speaking and listening. When Fida related proficiency to the term 'communication', she pointed out the dialectical competence that needs to be acquired by the proficient user. This corresponds with the theories of conceptualising Arabic proficiency, as the literature shows. Parkinson (1985), Allen (1989), Health (1990), Alish (1997) and Younes (2015) for instance tend to conceptualise it in the light of the existence of different varieties of Arabic. The question that is still contested in the literature is how many dialects are learners required to learn? This point is discussed in the next chapter as it is related more to communication as the data show.

**John** was also asked to explain what he understands by the concept of language proficiency in general, and how he looks at Arabic language proficiency in particular. He said,

*“Proficiency is like in any language, you know, proficiency is, you know, are you able to carry out certain tasks, and so again you know with Arabic, this diglossia, we have been talking about diglossia, you know. I mean to be proficient in Arabic you have to be proficient in fuṣḥā and ammiyyah. If you're proficient in fuṣḥā, that's not enough”.*

John explains the diglossic knowledge that he thinks the concept of Arabic proficiency embraces:

*“So proficiency here, foreign proficiency for a foreigner who is learning Arabic, they have to have a good command in fuṣḥā, and of course there are levels of that like in anything else. But they also have to have a good command [...] of ammiyyah of one major dialect”.*

John seems to relate the concept of proficiency to the learners’ ability to perform linguistic tasks; but he did not explain what he means by the word “tasks” here. Initially I thought he meant the language functions on which the task is made to teach or assess students, but going through his responses, it seems that the word “tasks” relates more to what extent the students’ performance in the class matches the learning outcomes. He said;

*“We look at class performance and if a student is clearly not carrying out the tasks, I mean they can’t do... I mean at the end of each module a student, you know you have learning outcomes and a student must be able to do this, do that, do that”.*

It seems to me that the way John looks at proficiency is more assessment-oriented; that, he considers it related to how well the student performs a certain task set by the teacher. What confirms that is another statement he made when he was asked about the criteria on which he considers a student to have become a proficient user of Arabic:

*“We look at pronunciation, we look at grammar, we look at vocabulary, centred structure for speaking, and of course it is the same when they are writing”.*

In his statement, there seems to be an emphasis on the linguistic knowledge, as well as on putting this knowledge into action (performance). Again, this would confirm the assessment-based or skills-based view of looking at proficiency that John seems to adopt.

Saying that *“and of course there are levels of that like in anything else”* in the second of his excerpts reveals John’s consideration that proficiency consists of different levels and grades and that it is not a comprehensive concept.

Like Luna and Fida, John also refers to the linguistic knowledge (grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary) as a component of proficiency, reflected in performance of

tasks. Yet, an important difference that can be observed between John's and the other two ATs' opinions is that the tasks John speaks about are set by the teacher and performed in the classroom, whereas the ATs (Luna and Fida) seemed to discuss performance both in relation to classroom tasks and in real-life communication. This would go back to my point about John's understanding of proficiency from an assessment-oriented view. His response resonates with Luna's in terms of conceiving proficiency to be acquired or assessed through stages of attainment. Fida, on the other hand, seems to be referring to a language user's repertoire in a particular skill as a whole.

The three ATs seem to draw attention to different areas of linguistic knowledge with more or less concentration on performance. Fida seems to concentrate on linguistic knowledge as a sign of proficiency, whereas Luna and John would argue for the performance of this knowledge as an indication of proficiency.

Also the dialectical knowledge appeared as a shared component of proficiency amongst the assessor teachers. However, the requirement of one dialect or more dialects is contested among them, as it is in the literature.

#### 5.2.2. Teachers' responses

Teachers (Ts) were required to respond to the same questions posed to the ATs; which are the way they understand the concept of proficiency in general and in relation to Arabic language in particular. They were also asked to describe the features of proficiency reflecting on some examples of their students. The responses were as follows:

When **Walid** was asked about the way he understands proficiency in Arabic, he made the following statement;

*“The problem of our profession of teaching Arabic as a foreign language is that we do not have particular traditions that resonate with the features of Arabic language. Therefore, even the terminology that we use when we talk about Arabic pedagogy is taken from other languages and so we can't translate it accurately [...] Arabic, unfortunately, has not been recently researched to determine such traditions or*



*to conceptualise such terminologies. There isn't a precise definition for proficiency for example".*

The point Walid is making seems to be problematising the general context of the Arabic teaching profession. He mentioned the lack of research in the field and the terminologies borrowed from studies on other languages, which do not correspond to the features of Arabic language. According to him, these factors would make it hard to identify the meaning of such jargon in regards to Arabic pedagogy; proficiency is no exception.

Speaking about proficiency in general, Walid suggests that it is "*an infinite concept*" that cannot be limited or specified and, therefore, "*some non-native learners of a language can be more proficient than some natives*".

As for the way he understands proficiency in Arabic, he stated that it is

*"the learner's ability to read and understand, to listen and understand and to speak in any way he/she wants in Arabic but in a clear way that guarantees the listener's full understanding"*

Again, Walid seems to be talking about proficiency as a multi-level concept, and as separate skills.

In this part of his response "*to speak in any way he/she wants in Arabic*", Walid does not require his students to produce certain varieties of Arabic. According to this part – "*but in a clear way that guarantees the listener's full understanding*" – what seems to matter to him is that the message has been understood.

When he was asked about what he means by "*speak in any way*", a phrase that is quoted in the previous excerpts, he said:

*"I'm referring here to the variation a learner chooses to speak with even if it was a combination of fuṣḥā and any dialect, what matters is that can he deliver the message in a way that is understandable for the listener".* This relates to an idea associated with CLT; that is being understood by a 'sympathetic native speaker'. Krashen (1988) for example deemed this principle of CLT a useful means for improving second language acquisition.

Walid seems to have a flexible approach to language use, in allowing for the juxtaposition of the two varieties, whether students' production was in MSA, the colloquial, or a combination of both.

Walid made a connection between proficiency and the learners' linguistic level in the different skills. Speaking about the writing skill, for example, he said,

*“I can ignore the mistakes that the native himself would make; namely some spelling mistakes that don't change the meaning”,* whereas the other type of mistakes that cannot be tolerated are those *“made at the structural level; the sentence order, putting two subjects in one sentence when starting the sentence with a verb, and generally speaking the grammatical mistakes that change or affect the meaning”*.

In his responses, he pointed out that the linguistic inaccuracy has different levels; some can be tolerated when a learner of Arabic has a high level of proficiency, while others affect the learner's level of proficiency.

What is interesting in this response of Walid's is his tendency to focus on 'meaning' in speaking and 'accuracy' in writing. His first focus might be attributed to the speed and immediacy of delivery that features in the oral production. Such factors would affect the accuracy of production, particularly in the novice levels and, according to him, getting the message across and being understood is key. His other focus, accuracy in writing, was related to the syntactic errors that affect the meaning. In both cases, it seems to me that Walid emphasises meaning delivery, but with more consideration of accuracy in writing.

Overall, Walid's responses highlighted several aspects; firstly, contextual problems that influence conceptualising the term 'Arabic proficiency'. I personally would argue with Walid on this point particularly when it comes to Arabic proficiency. The lack of scientific and research ground on Arabic pedagogy in general has proved to be the main challenge for my research on proficiency. The work done on this topic is mainly foreign (in the US and Europe) whereas domestic research seems to be limited and inaccessible. The available literature (e.g., Blanc, 1960; Badawi, 1973; Al-Batal 1992; Younes, 2015) seem to mainly discuss Arabic from a sociolinguistic perspective, whereas the implications of this perspective on Arabic teaching and testing practices are not very solid. For example, testing the dialectical competence as part of testing general Arabic

proficiency is an area that demands significant research. Secondly, Walid highlighted focusing on ‘meaning’ in speaking and ‘accuracy’ in writing with some tolerance according to the type of error.

Walid appears to adopt a balanced approach that gives credit to the meaning and form according to the skill; speaking and writing respectively, whereas the ‘counterbalanced approach’ of Lyster’s (2007: 134) between form and meaning is not skills-based.

Thirdly, it is up to the learner to choose the type of variety they use for communication: What would matter is getting the message across. Walid also spoke about combining *fushā* and any dialect rather than treating the two separately. This response of Walid’s seems to relate to the idea of authentic language input and output; the concept that was emphasised in CLT theories (e.g., Nunan, 1989; Brown, 1994; Holliday, 1994) to promote communicative language use.

The freedom Walid has given to the learner in terms of the variety of Arabic they choose to use might relate to enhancing the learner’s autonomy. Autonomy is a principle that has been referred to in the CLT pedagogies (e.g., Holec 1979; Little 2009) and gained more attention in the post-method approaches, particularly in CLIL (Stryker and Leaver, 1997), and in the constructivist and socio-constructivist/sociocultural theories of learning (Manion *et al*, 2004).

**Farah** Farah’s understanding of language proficiency follows.

*“I think the word ‘language proficiency’ means different things to different people, and usually the main two things about language proficiency are fluency and accuracy, like how fluent the student is in the language, but there is usually a trade-off between fluency and accuracy in the grammar and the structure”.*

Farah talks about proficiency in connection with fluency and accuracy in the same way the teacher Walid did, but unlike the ATs; Luna who focused on *accuracy and appropriacy*, Fida who highlighted the *linguistic knowledge*, and John who emphasised the *bi-dialectical knowledge*. Tension between fluency and accuracy has been an ongoing theme in CLT theory (e.g., Brumfit, 2001), and a call for a balanced approach between the two was emphasised in the post-methods approaches (e.g., Lyster, 2007).

When I asked her what she understands by proficiency in relation with Arabic language, she said:

*“I would hesitate to use this term, because I think proficiency has, like, levels, a person who learned Arabic for a few months and they can introduce themselves, and just order pizza or something in Arabic, they are a proficient user of the language, but they’re not very advanced; they have like some proficiency”.*

For me this is a strong statement that indicates that Farah perceives the concept of language proficiency comprises different levels of attainment, and that any learner of a language can be proficient at this language but at a certain level. Apart from the AT, Fida, all other ATs and the teacher, Walid spoke about proficiency as a multi-level concept which resonates with the teacher Farah’s opinion as well.

In her last statement, Farah talked about the learner’s ability to *“introduce themselves”* and *“to order pizza”* etc. I asked her if that has to do with a specific variety of Arabic. Her response was:

*“Again, depends on the context because what matters for me as a teacher is that the student is able to communicate. So, I would expect them to understand modern standard Arabic and the educated speakers’ Arabic. However, which variety they speak, the learners, it is completely up to them. So, you can have proficiency in Standard Arabic, or a proficiency in a regional dialect, but it is still proficiency”.*

Like the teacher Walid, Farah seems to have flexibility and openness towards the variety of Arabic the students choose to use for production. This would imply that a learner who is proficient in one variety might not be proficient in the other, but still can be called a proficient user. She spoke about MSA and ESA; a variety that contains the features of MSA and the colloquial (El-Hassan, 1977). Walid also spoke about an integrated version of MSA and the dialect; but the only difference between the two opinions is that Walid mentioned that the learner is free to use MSA, the colloquial or a hybrid version of both, whereas Farah mentioned MSA and ESA only. Opinions regarding ESA appear contested in the literature with regards to its naming and basis—MSA or the colloquial, as discussed in section 3.2.2.

Perhaps, for Farah, the learner's ability to communicate is the measure of proficiency rather than in which variety they communicate. This view relates to her earlier point about striking a balance between accuracy and fluency.

Her description of whom she considers a proficient user of Arabic accorded with the way she understands proficiency. A statement of hers that clarifies this was,

*“Well, the only student that I consider not a proficient is the complete beginner because any learner... they will learn some proficiency, they will acquire it”.*

Farah seems to say that there is no such thing as an absolute non-proficient, which resonates with her different grade perception about proficiency. However, according to her, there is a weak student or a student who is not proficient in his/her level. Below are the characteristics she ascribed to this student:

Farah: *“Another student, I would call her a weak student. As a teacher, I thought she was not acquiring the proficiency that she wanted”.*

I: *“... because she lacked which kind of knowledge?”*

Farah: *“She lacked vocabulary knowledge and she lacked sentence structure and listening comprehension, so usually proficiency depends on communications and how much you can communicate your ideas or understand what people are trying to communicate to you, but because she was not familiar with the... She was not capable of remembering words, I think she was, like, not very proficient”.*

Again, Farah seemed to emphasise the linguistic knowledge that a student is required to obtain so that they can be proficient in their level. The linguistic features she mentioned are lexical and syntactical knowledge in addition to the listening comprehension. Since the student she described lacked these types of knowledge, Farah did not think she was proficient in her level.

Farah appears to emphasise a number of aspects; firstly, unlike Fida, Farah regarded proficiency as a multi-grade concept, corresponding with the ATs (Luna and John) and the T. Walid in this regard.

Secondly, the learner's ability to produce one variety of Arabic, and understand MSA and ESA are sufficient to achieve proficiency. Like Walid, Farah appeared to adopt a

flexible approach regarding the variety of Arabic a learner chooses to use. Yet, while Walid still demands the knowledge and use of MSA and a spoken form of Arabic for a good level of proficiency, Farah seems to regard the ability to produce one variety as sufficient for a proficient user if they understand MSA and ESA. From my perspective, I believe the situation is more complex than that. Having a good level of proficiency in MSA only would provide the learner with a good command of linguistic knowledge, reading strategies, and writing accuracy, but the learner would still lack other important aspects of the language covered by the different spoken forms. Also, Farah appears to suggest ESA as a variety that could replace the colloquial, which I do not agree with. It is not clear to me in Farah's responses what she means by ESA; whether it is MSA- or colloquial-based; which is also contested in the literature (see section 3.2.2). Ryding (1995: 225) argued that the knowledge of *ammiyyah* 'covers an extraordinary spectrum of social, cultural and geographic variants'. Social norms and cultural appropriacy seem no less important than the linguistic knowledge itself. Neglecting this side of the colloquial might affect the learners' overall proficiency. To me, it seems that Farah considered that ESA replaced the colloquial; this was also the case in Younes's (2015) IA model to replace MSA and the colloquial in listening and speaking. I disagree with the two views because, simply, I think using any Arabic variety is context-dependent, while it is not clear when ESA can be appropriately used. That is to say, if ESA is MSA-based then to what extent is it appropriate to use it for ordering pizza (the example that Farah has given)? If it is colloquial-based, then is it appropriate to use it in formal settings?

Thirdly, Farah, like the ATs, and the T, Walid highlighted the linguistic knowledge as a required component of proficiency. Farah mentioned different areas of linguistic knowledge (syntax, lexicon) and comprehension, while more attention to the performance of this knowledge was given by the ATs Luna and John.

**Iman** When **Iman** was asked to explain her understanding of language proficiency, she immediately started to describe the 'proficiency course' that she is teaching at the moment. She said;

*"This proficiency we have now that people who have been here for 12 years. They finished the advanced and then advanced 2, advanced 3, proficiency 1, proficiency 2,*

*and then what did we do? Proficiency continuous. That's how it is going, there is no limits”.*

Iman appeared to view proficiency as an infinite concept, but from a holistic perspective. The way she chooses the students for the proficiency course infers that proficiency for her is like an imagined state of being; as one is never proficient. Saying that “there is no limit”, it seems that she meant that the way to achieve proficiency is open-ended like any other form of life-long learning.

She gave a description of those students who she selects to enrol on this proficiency course:

*“When I assess somebody to go there, they have to be like you're speaking to an Arab person, speaking to an Arab muṭaqqaf (=educated), tamām (=OK)? Someone who is able to speak to you about different topics, understand if you're listening to the music and discuss it, or if you ask them about the current situation, about family, anything really. They can open up any kind of discussion and they will discuss it. They might not know the details of grammar, that's not an issue. The teacher expects people to be able to follow, they follow language at that speed, at the normal speed of native speakers”.*

Iman appeared to relate proficiency to the learners' ability to open discussions and talk about different topics, which is more to do with the concept of communication. Less focus is given to the knowledge of grammar, or as she said ‘the details of grammar’ which may imply that a deep knowledge of grammar might not be essential as long as the communication is successful; or it might mean that using grammar is important but knowing about it is less so.

Perhaps, Iman is talking about the NS model as a norm on which she relies to choose her students for the proficiency course. The model she has chosen is the educated Arab, so her students should be able to speak like an educated Arab and to understand the listening materials at the same level of speed that is normal for a native speaker.

Overall, Iman appeared to focus on two main points; firstly, proficiency is an open-ended term and a single level concept. Like the assessor Fida, Iman may be talking about proficiency as a one-grade concept. As I mentioned earlier, this might be due to the course of proficiency they both are involved in. This course requires a high level of linguistic knowledge in MSA and an advanced level in overall competency. However,

perhaps Iman is focusing on the performance of the linguistic knowledge corresponding with the ATs; Luna and John in this regard. This is possibly due to the fact that the scale of proficiency on which this course of proficiency is based is the CEFR (2001), which is a model that adopts a communicative approach of teaching and assessment. Although this model considers the linguistic competence or ‘language competence’, it also gives credit to the sociolinguistic competence and pragmatic competence (discourse and functional) (CEFR, 2001).

Another reasonable explanation would be that the pedagogy of teaching Arabic is still grounded in the communicative approaches. This is probably due to the need to decrease the emphasis given to the textual skills of Arabic at the expense of the oral ones, which resulted in privileging MSA over the colloquial in all skills including speaking (Wilmsen, 2006: 125).

Secondly, the norm of testing proficiency would be an educated Arab: Iman seems to refer to the NS model as a norm of assessing proficiency, which appears to be a controversial topic in all approaches to language pedagogy. It is also still contested and under scrutiny when it comes to Arabic pedagogy. Therefore, I dedicate chapter 8 of this thesis to present how my research participants have viewed it in the light of the diglossic nature of Arabic.

In their conceptualisation of proficiency, Ts tended to point out the linguistic knowledge; which corresponds to the ATs’ opinions. The Ts, Farah and Walid have called for a trade-off approach between accuracy and fluency, while no direct reference was made to any of them by the teacher, Iman. Unlike the Ts, Walid and Farah, the teacher Iman referred to proficiency as an imagined open-ended state to achieve, and identified an educated native Arab as a norm for assessing proficiency in Arabic.

### 5.2.3. Learners’ responses

The Ls were asked several self-assessment-oriented questions that may reflect their understanding of language proficiency and how they locate their level of Arabic according to their views. They were firstly required to identify the aspects that may describe a proficient user of Arabic from their own perspectives. Then, self-reflection on their level of Arabic took place based on the attributes of proficiency they identified. The responses were as follows.



Naya        When Naya was asked about what she understands by a proficient user of Arabic, she stated:

*“To me, proficient is, at the moment in English I can understand very much everything. I can’t think of any time recently that I wouldn’t understand something, or I wouldn’t be able to express something. In Arabic, this happens a lot obviously. I can’t understand everything and I can’t express everything”.*

Then I asked her whether or not she considers herself to be a proficient user of Arabic; she said,

*“No, no. I think proficient just means that you are able to understand any sort of texts pretty much, and any kind of spoken piece of language”.*

According to Naya, proficiency seems to be the ability in both; receptive and productive skills. She seems to lack being able to understand and to express “everything in Arabic”, unlike English: therefore, she does not consider herself a proficient user of Arabic for this reason. The connection that Naya made between proficiency and the level of the learner’s ability to comprehend and produce the language, implies a skills-based understanding of proficiency that was not mentioned clearly. Based on this criterion, Naya does not consider herself a proficient in Arabic as her level of comprehension and production fails to match her perception of the highest level of Arabic proficiency, as stated. Moreover, this view of hers suggests that the concept of proficiency is a single end-state level of attainment.

Naya was also asked to identify her level of Arabic, from a self-assessment perspective. She said,

*“I identify [my level] as low advanced probably, but in terms of comprehension, for example reading, or listening but not [speaking]”.*

The reasons she gave for that were:

*“I’m not really stable at this point, so sometimes, I speak very well especially if I have spent some time in Morocco and then I come back and I speak very well in the class but then I don’t really speak here all the time so my level goes down very quickly”.*

So Naya considers herself to be a low advanced learner at some skills but still not proficient. She attributed this to the inconsistent level of her production over the time.

Overall, Naya's responses seem to be highlighting that, firstly, proficiency is a single grade concept and that it comprises understanding the input and expressing the output of the language. Secondly, according to her conceptualisation of proficiency Naya has an advanced level in the receptive skills of reading and listening with a lower level in speaking. From my perspective, this might be due to the way teaching is undertaken in the field of the Arabic profession. Although awareness has been drawn to the communicative needs of the students in the UKHE context, probably approaches to teaching Arabic still focus on the textual skills more than on the oral ones.

**Yaman** **Yaman** was also asked to identify his level of Arabic and whether he considers himself to be proficient.

I: *"Do you think you're a proficient user of Arabic?"*

Yaman: *"No I wouldn't regard myself as a proficient".*

I: *"Why not?"*

Yaman: *"Vocabulary and grammar. I always say that I have very bad Arabic in both. But I think the truth is that I have a foundation of both. I can read and write and I can communicate in both Egyptian colloquial Arabic and the formal Arabic, but I'd call it more survival Arabic. I'd find it much more difficult to speak about politics - about parts in fact to make a point, just to make points in general, I find it difficult to make my point in Arabic, but I wouldn't find it difficult to survive in terms of how to navigate, or if I ever needed something or someone needed something from me, those kind of basic kind of..."*

In Yaman's statements, proficiency seems to be connected to three domains; the ability to communicate in the formal and informal varieties of Arabic, the language functions in different skills, and the linguistic knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Accordingly, he does not regard himself as a proficient user due to his low linguistic level regarding a lack of vocabulary and inaccuracy in addition to his failure to successfully perform certain high language functions; such as making a point or discussing politics.

Proficiency according to Yaman seems to be aligned to three types of knowledge. The first is *linguistic and bi-dialectical knowledge*. In addition to his focus on grammar and vocabulary as components of linguistic knowledge, Yaman also referred to the knowledge of *ammiyyah* alongside *fushhā*. Although all ATs and Ts mentioned the knowledge of *ammiyyah* in conceptualising proficiency, neither ATs nor Ts nor Yaman explicitly mentioned the inter(cultural) dimension of the language although it is implicit in the bi-dialectical knowledge.

The second type of knowledge Yaman referred to is *language functions*. Yaman is a heritage speaker of Arabic who can ‘survive’ in both Egyptian and MSA, as he seems to be saying. In this regard, Yaman appears to refer to some failure occurring in his communication due to the language functions that he thinks he lacks which influences his level of proficiency. The functional-notional orientation of language proficiency (Wilkins, 1976), to which Yaman seems to refer, has been considered for the communicative pedagogy, but also been criticised for adopting a touristic model of learners and so aims for the survival in the target language. In contrast to this orientation, an emphasis was put on the intercultural aspects of language pedagogy that enhances learners’ identity, draws on their own experience and enhances their appreciation of the culture of the target language as well as other cultures. A number of models (e.g., Byram, 1997; Risager, 2014) have considered intercultural competence as a core aspect of language learning in general, and of proficiency in particular. Given that Yaman is a heritage learner of Arabic, he might have some aspects of cultural awareness in Arabic; that is possibly why he concentrated more on his linguistic performance.

**Glen** From a self-assessment perspective, **Glen** believes that he has a good knowledge of CA, MSA, and the Levantine. When I asked him how he describes his level of Arabic in both MSA and the dialect, and whether or not he considers himself to be proficient, he said;

*“My CV says I’m fluent in both, I think I should probably change that because I haven’t been in Syria since 2009 and I’m very rusty. [...] My classical Arabic is also fluent; I read all the time for my work. After being in Syria for 9 months, I then went to Jordan and when I was in Jordan people assumed that I must have, I must be half Syrian or*

*something. Now I would say my knowledge of ammiyyah is advanced because I like to think it is advanced”.*

In his responses, Glen used the word ‘fluent’ rather than ‘proficient’ to say that he understands and speaks Arabic at a very high level. I therefore, asked him about the reason and what distinction, if any, he sees between ‘fluency’ and ‘proficiency’. His response was interesting:

*Glen: “My definition of fluency is if someone, if you’re speaking on the phone and someone can’t tell you’re not a native; which means there isn’t an exacting definition of fluency. While sometimes an assessment of a proficient comes underneath good”.*

*I: “Interesting! Then you said you’re fluent, which means you’re more than proficient?”*

*Glen: “Yes”.*

Glen does not equate proficiency with fluency. He makes a distinction between the two and associates fluency with the ‘near-native’ model, which is why, for him, there is no exact definition of the word fluency. On the other hand he considers proficiency to embrace different levels of attainment and that a learner can be proficient but “underneath good”, as he said.

Overall, Glen seems to be focusing on two points; firstly, unlike Yaman and Naya, proficiency according to Glen is a multi-level concept and the highest level of proficiency requires fluency in both MSA and the colloquial. Secondly, fluency is more comprehensive than proficiency. In the literature, fluency in the early eighties was a synonym for the oral proficiency. However, according to the communicative pedagogy, it has been used in contrast to ‘accuracy’ (Chambers, 1997). In his conceptualisation of proficiency, Glen appears to be talking about fluency as possibly the highest level of proficiency, to indicate that the learner probably has the highest level of the language repertoire. It might be similar to when we use fluency in a non-technical way to say that someone is fluent in that language we probably mean the overall proficiency.

The Ls conceptualised the concept of proficiency from different perspectives; Naya related it to the stable abilities in the productive and receptive skills alike. Yaman focused on the linguistic knowledge – namely grammar and vocabulary – as an

indicator for a high level of proficiency. They both looked at proficiency as a single level and an end state of abilities. Glen, unlike the two, perceived proficiency to be a multi-level concept and that fluency is more comprehensive than proficiency.

### **5.3. Summary and discussion**

It is clear how different and complex are the ways the participants conceptualised the concept of proficiency and the features that characterise it.

The AT Luna looked at proficiency to consist of different levels of attainment. The AT John, and the Ts, Walid, and Farah shared the same opinion, whereas the AT, Fida and the T, Iman appeared to understand proficiency as a single-level concept. That may be because Fida and Iman work at the same place and teach the course of proficiency which focuses mainly on *fushā* and which only highly achieving students can take.

The AT, Luna regarded the proficient user of Arabic as the one who can produce different varieties of Arabic language. The remaining ATs and Ts except Farah seemed to have a similar opinion. The T, Farah in her turn considered that a proficient user of Arabic is the one who can communicate with any variety of Arabic of his or her choice, but should understand MSA and ESA.

Another feature the AT, Luna drew attention to is that the proficient user of Arabic is the one who can speak at least one dialect and understands others, and this point is particularly important where all of them have diverging opinions. The AT, John and the T, Walid regarded the knowledge of one dialect as sufficient for successful communication and also in relation to proficiency. The AT, Fida on the other hand thought that the learner should speak at least two dialects in addition to MSA to be regarded as a proficient user of Arabic as well as a successful communicator in the language. The T, Iman appeared to talk about a variety of Arabic that she aims to teach her students, which is the ESA.

As for the learners, Naya did not regard herself as a proficient user of Arabic due to the inconsistent level of her production, particularly in the dialect. Yaman did not consider himself a proficient user of Arabic due to the lack of his linguistic knowledge in either vocabulary or structure. Glen preferred to consider himself fluent in Arabic in the three varieties CA, MSA, and the Levantine colloquial as for him proficient does not necessarily mean the highest level of attainment.

It is worth pointing out again the general lack of comments on culture as an aspect of proficiency although bi-dialectal competence is one aspect of culture which was emphasised.

This chapter addressed the first research question; that is the way the concept of CAP can be conceptualised in Arabic from the different participants' perspectives. The participants' responses converged and diverged in their different conceptualisations. Most of the participants' responses appeared to locate the concept of proficiency in the post-method pedagogy where balance between fluency and accuracy has been called for. Lyster (2007) argued for a 'counterbalanced approach' that integrates form-focused and meaning-based instructions to draw the learners' attention to both form and meaning at the same level. This resonates with Spada and Lightbown's (2008) integrated approach of form-focused instructions within communicative activities to help learners realise certain features of the input that would help them acquire these features. Swain's (2000a) emphasis on the importance of raising the learners' language awareness in both the input and the output of the language is compatibility to some extent with these approaches.

Another aspect raised, as an answer to the first research question is the concept of proficiency as one-grade or multi-level. As mentioned in section 5.2.1., the way proficiency is viewed in this regard would be interpreted and reflected in scaling the descriptors of language proficiency; whether holistic or analytic. Alderson (1991) made a functional distinction between three types of proficiency scales; a) a *user-oriented* scale which is often holistic and offers one descriptor per level, b) an *assessor-oriented* scale; this can be both holistic: offer one descriptor per level, and analytic: offer an explanation of 'different aspects of the performance', and c) an *instructor-oriented* scale that gives guidance on how to construct tests at appropriate levels, where the holistic descriptor can be deconstructed into detailed categories that describe the different competences. Using any of them would rely on an 'accurate identification of the purpose the scale is to serve, and an appropriate matching of the formulation of scale descriptors to that purpose (CEFR, 2001: 37-39). In the context of Arabic language, a detailed analytic scale of proficiency for teaching, learning and assessment seems to be highly demanded by the teachers and learners.

The third important aspect of communicative proficiency is the knowledge of the spoken form of Arabic, which seems to be an agreed feature amongst the participants if we exclude Farah. Most participants cited one dialect as sufficient for the proficient learners to learn and use; yet there was not an absolute agreement on that given that the AT, Fida called for one at least while the T, Farah appeared to say that one variety is enough for production and MSA and ESA are required for comprehension. A detailed discussion on the diglossic knowledge is offered in chapter 6.

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

This chapter explored the conceptualisation of Arabic proficiency from the different language users' perspectives. Accuracy, appropriacy, and bi-dialectical knowledge emerged as the attributes of language proficiency from most of the participants' perspectives. It is worth noting that a link has been made between proficiency and communication particularly through the topic of Arabic varieties. The next chapter presents and analyses the data that discuss the components of communicative proficiency.

# 6

## Analysis 2: Components of CAP

### 6.1. Introduction

The process of analysis showed that the participants elaborated the concept of proficiency and talked about the different components that they think this concept comprises, which are sociolinguistic competence, cultural competence, bi-dialectical competence, and interactional competence.

This chapter presents these competences, as reported across the participants' responses. The first section presents the findings regarding the relationship between communication and proficiency, and in what way CAP can be observed in communication. Following that three subsequent sections discuss the components of CAP from the participants' perspectives – sociolinguistic, cultural, and bi-dialectical competences. Finally, summary and discussions of the findings are provided.

This chapter addresses the second research question:

R.Q.2. What competences does communicative Arabic proficiency consist of?
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### 6.2. Proficiency and communication

The ATs and Ts were asked to explain a) how they understand communication and its relationship with the meaning they gave to the concept of proficiency, and b) if and to what extent they think the learner's ability to communicate determines their level of proficiency. The responses were as follows:



### 6.2.1. Assessor teachers' responses

**Luna** Communication, according to Luna, is *“how you interact with the other person, use everything from how to address them, the cultural side as well as whether there are long gaps between taking the turn in conversation, also grammatical accuracy as well”*.

**Luna** seems to be talking about communication in its relation to interaction, speed and accuracy in the oral production, with an indication of the cultural knowledge.

However, speaking about the relationship between proficiency and accuracy she stated;

*“You can have a lot of communication that’s not proficient”*. This implies that, from her perspective, the learner’s ability to communicate does not reflect their level of proficiency. She reflects upon herself as a heritage learner of Greek: to demonstrate that she said, *“my Greek is very bad but I’m very communicative, yeah I can live in Greece and get by and communicate but I’m full of mistakes”*. She understands the relationship between proficiency and communication as follows; *“Proficiency is communicative, plus you can be communicative without being proficient, but you can’t be proficient without being communicative, that’s how I see it”*.

It seems that Luna’s perception of communication can be a combination of three abilities; accuracy, interaction and cultural appropriateness. Clearly she considers the ability of communication as an essential part of proficiency. She also seems to put emphasis on accuracy as an indication of proficiency. This also comes out very strongly in section 5.2.1 with credit given to the grammatical awareness, and a link made between accuracy and a good level of proficiency.

Interaction appears to be an essential aspect of communication, which was emphasised by many communicative models. Canale and Swain (1980) highlighted socio-cultural and interpersonal interaction as a component of which the communicative competence consists. Kramsch (1986) also developed a communicative model that is mainly based on interaction. In Kramsch’s model, interactional competence has been expanded to include the learners’ ability to negotiate the intended meaning, to anticipate the listener’s response and to clarify one’s own and others’ intentions in order to make a communicative decision. Long’s (1981) interaction theory suggests that interaction

could boost learners' levels of proficiency and maximise their acquisition of the second language input. His hypothesis expanded Krashen's (1985) "Comprehensible Input" which emphasises understanding spoken and written language input for improving learners' linguistic skills. According to Long (1985:378), conversational adjustments promote input comprehension which in turn improves acquisition of the second language. In addition one of Byram's (1997) ICC 'Savoirs' also stresses the learner's skills of interaction as an important sort of knowledge that shapes the learner's intercultural competence. Luna's focus on interaction seems to emphasise the cultural appreciation and appropriateness. This would locate her understanding of communication in Canale and Swain's model (1980) as well as in Byram's (1997) ICC. Her perception also seems to correspond to Ager's (1994) 'Languaculture' that deems culture as part of the language. Risager (2007) also stated that language is never culturally neutral.

**Fida** was asked about her understanding of communication and if there is any relationship between proficiency and communication from her perspective. Her response was:

*"Communication is the ability to speak to someone or to a group of people or to be in a place where you can deliver a lecture or whatever and to be able to communicate with people in the language you're targeting. For Arabic, like the communicative Arabic is like really what we do in here, our aim here is to enable the student to communicate well with others and that's why speaking is very very important in all the courses".*

Fida's understanding of communication seems to rely on the learner's ability to deliver a lecture, or to have a conversation with a person or with a group of people. But apart from relating communication to the learner's ability to speak, there was not another definition of communication here. Also "delivering a lecture" may be seen as quite a specialised skill, and level-related, whereas communication can happen at any level and with basic conversations.

As for her understanding of the relationship between proficiency and communication, she stated;

*“To be communicative, it is essential to be proficient but to be proficient you should know most of the vocabs, all structures of the sentences; you need to know all sorts of topics”.*

This statement implies that proficiency is an essential part of communication. According to Fida, a learner cannot be considered a successful communicator unless they are proficient, with a high level of linguistic knowledge; which contrasts sharply with Luna’s view. To me it seems that Fida’s conception of communication relies on speaking, but for her the ability in oral production requires good command of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. A reference may be made to the relationship between accuracy and fluency for successful communication. This correlation does not appear to correspond with Skehan’s (2009) hypothesis on the relationship between fluency and accuracy. Instead, it predicts that focusing on maintaining a high level of one of them might deplete attention paid to the other one.

The definition Fida gave to communication – *“the ability to speak to someone or to a group of people or to be in a place where you can deliver a lecture”* – also refers to the contextual factors, which is one of the components that the socio-cultural competence comprises according to Celce-Murcia *et al.* (1995). They suggest that the interlocutors and the settings where language is produced should be considered.

**John**            **John** was asked to explain the relationship between the meaning that he gave to proficiency and the term of communication:

*“Well I think of course there is a relationship. I understand, personally, if you ask me what do I define this proficiency, proficiency is the ability to communicate. Now, okay but obviously, that’s oral proficiency, you know. Now what we’re talking about, say the oral proficiency is the ability to communicate and I would say in ammiyyah because that’s ultimately what they need. Without ammiyyah they can’t communicate in Arabic with Arabs. You cannot say you’re proficient if you cannot communicate, I’m sorry”.*

John related communication to the ability to speak in the dialect specifically. So, for John, proficiency is more comprehensive than communication, and communication is a component of proficiency. He seems to put great emphasis on the dialectical knowledge as an important component of communicative competence. He also

exclusively relates this knowledge to *ammiyyah* since communication is confined to speaking, and speaking according to him should be carried out in the dialect. The increasing interest in *ammiyyah* by the scholars of Arabic can be observed through considering it part of communicative proficiency, which is evident in the different models of Arabic proficiency. For conceptualising proficiency, those models are based on the existence of different varieties of Arabic; such as Blanc (1960), Badawi (1973), Alish (1997) and Younes (2015). This will be spoken about in more detail later in (6.4). John also related the dialectical knowledge to the authentic language use since “without *ammiyyah* [learners] can’t communicate in Arabic with Arabs” according to him.

Overall, both Luna and John seem to consider communicative competence as an important aspect of overall proficiency. According to Luna, a proficient user can be a successful communicator while not every communicator is necessarily a proficient user. The views of both diverge from Fida’s point on this aspect. Fida tends to believe that proficiency is an important aspect for successful communication and that a non-proficient user cannot achieve a good level of communication because, according to her, “*to be communicative it is essential to be proficient*” and being a proficient user requires good commands of linguistic knowledge – vocabulary, structures and different topics. Luna’s and John’s understandings of the relationship between proficiency and communication appear to sharply contradict Fida’s in this regard. For Luna and John, communication is part of proficiency, whereas proficiency is part of communication, according to Fida. While Luna and Fida both agree on the linguistic knowledge as an essential component of communicative proficiency, John puts emphasis on the bi-dialectical knowledge.

The three ATs have different views on the types of knowledge the communicative competence would consist of. Luna and Fida identified interaction as an essential component of communication. Yet, while Luna’s perception about interaction shows cultural appreciation and appropriateness, Fida’s understanding of it seems to be linked to the learners’ ability to produce the language orally with a good command of linguistic knowledge (grammar and vocabulary). John’s opinion also appears to be focusing on the learner’s ability to produce the spoken varieties of Arabic, which reflects authentic situations of language use.

### 6.2.2. Teachers' responses

The Ts were also required to respond to the same questions posed to the ATs. The questions aim to explore a) the teachers' perception of communication and whether it relates to proficiency and b) if the learners' ability to communicate reflects their level of proficiency. The responses were as follows:

**Walid**            **Walid** was asked about the meaning of communication and how it relates to proficiency. He said;

*“It is the learners' ability to engage in any socialising situation within any social network. It is the learner's readiness and willingness to meet with natives, contribute to the conversation, expressing his opinion, discussing, responding, taking the initiative, and showing disagreement”.*

Perhaps, Walid's understanding of communication relates to the concept of interaction in a negotiable context where the learner's ability to listen, start a conversation, comprehend and respond is strong.

I then asked him whether the learner's ability to communicate reflects his/her level of proficiency, his reply was: *“I can't confirm that because some learners are shy or introvert. They might be psychologically not able to communicate”.* From his point of view, the learner's ability to communicate does not determine or reflect their level of proficiency, which resonates with Luna's view. Yet his reason was that *“some learners are shy or introvert”* and therefore, one cannot *“determine the level of this type of person based on their level on interaction with others. It is not fair”.* He added; *“The more the student is proficient the more he is willing to communicate”.*

Walid seems to be emphasising that the learner's level of proficiency influences their ability to communicate. His views also appear to imply that communicative competence is a combination of socio-cultural, interactional and behavioural factors. He appears to be talking about the term of communication to embrace three types of competences discussed in the literature (section 3.4). The first is socio-cultural competence: several models have highlighted this type of knowledge as a component of communicative proficiency. Celce-Murcia *et al.* (1995) identified this competence as one of their communicative model's components, which also corresponds with Canale and Swain's

(1980) sociolinguistic competence. According to them, learners' socio-cultural competence reflects their background knowledge about the target language community regarding their beliefs, taboos and values.

The second is interactional competence: the concept of interaction that Walid seems to highlight here appears to directly relate to Kramersch's model of interaction (1986). Walid mentioned the learners' ability to negotiate meanings, show disagreement, and initiate a conversation, and to respond to the interlocutors. Those aspects formulate the model of interaction that Kramersch proposed.

Thirdly, Walid continues to put emphasis on the learner's autonomy and willingness to interact as an indicator to their successful communication. He identifies these behavioural aspects as subcomponents of the communicative competence. Autonomy is one of those learning strategies that reflect that learners take responsibility for their learning and so they create their learning opportunities by taking the initiative. As mentioned in section 5.2.2, autonomy is discussed in CLT (Holec, 1979; Little, 2009), in the constructivist and the socio-cultural theories of learning Vygotsky (1978), and in the post-method pedagogy (Stryker and Leaver, 1997). Nielsen (1996) argued that in TAFL (Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language) contexts, communication success is mainly dependent on the learners. Therefore, they should be encouraged to develop strategies of independent learning to carry out successful communicative tasks. Also language-learner strategies-based Arabic instruction should be developed as means of empowering learners to become more autonomous (McDonough, 1999; Harris *et al.* 2001).

Walid perceives proficiency to be more comprehensive than communication; which resonates with the ATs, Luna and John's, in this regard. Walid does not seem to be talking about accuracy here in relation with communication, as explicitly and strongly as Luna and Fida do, but it seems that he is implying it, since expressing one's opinion, discussing, showing disagreement and taking initiative require accuracy. Discussed in section 5.2.2, when Walid was asked to conceptualise proficiency in Arabic, his responses implied some tolerance regarding grammatical errors. He seemed to accept inaccurate production particularly when it comes to the errors that Arabic native speakers would make, or those that do not affect the meaning.

**Farah** understands proficiency in terms of communication as follows;  
**Farah**

*“We’re talking about a language; language is not studied as a vacuum; language is a mean for communication. Of course you have the body language and other ways of communication but a student learning a language might need only a few vocab to be able to communicate, but even if he’s communicating, he is not very proficient in the accuracy so they might be able to say what they want but like with 5 to 20 grammatical mistakes. They’re still communicating but they’re not very accurate in the language uses. But in that case they don’t have a very high proficiency level; their level is lower”.*

Many aspects of communication can be grasped by Farah’s statement. Farah does not speak about the term ‘communication’ in isolation from the term ‘proficiency’; they rather correlate, as she said. She indicates that being a successful communicator in a language does not necessarily imply a high level of proficiency since communication can happen with a little knowledge of the language. However, this language communicated might lack a great deal of accuracy, which indicates a low level of proficiency. This seems to be corresponding to the views of Luna and Walid in this regard.

I asked her about the variety of Arabic she expects to be the tool of communication, according to her understanding.

“Farah: *“We have the most recent expression is the educated spoken Arabic, which is a simplified MSA and closer to regional variety so that would be the ideal thing. However, it again depends on the learner and the context”.*

*I: “Do you mean they can choose one of the varieties? Either MSA or a ...”*

Farah: *“Exactly, or a spoken variety but it is usually the educated person...?”*

Farah shows a flexible attitude in conceptualising proficiency and communication. She gives the learner the freedom to choose the variety they feel comfortable communicating in, whether it was MSA, a dialect or a mixture form of both. Yet, according to her, the ideal variety to be used is the language of the educated native. In other words, it is up to the learner to decide which variety of Arabic they choose to

communicate. Nevertheless, ESA is the preferred spoken variety for her, which would not reflect a very flexible attitude after all.

Resonating with all the above except for Fida, Farah's responses would reflect that the learner could carry out successful communicative tasks even if they do not have a good level of proficiency. The result would be an inaccurate oral production though. Therefore, successful communication does not necessarily reflect a high level of proficiency.

**Iman** As for the way **Iman** conceptualises the concept of communication, she stated;

*“Everybody was learning the language because they want to communicate in the language and then the latest approach was a successful approach because it manages to get people to do two things, to achieve accuracy and fluency at the same time so I'm accurate and I'm fluent, so I can balance between the two while I'm learning”. “The latest approach”* that Iman mentioned here refers to the communicative approach of language instruction. She mentioned that later in her response to the question of this section by saying; *“For me I think the communicative approach or learning Arabic for communicative reasons is what everybody is looking for”*.

Iman looks at the concept of communication from a different perspective. She indicates that communication guarantees achieving the balance between fluency and accuracy. For her, successful communication requires the two at the same level. This contradicts her description of the proficient user she gave in section 5.2.2, where she put less emphasis on the level of grammatical knowledge as a feature of the proficient user.

As for the question of the relationship between proficiency and communication, if any, she said;

*“If someone can communicate, it is not necessarily proficient in other skills, so the skills go together and this is where we go back to the communicative approach of teaching. We try to put all skills together, the four skills together, you can't let students to be very good, when you see a piece of writing from a student and then you give him*



*70 out of a 100 in there and then when you give him a listening test he gets 30, this doesn't make sense".*

Again, the way she describes the relationship between proficiency and communication accords with the views of the other participants excluding Fida; which is that a communicator is not necessarily proficient in all skills. They might be proficient in writing but this does not mean they are proficient in all other skills. Listening is the example she gives.

Iman seems to be explicit about relating communication to a trade-off approach between accuracy and fluency. This would imply that accurate communication requires a high level of proficiency since it requires a good command of grammatical accuracy in the input. This idea would put emphasis on the importance of having a 'counterbalanced approach' between fluency and accuracy as suggested by Lyster (2007), or a balanced concentration on both for successful communication as put forth by Swain (2000a). The trade-off between the two constructs would help maintain a good level of awareness in both the spoken and the written forms of the language, according to Swain (2000a). In Iman's statement, "*we try to put all skills together*", there might be reference to this meaning of Swain's.

The Ts seem to agree on the idea that communication does not require a high level of proficiency. Apart from Fida, perhaps ATs also share this opinion. On the other hand, Canale and Swain's (1980: 30) communicative competence was seen as distinct from actual communication. The former, – 'communicative competence' – contains grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence, whereas the latter – 'actual communication' – implies 'the demonstration of knowledge in actual language performance' (Fulcher and Davidson, 2007: 38). Possibly this distinction implies that the communicative tasks carried out by the learners rely on two pillars; knowledge and putting this knowledge in action.

In short, ATs and Ts highlighted different aspects that communicative proficiency would comprise. The first is interaction: explicitly emphasised in the ATs' (Luna and Fida) responses, in addition to the teacher's Walid. Luna related it to social appropriateness, whereas, Fida and Walid talked about it in relation to the oral production and conversational interaction. The second is dialectical knowledge: this is

considered an important component of communicative proficiency by the AT, John and the T, Farah. Yet, for John, the knowledge of MSA and a regional dialect are essential for successful communication, while for Farah it is a choice made by the learner to use MSA, a colloquial, or even ESA. The third is accuracy: apart from the AT, John and the T, Iman, the remaining ATs and Ts indicated accuracy as an important factor for communication. While John does not seem to refer to either accuracy or fluency, Iman calls for balance between the two to work out a communicative task. The coming section shows to what extent the ATs' and Ts' opinions resonate with those of the Ls.

### 6.2.3. Learners' responses

The Ls were required to talk about their experience when communicating with Arabs in the countries that they have been to. They were asked to identify the variety of Arabic they used for communication, and to give examples about the type of communicative activities they were involved in. Their answers were as follows:

**Naya** described her communicative experience in Morocco as follows:

**Naya**

*“Basically first six months I wouldn't really communicate, it would always be very awkward although my speaking in classroom was very good”.*

In section 5.2.3, Naya described her level of proficiency to be “*lower advanced*”. Nevertheless, she was not able to communicate with people when she went to Morocco. The reason behind this was her lack of the dialectical knowledge that prevented her from feeling confident to communicate. She said, “*I took quite a big trip around Morocco, so I had to communicate with people at some points. Eventually I did learn quite a few phrases so I would use them and mix them with fuṣḥā, and this is how communication would go basically*”. A strong connection here seems to be made between successful communication and the knowledge of different Arabic varieties, which accords with the assessor's (John) and the teacher's (Farah) opinions in this regard.

Naya's statement seems to imply that having a good knowledge of MSA, and some knowledge of the colloquial, does not necessarily guarantee successful communication unless the person is speaking what people actually speak. Eventually, the strategies she

used to establish communicative tasks were immersing herself in a context such as “a *long trip*” where she can interact in Arabic, and integrating certain spoken expressions/phrases with *fuṣḥā*. Immersion and learning spoken phrases are strategies that she followed to support her communicative competence.

Naya’s experience in this regard supports the idea that a good level of proficiency does not guarantee success in communicative situations. Also a high level of proficiency in *fuṣḥā* only does not either guarantee successful communication with native speakers. Naya’s statements emphasised the necessity of being able to speak in *ammiyyah* to establish communication. This would refer to the bi-dialectal competence as an essential component of communicative competence. In addition, Naya mentioned an integrated version of *fuṣḥā* and *ammiyyah* on a *fuṣḥā* basis, where only the features of one dialect are emerged with *fuṣḥā*, whereas the only variety that is based on *fuṣḥā* amongst the different proposed models of Arabic (section 3.2) is Bishai’s (1966) ‘Modern Inter-Arabic variety’. However, this variety does not seem to correspond to Naya’s version since it contains blending elements of MSA and dialects used in various inter-Arab meetings that have native speakers from different Arabic-speaking countries.

**Yaman**        **Yaman** is a learner of three varieties of Arabic, CA, MSA and the Egyptian dialect. I asked him how he usually communicates with people when he goes to Egypt.

I: “*How did you speak with people then?*”

Yaman: “*in the streets?*”

I: “*Yes*”.

Yaman: “*With broken Arabic*”.

I: “*What kind of Arabic?*”

Yaman: “*Ammiyyah*”.

I: “*How did you learn ammiyyah? Because you said you haven’t officially learned it*”.

Yaman: *“That was from picking up from being in there, and to be honest I think this was for me the best way to learn Arabic is to one be in the context where it is spoken and to immerse yourself in that context”*.

Yaman does not consider himself a proficient user of Arabic even in the Egyptian. As stated in section 5.2.3, his way of communication in Egypt was what he calls *“broken Arabic (ammiyyah)”*. Yaman has used a broken version of *ammiyyah*, although relatively he has the same level in the three varieties of Arabic. Interestingly, corresponding with Naya’s experience, Yaman stated that he learned the colloquial through being in the context where language is used and becoming immersed in that context.

I asked him if he tried to speak *fuṣḥā* with people given his broken dialect. He said no, for the following reasons;

*“I was aware that if you speak fuṣḥā in Cairo, you’ll probably come across. It’ll be humorous for the people; they wouldn’t probably take you that seriously unless you’re like a sheikh or something like that”*.

For Yaman the language form that should be used for communication is the dialect. One reason is that the people’s attitude towards a foreigner in the street speaking *fuṣḥā* is not very encouraging. The other reason is, looking at this from a psychological perspective, being exposed to sarcasm and not being taken seriously must feel frustrating for the learner.

I even asked Yaman if he means that broken dialect is better and more comfortable than MSA for the learner to communicate with, and his answer was yes and the reason was;

*“I remember actually one time being in a market in Cairo, a very busy and well-known market for ripping off tourists and foreigners and we were in a shop and a friend of mine who was studying fuṣḥā was trying to communicate with the owner of the shop and the owner was almost making a deal of the fact that he was making mistakes even though his Arabic is probably better than mine, but it was because he was coming across speaking fuṣḥā as very distant and strange [...]. The shop keeper ended up trying to then, I don’t know, allow me to speak on his behalf and I probably had worse ammiyyah than he had fuṣḥā but somehow I was able somehow to establish a better*

*relationship with him and take away. [...] even speaking in very broken colloquial Arabic, I think it allows you to express this hidden side to language, which is more emotion and even hand gestures and a kind of intonation and rhythm and stuff”.*

In this example, Yaman seems to be referring to using *ammiyyah*; “*broken ammiyyah*” as a strategy to “*establish a better relationship*” with native speakers. Shifting the conversation to be through *ammiyyah*, Yaman was trying to avoid any potential problem arising in the communication process.

Yaman also seems to look at language as part of a broader semiotic system, talking about the nonverbal type of communication. He seems to be talking about what advantages that using the dialect with the natives might give the learner that MSA cannot offer. This accords with his idea about learning by immersion in the context where the dialect is spoken. In other words, immersing in the context requires the student to learn the dialect, and learning the dialect will, in return, give the learner this knowledge in addition to the other non-verbal advantages that Yaman seems to be talking about.

In Yaman’s responses, communication occurs in *ammiyyah* through immersing oneself in the context where it is spoken, and by interacting with the NSs. Again this corresponds to the answers all participants gave in this regard. In Yaman’s statements, though, perhaps there is a clear reference to two types of competences that shape the communicative ability; firstly, socio-cultural competence (Celce-Murcia *et al.* 1995) which includes appropriateness in using the language variation according to the context, the usual dialects and awareness of values and living conditions in addition to the non-verbal communication using the body language and gestures. The second competence he refers to is strategic competence (Canale, 1983). The competence that I refer to here is the expanded conception of the strategic competence that was proposed in Canale and Swain’s (1980) model of communicative competence. In this model (1980: 30) strategic competence was perceived to be the ‘verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence’. Strategic competence in models like Celce-Murcia *et al.*’s (1995) and Bachman’s (1990) correspond with this meaning. Canale (1983) expanded this definition to embrace strategies that reinforce the

effectiveness of communication, such as checking if the listener has comprehended what has been said, and also avoiding problems in the communication process.

**Glen** According to his self-assessment, **Glen** is a proficient user (or fluent as he likes to describe himself) of three varieties of Arabic; CA, MSA and the Palestinian colloquial. I asked him about his experience in Syria about communicating with people. He said;

*“When I first went to Syria, I was living with students of Sharia who were not Syrians, and who were wearing gallabiyahs (long clothes) and they’re actually mostly Tunisians. It was the opposite, they only really spoke to me in fuṣḥā, and I think I, because in [Cambridge] we only were taught to speak in ammiyyah. Then I stopped living with them after a month, so things normalised’.*

Glen seems to indicate that having to speak *fuṣḥā* to communicate was weird for him and was not even "normal". Maybe this is because the people he was communicating with were not Syrians, and more particularly Tunisian. Glen may not have understood the Tunisian colloquial, or maybe those he communicated with were not able to speak Syrian. Either way, Glen did not feel comfortable speaking in *fuṣḥā*; neither was he taught to speak in it, and probably that explains his attitude towards speaking it.

I asked him about the reasons he learned *ammiyyah*, he said; *“You’re learning a language; you want to get to speak to people as they speak to you”*. In his statement, Glen points to the use of dialect when talking about communication. It is worth noting that, for the first month, Glen lived in Syria, but the interlocutors he was involved in conversations with were native speakers of Arabic who might/might not have the knowledge of the Syrian dialect. Therefore, there would be a possibility that if colloquial was the medium of communication between them; they would be speaking a dialect that Glen might not fully understand. Yet, he still thinks communicating with them in *fuṣḥā* was not normal. One would find a reference to the sociolinguistic competence (Bachman, 1990), which shows sensitivity to the type of variety, dialect or context of language use.

The three Ls seem to share the same opinions regarding the usage of the colloquial for communication. Even though their purposes of learning Arabic are different, the kind of experiences they had when spending time in an Arab country significantly intersect.

#### 6.2.4. Summary of findings

The concept of communication in relation to proficiency seems to be a contested concept. The AT, Luna and the T, Walid talk about communication in relation to interaction with focus given to accuracy. Luna states that a learner can be a successful communicator but this does not mean he or she is proficient, and the teacher Farah seems to share the same opinion since communication can happen with a little knowledge of the language. From my perspective, this would be true only at a basic level, since communication requires more than this limited knowledge when the level increases.

The AT, John relates communication to the ability to produce the dialect with focusing on accuracy as well. The T, Iman thinks that communication guarantees achieving the balance between fluency and accuracy; for her, successful communication requires these at the same level.

As for the Ls; Naya stated that she could not communicate successfully in Morocco due to her limited dialectical knowledge that prevented her from feeling confident to communicate. For Yaman the language form that should be used for communication is the dialect, and he himself has spoken a broken version of Egyptian and felt that MSA is particularly formal and creates barriers between the interlocutors. When Glen was in Syria, he found himself in a context where MSA was the language of communication and he found that to be weird and not "*normal*".

Overall, interactional competence seems to define communication for most of the participants. Communicative competence was also perceived through a number of components proposed by the different participants such as interactional, bi-dialectical and socio-cultural and sociolinguistic which includes the knowledge of the colloquial, in addition to a number of behavioural factors of the learner; readiness and willingness to communicate.

The following sections present a more detailed analysis of the participants' responses regarding the two competences about which the participants were asked; cultural and bi-dialectical competences. The interactional competence is addressed in chapter 7.

### 6.3. Cultural competence

Cultural knowledge appeared repeatedly as an important element, which the concept of proficiency comprises in the data. However, it seems to have been perceived differently amongst the participants. Each looks at it from his or her own perspectives, which might intersect at times.

#### 6.3.1. Assessor teachers' responses

ATs were asked to illustrate what they understand by the culture of the target language, whether they teach and test culture and, if so, how they do that. Their responses were as follows:

Luna                      What **Luna** seems to understand by culture is the "social cultural" aspects:

*"Social cultural; like interacting with different people from different backgrounds, and as I said students should know how to talk differently in different registers, that's what I think students should learn how to use"*

This statement shows that the social aspects of communication seem to be considered as representatives of the culture that the students should be aware of. These are interaction with different classes of people which emphasises the concept of appropriacy, in terms of "different registers" of the language and where and when to say certain things. In talking about communicating with "different people from different backgrounds", a reference appears to be made to the intercultural competence in addition to the cultural awareness of the target language. Luna seems to see culture as comprising a number of aspects:

*"Both how to interact with someone or if you're writing how to write to them; how to address them; what register language do you use, (...) and also you need to know what's going on in the Arab world; that is so important to know"*



Luna tends to talk about culture introduced to students through the language not as a separate kind of knowledge. In her statement, social appropriacy appears as an aspect of culture represented in the way people are addressed and the type of language used with them. She added to that the knowledge of the context of the target language; this is probably a reference to the political or social awareness; which is also a component of the intercultural competence. When asking her about the way she teaches or tests culture, she said,

*“We did one on health and was on organisation campaigns. So, students had to design a poster for the campaign and then had to have role play with parents to persuade the parents to take their children to be vaccinated, so and we’ve done all preparation, vocabulary, reading, we’ve done role plays”.*

Role-play is one of the methods she follows to teach and test her students on their cultural knowledge. Again, this resonates with the way she perceives communication, which is interaction, and the role-play seems to work successfully in achieving that. In Luna’s responses, there is a reference to communication with people from different backgrounds which relates to ‘intercultural competence’, a communicative model proposed by Byram (1997), ‘languaculture’ suggested by Agar (1994), and the European ‘framework of reference for pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures’ (2012). The latter states that the knowledge of culture consists of different aspects, including knowledge of ‘the role of culture in intercultural relations and communication’, which Luna’s response seems to imply. Also in his model of intercultural competence, Byram proposed three competences – linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competences – in addition to other non-linguistic dimensions which are ‘knowledge, attitude, awareness, and skills’ that an intercultural speaker should have. Luna seems to be talking about sociolinguistic competence by stating that *“students should know how to talk differently in different registers”*. Interestingly, Luna also seems to refer to the knowledge of the events (that might be political or cultural) that are taking place in the Arab world rather than in the country where Arabic is being learnt. This type of knowledge is also one of Byram’s ‘savoirs’, which requires the learner to be aware of the political, geographical, historical and contemporary knowledge of the target language culture. Moreover, Byram added that a learner is required to deal with interlocutors from different cultural backgrounds, and to be able to discover and evaluate one’s own and others’ cultures.

**Fida** **Fida** also described what she understands by culture and what kind of aspects a learner should seek knowledge about. She said;

*“Using the language is not only understanding it; using it means where he can get his political information, where he can get his poetry information for example, where he can get things to do with environmental things, so he needs to know all the sources of the language, to know how to refer to it, so this is a type of culture he needs to know. This is the type of culture he needs to be aware of”.*

Cultural knowledge according to Fida seems to include a wide range of topics on almost all types of life such as politics, poetry, the environment and all “*sources of language*”, by which I think she meant different sort of knowledge. She also talked about the social life in more detail, as a part of the culture the learner should be aware of.

*“He needs to know about Arabic finance, he needs to know about politics and he needs to know about the social life, social life, food and dress and all kind of things; he needs to know about al‘ā`ilah (the family) like the family in the Arab countries, the traditions and how they live so these are the main aspects. And also some of the poetry, not necessarily the classical poetry, he needs to know a little bit about religion, and not only a little bit, he needs to know well about the religion and the sects of religions as well and the differences between them he gets in trouble”.*

Fida’s expectations from her students regarding culture seem to cover a wide spectrum of domains and topics. She appears to be focusing on different types of knowledge, and where the language comes from, which seems to relate to the language registers and to the language use. Also, being appropriate appears essential when she mentions the different religions and sects, not only for appropriateness but also for survival in tricky situations. Unlike Luna, perhaps Fida does not speak about the necessity of this knowledge when speaking to people from different backgrounds. This would locate her opinion in the models that proposed the socio-cultural competence as an essential component of communicative proficiency (e.g., Celce-Murcia *et al.*’s 1995 socio-cultural competence that also corresponds with Canale and Swain’s 1980 sociolinguistic competence) rather than in the model of intercultural competence.

**John** in turn provided an explanation on how he perceives culture.

**John**

*“They need to understand the culture of the Middle East, the Islamic culture, all the minorities and also Arabic has a lot of cultural expressions”.*

John’s understanding does not seem to diverge from the views of Luna and Fida. He though separates the Islamic culture from the culture of the Middle East, which in my opinion seems to be valid, as the knowledge of one does not necessarily imply the knowledge of the other. He interestingly added,

*“Arabic is an interesting language because it is not just like English, it is not just a language of communication, it is a religious language, it is the language of the Quran, and that is very important to bear in mind and students should bear this in mind; give Arabic the respect that it should have. It should be respected as a language”.*

He does, though, put more focus on two aspects; firstly the knowledge of religion and sects as part of Arabic culture, and secondly the learners’ attitude towards Arabic since it is the language of the Quran, and that is to be respected. I asked him about the tasks/approaches he generally uses to teach or to test the students’ cultural knowledge. He said;

*“So you have to put them in a role-play or you know, I don’t know, you’re robbed; you’re in Cairo and all of the sudden, you left your laptop in your room or something that you forget to take it with you and you came back to the room and after it is cleaned you found out that the laptop is gone, and you’re now reporting this to the police in Cairo. That’s real because these things happen”.*

This statement seems to be saying that a role-play again is perceived to be a good task for assessing the learners’ cultural and social awareness. John, like Luna, suggested using it to stimulate the learners’ linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge when Arabic is learnt outside an Arabic context. This task perhaps is seen to reflect the learners’ ability to deal with a certain social/cultural situation; to choose the type of language they should use which is the Egyptian colloquial in John’s example, the way they address the police officer, and to know what people usually do in such situations. But not only that, it also immerses the students in a real-life situation or in an imaginary

situation when the real context is not available given the learning process is taking place in the UK.

Again, John's understanding of the cultural knowledge that learners should have seems to correspond with that of Fida and Luna: yet John, like Fida but unlike Luna, seems not to talk about the learners' cultural competence from an intercultural perspective. The focus of his statements locates his opinion in the socio-cultural competence as a component of communicative proficiency. I find this difference of focus very interesting. This lack of focus on the intercultural dimension by John and Fida could be linked to their understandings of culture. They both tend to relate culture to knowledge and information (topics in Fida's statements, and religion and social expressions in John's), whereas Luna relates it to interaction and socio-cultural communication which would involve people from different backgrounds.

### 6.3.2. Teachers' responses

Both ATs and Ts were asked to respond to the same questions. The purpose is to elicit their responses regarding considering the cultural knowledge as a component of communicative proficiency. It is also to explore their understanding of the culture and the types of cultural aspects they teach and test, or whether they do that at all. Their responses were as follows:

**Walid**                      **Walid's** opinion about how important it is for the learner of Arabic to be aware of culture, he said:

*"You can't separate the language from its cultural context".*

He seems to speak about culture and language as two sides of one coin; which puts a great emphasis on the learner's cultural knowledge of the target language. He also gave several examples about the different aspects of culture a learner should be aware of such as Arabic music, poetry, food and daily expressions.

*"I always add Arabic poems to my teaching materials because reading poems or listening to poems is a very cultural thing. All Arabs, even the illiterate, are interested in poems".*

Walid seems to be talking about living the culture and feeling the language rather than just knowing them. He talks about what kind of things people enjoy and interestingly avoided speaking about politics or the other types of knowledge that ATs talked about.

Regarding food and eating with family and within a group, he said, *“It is rare to find someone eating alone, that’s why we do care about having our meals together and we don’t mind spending six hours cooking a meal for 15 people”*. Walid also seems to regard the social customs as important cultural knowledge. He added, *“Our daily expressions are a good example as well such as ‘lā ‘aynī and ‘lā rāsī (at your service). Why we say such expressions, how we communicate with each other”*.

The knowledge of daily expressions is a part of Arabic culture according to Walid. This would relate to the social appropriacy and seems a direct indicator to the knowledge of *ammiyyah* for acquiring the cultural competence.

*“They also should know what the things are that we see as beautiful and how we reflect that in our language. Take the moon as an example. It might not mean anything to a British student when I talk about the moon. Therefore, I translate it to “sunshine” as an equivalent to the moon in Arabic culture”*.

Another aspect of culture Walid perhaps refers to is how the NSs of Arabic express their enjoyment or their sense of beauty. Walid appears to be in favour of letting students live the NS’s experience when they use the language with all feelings and attitudes associated. He provided very interesting reasons for his claims: *“The purpose is to share the experience of the native speaker when they listen to their music”*. He added, *“I think the student needs to live and feel the language, [...] and also should know what the things that we see as beautiful are and how we reflect that in our language”*.

In his statements, Walid seems to consider culture as an essential part of the language learning experience. He also gave several examples about the cultural aspects that he thinks a learner of Arabic should be aware of. Three observations could be deduced from his opinions; firstly, culture and language cannot be separated; secondly, cultural knowledge is the culture of the target language; and thirdly, cultural knowledge can be obtained by the two varieties of Arabic –MSA and the colloquial.

Unlike other participants, Walid talked about the culture in a very detailed way with exemplification. Although Walid does not seem to talk about culture from an

intercultural point of view, his statements would still convey some aspects of Byram's ICC (2008) and Agar's 'languaculture' (1994), namely considering culture as part of the language. Also, Walid encourages the learners to feel the language and live it through truly experiencing all possible aspects of the culture which accords with Byram's ICC model that comes in contrast with the touristic-oriented pedagogy of language learning. It simultaneously accords with Agar's view that sees the culture as a domain of experiences that fuses structure and semantics in cultural aspects. In addition, Walid spoke about the written and the spoken forms of the language as sources of cultural knowledge, poems in MSA and daily expressions in the colloquial. However, most of the other examples he gave seem to be experienced through the daily life in which the colloquial is most likely used.

**Farah's** understanding of the culture is as follows;

**Farah**

*"Awareness of the culture is important to know if you're considering the language in a practical way of thinking".*

Farah sees the knowledge of the culture as a component of language awareness. Appropriacy is another element she seems to be focusing on in her following statement;

*"If you're talking to your friend which statement would you use and then put options like your highness, your majesty, or hey you. That's an important aspect of the language".*

This excerpt indicates social appropriacy and the type of language and expressions chosen for a certain context or when speaking to a particular social class. She gives an example about the type of social cultural elements that the student should be aware of;

*"A love story between two cousins, for people in the UK it is almost... like impossible to have a marriage between one person and their immediate cousin, but in Arabic that's a very common thing. So, things like this like cultural social are like important aspects of learning the language".*

In this statement, Farah seems to refer to the learners' awareness of the social beliefs and thoughts. She exemplifies that by the social relations, namely between the two

genders and this is a complex issue in Arabic culture. Another aspect she added is the daily expression that people use when they communicate with each other.

*“One aspect for the culture and language is the use of terminology and idioms, so in Arabic everything is ‘lā rāsī, or min ‘aynī (= at your service), which doesn’t have the same meaning in English If you translate it literal translation”*

Interestingly, she gave the same example that Walid provided, which refers to how important this knowledge is to enter into successful communicative conversations with NSs. It also implies that the knowledge of *ammiyyah* is an important source of culture. When asked about whether or how she would assess the culture, she said;

*“The challenging question is how to assess this which I don’t have an answer for it. I’ll leave it for you to find the answers”.*

Apparently, Farah highlights the social cultural elements seen when she conceptualises culture. However, the aspects that Farah focused on seem to be firstly limited to social appropriacy, the use of daily expressions and some basic cultural traditions and, secondly, all social or cultural examples she has given are most likely embedded in the spoken form of the language. This would resonate with Ryding’s (1995: 225) statement in her conceptualisation of Arabic linguistic competence, that ‘the range of spoken competence covers an extraordinary spectrum of social, cultural and geographic variants’. Perhaps it would also imply that the type of culture that the non-native speakers of Arabic should be aware of is mostly embedded in the colloquial.

**Iman** gave an explanation on the cultural aspects that the student should be aware of:

*“[The students should be aware of] what they [native speakers] do and how they do it, like the communicative skills it is important to understand the tone for example”.*

Iman seems to be talking about the cultural knowledge in terms of how the culture is practiced by the native speakers. This would correspond with Street’s (1993) statement that suggests that the question is not what culture *is*; it is more what the culture *does*. Iman requires the students to be able to understand the tone of the speaker, in the context of what kind of impression it can give.

Apparently, teachers' talk about Arabic culture seems to incorporate a general wide spectrum of the learners' knowledge about the Arab world in the first place. This knowledge is basically perceived to cover the political, poetic and social kind of aspects. They seem to consider appropriacy and the awareness of how and when to use certain social expressions as an important element of the culture. Despite this, each of the ATs and Ts seems to conceptualise culture from different perspectives. The AT, Luna, unlike the other participants, tends to talk about it from an intercultural point of view where learners would be interacting with different people from different backgrounds. The T, Walid made a reference to the bond between language and culture. The T, Farah talked about the knowledge of Arabic culture in terms of social appropriacy, whereas culture according to the T, Iman is the native speakers' practices. It seems to me that all participants talk about culture as a homogeneous concept, and view language and culture as intertwined. Another aspect that the participants tend to incorporate when they conceptualise cultural knowledge is the learners' recognition and awareness of the colloquial as an important source of culture. The next section shows to what extent the ATs' and Ts' opinions resonate with those of the Ls'.

### 6.3.3. Learners' responses

Learners were required to share their cultural experiences in the year they spent abroad in different Arabic-speaking countries. I asked them what kind of cultural knowledge they have, the aspects they think Ls need to be aware of, and whether or not they lack any of these aspects. Their responses were as follows:

**Naya** For **Naya** the type of culture that she thinks she would need to be aware of as a learner is:

*"I think it is the use of certain expressions correctly would be a good enough indicator of somebody's cultural knowledge".*

According to Naya, culture has to do with using certain expressions in an appropriate way. She added, *"It's just important to see if a person can reply appropriately in this respect. It doesn't mean a thick knowledge of history or something"*. Here she seems to emphasise the learner's appropriacy as a good indicator of the learner's level of cultural awareness. Naya though does not seem to emphasise the historical side of culture as long as the learner is using the language in a socially appropriate context with suitable



expressions. That is to say, the focus of her statements was on the interactional aspects of the language – *“the use of certain expressions correctly”*– and would also imply the relationship between this aspect of culture and the colloquial. The aspect Naya seems to be focusing on is “appropriacy” which has been mentioned by the AT, Luna and the T, Farah as well.

When **Yaman** spoke about culture; he related it to the language learning experience in general. He started by describing what learning a language means for him.

*“There is two things; there is the language side and there is this kind of more cultural side, I think it has a profound effect on... you know like it is not just about being able to speak the language, to be successful or to be, to kind of be harmonious with the place is not just about the language”.*

Yaman’s philosophy of learning the language lies on two sides; the linguistic side and the cultural side. He related the success of communication to cultural awareness. He also used another expression, which is the *‘harmony with the place’* to emphasise the importance of the learner knowing the culture in order to feel comfortable and to feel at home when they relocate in the new environment of the target language. Yaman also does not seem to speak about the intercultural aspects of the language; yet he seems to refer to the interconnection between language and culture, and that culture is a complementary part of the language; which would point to Agar’s ‘*languaculture*’ (1994).

**Glen** relates culture to what he has been taught is culture, so for example;

*“What I remember vividly is that a lot of what we were taught in fuṣḥā was kind of media Arabic; how to talk about politics and things, that was just you know the kind of things we were asked to read and write about which of course you can’t talk about in Syria”. “We were taught things about the Arab world; you know, names of foods and things like that”.*

The examples that he gave seem to be very general since media is the language source that culture was taken from. He added the political knowledge, and his awareness that it

is not a good topic of a conversation if it took place in Syria. As for the language resources that contain cultural references, he said,

*“For some reason I suppose my instinct is to say well it’d be nice to read some Syrian novels and of course watch some Syrian TV and that kind of thing. That seems safer than taking classes of the details of Syrian culture and more different Syrians do in their lives”.*

In this statement, perhaps there is a reference to the written and spoken varieties of Arabic as cultural sources. Glen seems to be talking about different aspects of culture; politics, media, TV series, novels and food. He also appears to point out his awareness about a certain social taboo, such as discussing politics with Syrians. Subsequently, his statements accord with the cultural aspects that the teacher Walid identified (e.g., food and eating habits, poems, music).

#### 6.3.4. Summary of findings and discussion

Culture seems to mean different things to different people, and perhaps their responses imply that culture is a broad concept. The AT, Luna thinks that the social aspects of life in addition to appropriacy can represent culture. The AT, Fida just like the T, Walid understands culture to have a wide spectrum of language sources and a range of registers and topics. The AT, John identifies the Islamic culture, the culture of the Middle East and certain cultural expressions as aspects that should be taught. The social appropriacy and the type of language and expressions used in certain contexts represent the T, Farah’s understanding of culture.

The Ls seem to share the awareness of how essential is to know about culture although they diverge from each other in terms of what they understand by culture. Naya thinks the knowledge of some social expressions is enough in addition to being appropriate and that is what the cultural knowledge is for her. Yaman emphasises the importance of knowing culture of the place and people where a learner lives to feel comfortable and safe with some indication of the bond between language and culture. Glen considers media, literature and politics as sources of culture.

Culture is a concept that has been contested and conceptualised differently in the literature. My participants' responses seem to clearly reflect that as well as all understand culture to be one unified, fixed category. They seem to talk about it as a set of collective norms, behaviours and traditions. Culture in the literature has been defined and conceptualised from different points of view; from a functionalist-structuralist lens (e.g., Parsons, 1951; Parsons and Turner, 1991; Durkheim, 2013b), it is a solid system that is 'based on detailed descriptions of how the parts of society such as the institutions of education, the military, the family and politics contribute to the whole' Holliday (2014: 38). This conceptualisation of culture implies that social behaviours and values are fixed rather than autonomous or individualised.

On the other hand, based on a socio-cultural lens, culture is seen as a negotiated 'process' that is hard to specify, and in which human behaviour cannot be determined (Weber, 1964). Based on this perspective, cultural aspects can be pinned down by imagining how society might ideally be rather than how it actually is (Strath, 2008: 33-34; Weber, 1968: 23). Street (1993: 25) in turn pointed out that culture is not a thing; it is rather a process of collective meaning making; culture as social practice. A paradigm referred to as the "large culture" by Holliday (1999) implies that culture is controversial and embraces a wide spectrum of aspects, behaviours and values. In this article, Holliday discussed the need to distinguish between this paradigm of culture that is related to an ethnic, national and international entity, and the other 'small culture' paradigm that should be prescribed to the learners of foreign languages. The small culture paradigm, according to Holliday (1999: 237), 'attaches culture to small social groupings or activities whenever there is cohesive behaviour, and thus avoids culturist ethnic, national or international stereotyping'. The paradigm of Holliday (2013: 237) has an intercultural basis and consists of several categories:

1. 'Cultural resources: education, religion, language, tradition'.
2. The social relationships of a particular social group and the way of engaging in social activities.
3. 'Cultural products: arts, literature, cultural practices'.
4. Awareness of self and other in addition to the personal trajectory: family, ancestry, peers, profession.

My participants seemed to be talking about the first paradigm, viewing Arabic culture as a homogeneous concept with its wide spectrum of values and behaviours, whereas in

my opinion, conceptualising Arabic cultural competence should not necessarily imply learning about the ethnic, national and international differences. It is more to learn the shared principles on the intra-relationships and inter-relationships of a particular social group when its members meet for example.

#### **6.4. Bi-dialectical competence**

The issue of dialects was immediately raised when describing the proficient non-native of Arabic and in its relationship to the cultural knowledge and the communicative competence.

##### 6.4.1. Assessor teachers' responses

The ATs and Ts were asked to describe on what basis they consider a learner of Arabic as a proficient user of it. They were also required to identify the competences of communicative proficiency a learner of Arabic should be aware of. Their

**Luna** responses were as follows:

**Luna** stated that the learners should be “*proficient in Standard Arabic and spoken*” and she added, “*I would find it hard to imagine a proficient student who didn't know the dialect*”.

She also linked the learner's dialectical knowledge to their ability to communicate in different situations. She said, “*We expect them to be proficient in the different areas of life, and that's what dictates which variety they use*”.

Luna's statements seem to resonate with the conceptualisation she gave of Arabic proficiency; which is the learners' ability to produce the written and the spoken varieties of Arabic language. She seems to be focusing on two aspects here: a) bi-dialectical competence seems to be deemed a component of communicative proficiency; and b) it relates to the sociolinguistic competence. The first statement corresponds with her understanding of overall proficiency in Arabic which was discussed in section 5.2.1. This would imply a careful consideration of the ‘context sensitivity’ and ‘location specific’ concepts (Kumaravadivelu, 2001: 544), which are central to CLT and post-method pedagogies. The second point has a link to the sociolinguistic competence in Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence in addition to the

model of Bachman (1990). It is defined as ‘the sensitivity to, or control of the conventions of language use that are determined by the features of the specific language use context; it enables us to perform language functions in ways that are appropriate to that context’ (Bachman, 1990: 94).

**Fida** **Fida** has emphasised the importance of the bi-dialectical knowledge as an attribute of communicative proficiency. She gave the following example to express her opinion:

*“Recently I had a Pakistani guy who knows Arabic because he watched lots of programmes on TV, lots of soap operas, and he’s better than native speakers in speaking, and when he came to us, I didn’t feel sorry putting him with the native speakers’ class where they learn fuṣḥā because he was really a native speaker”.*

In her example, the learner spoke a dialect fluently like a native speaker but even though she considered him to have this level of nativeness – and that is normally very hard to achieve – she thought he needed to learn MSA. She also placed him at the level of heritage learners rather than at a level of a non-native beginner. She attributed that to his very high proficiency level of *ammiyyah*. I then asked her if she considers a learner who is very good at MSA but cannot speak a dialect as a proficient user of Arabic. She said, *“You can say he is proficient in Modern standard but you cannot say he is proficient in Arabic altogether, you have to define it”*. In this statement, there is a relationship drawn between the level of proficiency and the knowledge of the dialect, and also there is not something like a complete proficient in Arabic if one of the varieties is missing.

Fida’s comments seem to be focusing on the knowledge of *ammiyyah* as a sign of nativeness but not enough for overall proficiency. This point accords with her understanding of overall proficiency, one of the requirements of which is the knowledge of more than one dialect as discussed in section 5.2.1. In fact, all models of Arabic proficiency conceptualised it in terms of the different varieties of Arabic language; (e.g., Badawi, 1973; Al-Batal, 1997; Younes, 2015) and many others. Her attitude seems to imply that learning the colloquial would reflect how normally native speakers of Arabic

learn Arabic, and that is as Wilmsen (2006: 131) stated, ‘communicative Arabic is largely vernacular Arabic’, and the native speakers learn MSA through the colloquial.

**John** seems to be talking about the relationship between proficiency and the knowledge of a dialect. He said,

*“To be proficient in Arabic you have to be proficient in fuṣḥā and ammiyyha. If you’re proficient in fuṣḥā, that’s not enough”. Again, proficiency means the ability to understand MSA but also to be able to speak a dialect. He also gives an example about why learning a dialect is important:*

*“I mean I was in Jordan and I was in a class where they only teach fuṣḥā and I turned to speak to one of the students and I said “oh, šū ’ismak” (what is your name?). He looked at me “min wyn ’inta” (where are you from?). He looked at me as if I was speaking another language. Now I afterwards spoke to the teacher and I said; listen, imagine you now go to London and you apply for a job in London and somebody said to you, can you speak English? And you said: no but I can read. They will throw you out of the office, get out, get out, you can’t work here. So you know, this is, so we have to, of course, people have to be able to read, we don’t want people to be illiterate, but they have to be able to speak”.*

One point John seems to be focusing on is that the bi-dialectal knowledge is a part of Arabic language as a whole; he does not consider it extra knowledge or a different language. One more point is that speaking is mainly related to the dialect; that is why, in the example he gave about the job interview in London, he talked about speaking as a skill in relation with the dialect only. The person in the example knew *fuṣḥā*, he could have spoken in it but John did not consider that the learner has an oral ability to speak.

Like Luna and Fida, John considers the knowledge of *ammiyyah* as essential for communication and a component of oral proficiency. The aspect he seems to be focusing on is that speaking the dialect is essential for communicative proficiency but is also related to the contextual factors. His point corresponds with Luna’s opinion that the usage of the variety has to be appropriate to the context. This again brings to attention the importance of the sociolinguistic and socio-cultural competences.

What strikes me in John’s responses is that he does not seem to refer to any kind of integration between MSA and the colloquial. He speaks about them as two different

codes. Although as stated in section 4.7.3 he teaches the integrated approach of Younes (1995, 2015), the way he talks about the integration seems different from the way Younes (2015) does. Perhaps, the separation between *ammiyyah* and *fushā*, and the emphasis he puts on speaking *ammiyyah* rather than LESA, is the main divergence from the integrated approach.

In summary, ATs seem to be focusing on the learner's ability in the two varieties of Arabic which is regarded as a component of communicative proficiency. They also focus on some other different aspects; Fida tends to consider the knowledge of the colloquial as a sign of nativeness. Luna and John appear to link the bi-dialectal knowledge to the social appropriacy and contextual factors. This would stress the importance of the sociolinguistic competence and the socio-cultural rules for communication.

#### 6.4.2. Teachers' responses

In their explanations of communicative proficiency, Ts like ATs have put emphasis on the knowledge of the written and the spoken varieties of Arabic alike. Therefore, they were asked to describe how they would conceptualise the concept of communicative proficiency in the light of this knowledge. Their responses were as follows:

**Walid**            **Walid** seems to be looking at Arabic language and its varieties as a continuum rather than as separate categories. He said;

*“In my opinion, the problem does not lie in the fact that Arabic has different variations, it is there in the way those variations are being taught [...] I think those dialects should be included in Arabic syllabi so that learners don't feel or think they're learning different languages but rather they are getting exposed to different registers”.*

According to him, mastering these different registers is essential for determining the learner's level of proficiency. He stated, *“Even if the student spoke the dialect very fluently but wasn't able to read, I can't say he is a proficient user of Arabic”.* Walid perhaps tends to perceive the varieties of Arabic as different registers of the language so that the learner should implicitly and naturally get exposed to them when they learn the language. Therefore, according to him, it does not matter which register the learner

uses,” *even if it was a combination between fuṣḥā and any dialect*”, because eventually what matters, as he said, is being able to “*deliver the message in a way that is understandable for the listener*”.

The aspect that Walid raised seems to be the focus on Arabic as a spectrum of registers, which the learner needs to be aware of but not necessarily be able to produce them all. Yet, if one was missing, an overall proficiency would be affected. In the literature, linguists who conceptualised the notion of Arabic proficiency have looked at it from this perspective of a continuum as well. Again this accords with the view challenging the idea of languages as bounded systems. The result was creating models, such as those of Abboud (1971), Younes (1990, 2015) and Al-Batal (1992) that integrate the spoken and the written varieties in a form that introduces the two codes simultaneously. Younes (2015) chose the Levantine as the representative colloquial of the spoken code that is used by the educated. His model LESA is based on two of the categories that Badawi (1973: 92-93) proposed; ‘*CF the Contemporary Fuṣḥā*’; and ‘*Vernacular of the Educated*’. The difference between this integrated approach and the conceptualisation that Walid offers seems to be in the way this integration would be produced. IA has a skill-basis where reading and writing take place only in CA while listening is an integration of CA and LESA and classroom instructions and conversations would be carried out in LESA only. Walid seems to talk about it in terms of registers where learners can ‘deliver the message’ and make themselves understandable. Also LESA replaces MSA and the colloquial in oral production, while Walid’s statements do not seem to refer to this point.

**Farah**            **Farah** on the other hand, seems to have a very different opinion about the knowledge of dialect. She said;

*“I don’t have prejudice or discrimination, whatever the learner chooses to learn. However, the awareness of different varieties is a plus, it is an added thing so if the student knows that in standard Arabic we say laysa (not in MSA) and in spoken Arabic we say miš (not in some dialects) that’s an additional thing”.*

The flexible approach that features Farah’s opinions about giving the learner the freedom to choose which variety they decide to use continues to cover this aspect as



well; this is why her opinion opposes those of the other participants. Unlike them, she talks about awareness of different varieties being a plus, so the learner's knowledge of when to use *fuṣḥā* and when to use *ammiyyah* implies a more advanced socio-cultural ability in the language, as it relates to appropriacy.

## Iman

**Iman** was asked if she thinks the knowledge of the dialect influences her understanding of Arabic proficiency. She replied,

*“Yes of course it does, knowing a dialect helps even knowing the cultural background of the country or the language itself, how it was influenced historically by different issues”.*

According to Iman, the learners' knowledge of the colloquial does not only influence their level of proficiency but also can be considered a cultural and historical source of the language. She gave an example of one of her student friends who she does not regard as being a proficient user of Arabic because she is not able to speak.

Iman: *“I have a friend who is... who can probably translate a classical text, a very difficult text better than me. You know she is from Indian background, but she cannot speak, so there is no speaking, if someone reads her translation they would say very competent”.*

I: *“She can't speak fuṣḥā or a dialect you mean?”*

Iman: *“Neither, she can't, she has no confidence in speaking so the minute, she has never had that practice and for me, competency comes 'alkafā'ah 'altawāsuliyyah (communicative competency), 'alkafā'ah 'alkitābiyyah (writing competency), tamām? (okay?). So 'alkafā'ah (competency) is different, competency is in what? So, for me the competency has to be in tawāsul (communication). It is more important than in reading or writing”.*

I: *“...and when you say tawāsul (communication) ya'nī (you mean) the ability to speak? Communication? The ability to speak in one variety or in both varieties?”*

Iman: *“In fuṣḥā and ammiyyah, because that's the reality”.*

Iman seems to make a link between the knowledge of a dialect and the concept of communication. A strong emphasis is mainly given to the oral competency at the expense of the writing or reading competency as she classified them. Perhaps she also considers that being able to master and perform a linguistically very high language function such as translation does not mean the learner is proficient, because this kind of competency is less important to her when the communicative abilities are missing. She also requires the communication to happen in both MSA and colloquial; the learner should be able to speak both as in reality.

Two aspects that seem to feature Iman's conceptualisation of communication in the light of the bi-dialectical knowledge would be that, firstly, the knowledge of the colloquial is a cultural source; and that secondly, overall proficiency comprises oral proficiency in the colloquial. The first point of hers accords with some of the ATs' (Luna, Fida) and Ts' (Farah, Walid) observations. Iman seems to be talking about the knowledge of the colloquial as an essential part of communicative proficiency. Going through her responses, one would realise that she tends to speak about Arabic in terms of categories and varieties, and that the learner should know both when it comes to listening and speaking. This would locate her conceptualisation of communication in the models that look at Arabic from a perspective of categories – for example, Blanc (1960), Badawi (1973), Meiseles (1980), Cadora (1965), Bishai (1966), Ibrahim (1986) and Ryding (1991). Yet, Iman does not seem to talk about any varieties or integrated codes between the two, as if she considers a code that is fully MSA and another that is fully the colloquial.

The Ts appeared to look at the bi-dialectical knowledge in its relationship with communication from different lens. Walid tends to see Arabic and its varieties as a continuum and so requires the learner to be aware of both codes of the language – MSA and the colloquial. Iman also seems to consider the knowledge of both varieties essential for conceptualising communicative proficiency but does not refer to an integrated form of them. Farah, in contrast, seems to trust the learner to make their communicative decision, and tends to consider the knowledge of different varieties as a plus.

### 6.4.3. Learners' responses

Learners were asked to share their communicative experience of being in an Arabic-speaking country, whether they speak any colloquial, and in what variety of Arabic they managed to communicate. The responses were as follows:

**Naya**            When **Naya** was asked if the knowledge of the dialect influences her understanding of proficiency; she said:

*“I don't know how you can be called a proficient user of Arabic if you can't understand ammiyyah. I don't think it does proficiency”.*

Naya clearly linked the bi-dialectical knowledge to the level of proficiency the learner has and that resonates with the fact that she does not consider herself a proficient user due to the lack of the dialectical knowledge she has as mentioned in section 5.2.3. Discussed in section 6.2.3, despite her high level of proficiency in MSA, Naya was not able to communicate with Moroccans at the very early stage until she had some immersion and developed her knowledge of some spoken expressions. These two statements that are in harmony with one another seem to emphasise that Naya deems bi-dialectical knowledge as an important competence for communicative proficiency.

**Yaman**            **Yaman** seems to have an interesting opinion regarding using MSA for speaking. He said,

*“Fuṣḥā is very formal, I think maybe can create a barrier between native Arabic colloquial speakers”.*

Yaman is interested in learning MSA and CA as he is keen to learn the Egyptian; nevertheless, he tends not to regard *fuṣḥā* as the best way to be successful in terms of communication. It rather “creates a barrier” with those who try to communicate with others in daily life situations. Drawing on his experience, as mentioned in section 6.2.3, Yaman gives an example about being in a market in Cairo with a friend who tried to speak *fuṣḥā* to a shopkeeper who considered that as distant and strange. Ultimately the

owner of the shop allowed Yaman to talk on behalf of his friend using his broken *ammiyyah*.

In this example, Yaman's friend could not successfully communicate with the shopkeeper because he was speaking in MSA so probably the shopkeeper did not take him seriously or maybe it created a barrier, as Yaman described it, between the two so the communication task was left to Yaman who speaks "broken" Egyptian as he said. Nevertheless, he proved to be more successful than his friend. Again Yaman seems to always refer to the variety that comforts the learner and creates that feeling of harmony with the place; a point mentioned in section 6.3.3.

**Glen** I asked **Glen** if he considers learning the colloquial as essential for communication. He said,

*"I think just from experience, even if you speak a dialect of Arabic, it is very difficult to write you're fluent in Arabic on your CV because if someone says 'okay, fine, you're fluent in Arabic, talk to this Algerian', then you have to explain to them that you are only fluent in some kinds of Arabic which obviously has political and historical reasons".*

Glen raises the issue of the various spoken forms of Arabic and that learning one dialect might not be enough for the learner to be regarded as fluent as he always likes to say. He probably looks at fluency from an idealistic perspective, since it implies the knowledge of MSA and all the dialects. I then asked him which dialect he thinks provides that kind of intelligibility and guarantees understanding when the many dialects are being spoken. He said,

*"If you speak one of those kinds of central Middle Eastern dialect, then you are almost certainly going to be able to talk to people and they'll be able to talk to you. But equally you won't necessarily understand them particularly if they're not making an effort to be understood and at other times if they're choosing to be hard to understand".*

Glen chose to reply to my question by saying "*one of those kinds of central Middle Eastern dialects*" to probably refer to the Levantine and Egyptian dialects, which

implies that North African dialects and the different gulf colloquial might not be the right choice to achieve the understanding and to guarantee successful communication. In his opinion, there seems to be another factor that plays an important role in this kind of communication, which is the native speakers' willingness to communicate with the non-natives and to intend to be understood. Otherwise, communication will be interrupted.

Glen seems to be concerned about being involved in a conversation that is carried out by speakers of different dialects. Researchers took this issue into consideration and suggested a form of Arabic to be taught and produced by the learner in multi-dialectical contexts. Meiseles suggested the ESA category, which is 'the current informal language used among educated Arabs, fulfilling in general their daily language needs. It is also the main means of Arabic inter-dialectical communication, one of its most important trends being its inter-comprehensibility among speakers of different vernaculars' (Meiseles, 1980:126). Ibrahim (1986: 121) stated that 'ESA varieties have wide comprehensibility beyond the geographical areas in which they are spoken'. Younes (2015) also argued that his LESA guarantees what he called 'the inter-dialectical intelligibility' because of the shared bulk of vocabulary and grammatical structures amongst MSA and the Levantine. He also stated that this 'inter-dialectical intelligibility' increases when 'the percentage of shared features increase with education, geographical proximity, exposure to the mass media and entertainment outlets, and interaction with speakers of other varieties' (Younes, 2015: 19). However, no studies have documented ESA or FSA or LESA as mentioned in (3.2.3) and that the inter-dialectical intelligibility seems to remain a vague area as this has not been researched adequately, but rather based on only two small scale research (Ezzat 1974; Ibrahim 1986). On the contrary, a recent research conducted by Soliman (2014) concluded that unless the native speaker is familiar with the colloquial that is being spoken, inter-dialectical comprehension becomes harder to achieve.

#### 6.4.4. Summary of findings

Each group of the participants spoke about the knowledge of the colloquial in relation to different aspects. The AT, Luna links the learner's dialectical knowledge to their ability to communicate in different situations. The other two ATs, Fida and John, consider the knowledge of the dialect a component of which the concept of proficiency consists. The

T, Walid seems to be talking about the varieties of Arabic language as different registers to which the learner should be naturally exposed, not in a combined form. The second teacher Iman in turn thinks that the spoken forms of Arabic are important sources of the language and that the knowledge of a dialect influences the learner's level of proficiency. On the other hand, unlike the other two Ts and ATs, the third T, Farah regards the knowledge of a dialect as an extra knowledge of the language if the variety meant to be learned is MSA.

The Ls' experiences seem emphasise the necessity to acquire the knowledge of the dialect. Naya does not consider herself a proficient user according to the lack of her dialectical knowledge. Yaman considers that a broken version of a dialect seems to achieve more successful communication compared to MSA. Glen raises the issue of mutual intelligibility when more than one spoken form is being used.

Overall, there seem to be some mutual opinions regarding the knowledge of the colloquial in relation with proficiency, communication and culture. Disagreement between the ATs and Ts appears to be about the integration or separation of these varieties.

### **6.5. Summary and discussion**

Responding to the second research question, which is the conceptualisation of the concept of communication in its relationship with proficiency, ATs and Ts showed different perspectives of looking at this relationship. Overall, ATs and Ts seem to consider that communication can happen with a low level of proficiency and therefore a good communicative ability does not reflect a high level of proficiency. The AT, Fida, on the other hand, seems to emphasise that communication requires a high level of proficiency, which contradicts the others' opinions. As for the Ls, Yaman's experience of communicating in his broken *ammiyyah* seems to support the claim that communication can happen with little knowledge of the language, whereas Naya's statements seem to contradict that. Although her level in *fuṣḥā* was advanced, she was not able to communicate successfully due to her lack of bi-dialectal knowledge. Glen considered himself fluent in three varieties of Arabic so he has not given an opinion on that.

Overall, most ATs and Ts seem to be talking about communication as a component of proficiency, but not as an indicator of it. Their statements would imply that any language learner could communicate using the target language at their level, which might be novice, intermediate or advanced. Also, my participants' responses seem to take account of the contextual factors that would control a particular communicative situation. They identified the concept of interaction as a feature of the communicative ability. Their responses imply that if we are talking about meaningful communication, we should consider a number of variables that play the role in carrying out successful communicative tasks that is based on interaction other than the level of proficiency (i.e. the contextual factors, interlocutors, and the variety of Arabic used). An aspect that seemed to be missing in my participants' responses and that I think should contribute to the components of communicative competence is the 'discourse competence' (Canale and Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia *et al.* 1995). It is defined as the ability to produce a 'unified spoken or written text in different genres' (*ibid*: 9). Both register and genre are important aspects of communication related to appropriacy in oracy and literacy.

The participants identified several competences of which communicative Arabic proficiency consists. They can be listed as follows:

- I. *Sociolinguistic competence*: Almost all the participants highlighted the role of this type of competence for communication. It was represented by mainly two aspects; appropriacy and contextual factors. The definitions provided in these two models correspond to the definition of socio-cultural competence offered by Celce-Murcia *et al.* (1995). Defined by Canale (1983: 7), sociolinguistic competence *'addresses the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts depending on contextual factors such as status of participants, purpose of the interaction and norms or conventions of interaction. Appropriateness of utterances refer to both; appropriateness of meaning and appropriateness of form'*.

Appropriacy appears to be the core concept of which this competence consists; it is related to culture, context, form and meaning. Brumfit (2001: 5) related it to language ideology where language use becomes more problematic and negotiable. According to him, appropriacy is an area of language where teaching practices take place in a multi-cultural context and when teaching is 'strongly charged with

ideology'. The reason he gives is that 'a language has grammar, but it is a culture, not a language that has conversations of appropriate behaviour and cultures cross linguistic boundaries' (Brumfit, 2001: 52). The implications of this in an Arabic context would put great emphasis on the variety of Arabic to be used according to the context. Also, it also would highlight the importance of having a good command of cultural awareness that helps the learners maintain social appropriacy.

II. Bi-dialectical competence: As discussed in section 6.4, all participants indicated the need for knowledge of MSA and at least one spoken form of Arabic to successfully communicate in different contexts. I agree with my participants' choice on that and I consider this competence as very significant due to its relationship with the cultural knowledge and with maintaining social appropriacy.

III. Interactional competence: The concept of interaction was identified by many of my participants as featuring the concept of communication. According to Kramsch (1986) it implies the ability to dynamically negotiate intended meanings, clarify one's and the other's intentions, and predict what understanding and misunderstanding would occur between the interlocutors. I am in favour of this definition as I regard using the language as a dynamic process where the interlocutors need to co-construct understanding in a communicative activity.

IV. Cultural competence: As discussed in section 3.4.2 in the literature chapter and in section 6.3 in this chapter, culture appeared as a contested concept in the literature and in the participant responses, being either a fixed system of beliefs and values or a set of social practices. I personally tend to be in favour of Agar's (1994) conceptualisation of culture in its relationship with language; which is basically establishing communicative relations that make meanings. Agar (1994: 28) introduced that by the concept of 'languaculture' to sum up language and culture: he states;

*'language, in all its varieties, in all the ways it appears in everyday life, builds a world of meanings. When you run into different meanings, when you become aware of your own and work to build a bridge to the others, 'culture' is what you're up to. Language fills the spaces between us with sound; culture forges the human*



*connection through them. Culture is in language, and language is loaded with culture’.*

The concept of ‘languaculture’ accords with the intercultural competence proposed by Byram (2008).

Apart from the AT, Luna, my participants did not refer to interacting with learners or native speakers from different cultural backgrounds. Yet, this type of knowledge seems to be a core aspect of Arabic pedagogy because of its relationship to the Arabic sociolinguistic situation. The 2011 study of Shoman indicated the significance of developing learners’ intercultural competence for improving the learner’s ability to recognise and produce different Arabic varieties. It also includes the ability to analyse and interpret stories, poetry and film – the cultural aspects that most of the participants have referred to as linguistic resources of culture. This competence seems to be linked to the bi-dialectical competence since using the variety that is suitable to the situation needs social and cultural awareness. It also seems to be related to the interactional knowledge as well in the spoken, but also the written language. Participants such as the AT, Luna, the T, Walid and the L, Glen pointed to different aspects of literary texts as sources of culture; poems, stories and novels. Kramersch (2006: 251) suggested an important role for the study of literature in developing what she describes as ‘symbolic competence’, for ‘language learners are not just communicators and problem solvers, but whole persons with hearts bodies and minds, with memories fantasies, loyalties, identities. Symbolic forms are not just items of vocabulary or communication strategies but embodied experiences, emotional resonances and moral imaginings’. Consequently, ‘it is through literature that learners can communicate not only with living others, but also with imagined others and with the other selves they might want to become’.

Communicative Arabic language proficiency appears as a complex concept that is culturally contextualised in MSA but also in the different spoken vernaculars. In fact, Byram’s (1997) ICC, Agar’s (1994) ‘languaculture’ and the European use of term ‘plurilingual’ in the ‘framework of reference for pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures’ (2016) all refer to the interfaces between regional, social and cultural aspects

of the language. The repertoires of these models apply in relation to all languages but are particularly acute with Arabic; since these interfaces are evidently complex in the Arabic context. Also, notions of educated use of *ammiyah* and less formal variety of *fushā* seem to call into question the rigid separation of *ammiyah* and *fushā*; when are they separated and for what purpose? It also raises questions about notions of proficiency, and how it can be consistently assessed in the case of separation and integration. These questions are discussed in detail in chapter 7.

## **6.6. Conclusion**

This chapter explored how the participants conceptualised the concept of communication in its relationship to proficiency, and in the light of the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic. It also identified the possible competences of which the concept of communicative proficiency comprises. The participants pointed to the sociolinguistic, cultural, bi-dialectal and interactional competences in their conceptualisations of this concept. The next chapter discusses which of these competences should be tested in an Arabic proficiency test, and the approaches that the participants suggested to assess these competences.

# 7

## Analysis 3 - CAP Construct

### 7.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the aspects of testing communicative proficiency as discussed with the research participants. It explores what considerations the participants deemed essential for testing competences of communicative proficiency. It also sets out to elicit the framework construct through which learners' communicative proficiency could be assessed. The chapter addresses the third research question:

RQ.3. What construct(s) should a testing framework for communicative Arabic proficiency be based upon?

The next two sections present the findings which emerged from the participants' responses to this research question. The first one – with its four sub-sections – considers highlighting the aspects needed for testing communicative proficiency, and discusses the construct on which an assessment framework of Arabic proficiency would be based. The second section provides a discussion of these findings.

The data that emerged point to a number of important aspects needed to assess communicative proficiency. Some of them emerged along the participants' responses to different questions in general; which are interaction and authenticity of test's tasks. Some others were asked about such as culture and dialects. These aspects are listed in this chapter as follows;

- Interactional aspects
- Authenticity
- Cultural knowledge
- Inter-dialectical intelligibility

## **7.2. Aspects of testing communicative proficiency**

This section offers an account of my participants' opinions regarding the above-mentioned four categories. Four main sub-questions were posed to each group of the participants to answer the third research question; the first two that were put to the assessor teachers, and teachers are (Appendix 1: Q 6, 7):

1. How do you describe/understand a communicative Arabic proficiency test?
2. What kind of tasks/activities would you include?

Responding to these questions; interaction and authenticity appeared as two of the aspects considered by the ATs and Ts for designing a communicative proficiency assessment instrument.

The second two questions that were asked to the Ls are (Appendix 2: Q 11, 12):

1. Have you ever been assessed in Arabic? Which assessment tool has been used? What was it measuring?
2. What tasks do you expect a communicative Arabic proficiency test to include?

There was no reference to interaction or authenticity as aspects of proficiency assessment in the learners' responses. Therefore, discussion on interaction and authenticity was confined to the responses of the ATs and Ts only. Cultural knowledge and understanding different dialects were asked about, and the responses of all participants are offered in sections 7.2.3 and 7.2.4.

### **7.2.1. Interactional aspects**

The interactional aspects of language communication were highlighted by most of the participants as shown in section 6.2. Interactional competence, as identified by Kramsch (1986), represents a set of interactional language functions in the different skills, which reflects the learners' ability to negotiate meaning, read between the lines, and understand and respond to an interlocutor. Trying to describe a communicative proficiency (CAP) test, some of the participants pointed out a number of the interactional aspects of Kramsch's (1986) interactional competence, as the following sections show.

## I. Assessor teachers' responses

The ATs were asked to explain what they understand by a CAP test, to reflect on their testing practices, and to identify what they consider essential for this type of assessment. Their responses were as follows:

**Luna** I asked **Luna** to explain what she understands by a CAP test. She talked about testing the reading skill as an example;

*“There will be lots of questions on the different levels of the text; I think an understanding of text level is essential for a proficient. Well, actually partly for communicative too but the proficient should be able to understand everything from specific meanings of words to the over attitude of the text and the gist, and how the argument is developing, not just factual information about it. You will be able to read between the lines as we said”.*

Luna sees that tasks of a proficiency test should not only be aimed at assessing “*factual information*” but also examining the learners’ ability to “*understand everything from specific meanings of words to the over attitude of the text and the gist and [...] and particularly tracing how an argument is formed in a text*”.

Luna seems to be talking about assessing the interaction between the text and the reader who is the learner in this case. Wells (1981), Kramsch (1986) and Young (2011) talked about interaction as a collaborative activity that involves establishing a relationship between the sender, the receiver and the context. This involves the interaction between the written text and the reader as much as it does in the mode of the face-to-face interaction.

**Fida** When I asked **Fida** to describe what she understands by a communicative Arabic proficiency test, she said,

*“You wouldn’t be proficient if you don’t know how to analyse the ideas. It means you’re only trying to understand the text but when you understand the text you will go a level higher to analyse and talk about your feelings otherwise all of your effort will be on understanding the text, for example”.*

Fida seems to be talking about a very high linguistic interactional function in a reading text, which is analysis. According to her, the learner cannot be regarded as proficient if they lack the ability to analyse a text, show their attitudes, and react to it. This implies a form of interaction between the reader and text which, for her, features the different tasks of which a communicative proficiency test would consist. Her opinion seems to resonate with Luna's in this regard. They both talked about the interactional aspects in the textual form of the language and mentioned different language functions that help in observing the learners' interactional ability. Both mentioned that the learner needs to figure out the writer's "attitude", adding "reading between the lines" and following "how the argument is developing" by Luna, and text "analysis" by Fida. As mentioned, the interactional competence as conceptualised by Wells (1981), Kramsch (1986) and Young (2011) is not confined to the oral production but expands to embrace the written input as it also involves a receiver, a sender and a context.

**John** As for **John**, the attributes of a communicative proficiency test appear in his response as follows;

*"I think in the communicative approach... look, I mean the communicative approach for assessment is mainly in the oral. I mean, in the written, where is the communicative approach gonna be in the paper? Ultimately to prove somebody can read something they are going to have to either translate or do comprehension".*

Clearly John's opinion seems to contrast with both Luna's and Fida's. Firstly, John only talks about communication in the oral form of the language, and secondly, he does not specify what he means by communication in a test. The latter corresponds with his responses regarding the conceptualisation of communicative proficiency as in section 6.2.1. In that position, he related his understanding of communication to the learner's ability to communicate in both the written and the spoken forms of the language: but here he seems to be focusing on oral production only. Therefore, I asked him to determine what would be the best way to measure the learner's ability to communicate in oral production; whether it is in the form of one-to-one interview or within a group. He said,

*"I mean generally now we tend to do one-to-one, I have never tried doing it in a group. My worry about that is you wouldn't really have a lot of control over it and it may ... I*

*think there are too many problems. I think the advantages of it may be one or two but the disadvantages of it are greater”.*

John seems to be hesitant about doing an oral test within a group. He tends to favour the one-to-one interviews due to the fact that the teacher would have more control over the test compared to doing it within a group. Overall, John seems to be talking about communication in testing but he does not seem to be necessarily linking it to interaction. Also communication according to him does not take place in the written language since, as he said, *“in the written where is the communicative approach goanna be in the paper?”*

The ATs have spoken about testing communicative proficiency from different perspectives. Luna’s view seems to come in accordance with Fida’s regarding the interaction as a feature to be measured in the communicative proficiency test. This also resonates with their conceptualisation of communicative oral proficiency as discussed in section 6.2.1. They both related communication in the spoken language to the learner’s ability to negotiate intended meaning, react, anticipate and respond to the interlocutors. What seems to be an addition here is deeming interaction as essential in the written form of the language as much as it is in the oral production. On the contrary, John’s view resonates with his conceptualisation of communication (section 6.2.1) that focuses on the learner’s ability to produce the spoken varieties of Arabic, which reflects authentic situations of language use.

## II. Teachers’ responses

The Ts were also asked to identify the attributes of a communicative Arabic proficiency test, and to reflect on their testing practices in that regard. Their responses seem to point to interaction as well; as the following lines show.

**Walid** In his description of the tasks that he would include in a proficiency test, **Walid** mentioned interaction as a measure of oral communication only:

*“So I would say there should be three listening texts, an academic one, a political or media one and the third can be a part of a series episode that expresses a real-life*

*situation. As for speaking, I think it should test the learners' ability to interact, not only to communicate*".

Walid seems to refer to the interactional competence as a measure of learners' communicative skills in speaking. This statement of his, "*the learner's ability to interact not only to communicate*", appears to imply that communication does not necessarily imply interaction and that interaction appears to be a further step of communication. It might mean that interaction is communication plus in other words. Young (2011:430) reflected this point by stating that the fundamental difference between communicative competence and interactional competence is that "IC is not what a person knows, it is what a person does together with others".

A question was asked to **Farah** about what she understands by a  
**Farah** communicative proficiency test. She responded,

*"Testing is a funny thing in language learning, because you learn a language to be able to use it, testing should be a way of... Part of the learning, but it is very hard to determine what do you test the learner on... So, for the diplomats, I would need to test them in specially in C1 and C2, in their listening, reading, their speaking, their ability to negotiate, ability to give interviews, ability to interpret"*.

Farah seems to be questioning the role of assessment in language learning, and probably that is why talking about a proficiency test that is meant to measure the higher level of learners' attainment sounds "*funny*" to her. She tends to be talking about formative assessment as part of the learning process and she thinks that this should be the aim of the test, as her statement shows: "*testing should be a way of... Part of the learning*". On the other hand, the way she undertakes her testing practices for her advanced diplomat students tends to rely on measuring certain functions particularly negotiation and interpretation; the former has to do with productive skills and the latter serves for the receptive ones. She also seems to be suggesting that tests should be developed according to the learning purpose of test-takers themselves. Farah referred to negotiation; which can be considered a benchmark of interaction. Nevertheless, it is not very clear whether this could be measured in the lower levels for example. For me, this statement of hers – "*I would need to test them in specially in C1 and C2, in their listening, reading, their speaking, their ability to negotiate, ability to give interviews, ability to interpret*" – seems to suggest mapping different functions onto different



levels. This would lead to a proficiency test being viewed as an achievement test as Kramersch (1986) and Lantolf and Frawley (1988) pointed out. For example, Kramersch (1986, 367-368) argued against the compelling linearity of the proficiency levels that are based on functions, and accumulative language learning. According to her, neither functions nor notions are acquired in linear progression: 'For example, one needs to talk about past and future activities far before level two'. Focusing on functions has led 'proficiency advocates to underestimate the differences in the way foreign languages conceptualise reality'.

**Iman** was asked to talk about the competences that she would aim to measure in a proficiency test. She said,

**Iman**           *"Interaction is the most important part of all of this, it is how can I, for example when I ask the student when I said to you, 'we do a presentation, this is performance, tamām?' (okay) Excellent, but there is interaction; stop and I ask you questions. Can I ask you, for example, you prepared to speak about something but if I stop you in the middle would you be able to continue? Can I divert your speaking and then you still can continue? So, that's why I have to test the interactional skills".*

For Iman, based on the example she provided, giving a presentation does not reflect the learner's interactional abilities, which she tends to regard as the most important aspect to be considered in a test. She seems to put emphasis on the learner's ability to negotiate when his oral delivery is being interrupted or diverted. There seems to be a clear reference to the interactional competence of Kramersch (1986) in the oral production only. Her opinion seems to resonate with Walid's and the concept of negotiation that Fida has talked about in the advanced levels.

### III. Summary of findings

Overall, interaction is a theme that appeared repeatedly in the data of the ATs and Ts in different ways. Two of the ATs (Luna and Fida) perceived the interactional competence as a construct for measuring the communicative abilities of the Ls even in the written form of the language. On the other hand, the AT, John hesitated to consider interaction between more than two interlocutors in testing, particularly in testing the oral production for the risk of losing control over the process. The Ts also have different

opinions in this regard. Walid's and Iman's opinions match those of the ATs (Luna and Fida) in terms of using the interactional competence as a measure of the learners' communicative skills whereas the T, Farah, relies on measuring certain functions particularly negotiation and interpretation when testing her advanced learners' communicative abilities.

In the literature, linguistic interaction is perceived to be 'a collaborative activity and this applies just as much to the production and interpretation of individual utterances as it does to longer stretches of discourse' (Young, 2011: 430). The interactional competence requires the establishment of a triangular relationship between the sender, the receiver and the context where and when the situation is taking place (Kramsch 1986; Young, 2011). The three factors need to develop what Wells (1981: 46-47) called "intersubjectivity" to guarantee successful interaction in a particular situation to which the communication refers. Therefore, if these factors existed in an interactional situation, whether that was through the written form or the spoken form of the language, intersubjectivity would be the indicator for the successful interaction in the tested situation.

### 7.2.2. Authenticity

Authenticity is meant to resemble the actual usage of a linguistic task in the target language environment. It is a theme that appeared repeatedly in the ATs' and Ts' responses to the third research question.

#### I. Assessor teachers' responses

As mentioned in section 7.2, none of the teachers was asked to talk specifically about authenticity. This theme rather emerged through different sub-questions put to the ATs and Ts in the interview schedule. The theme of authenticity was highlighted in their responses, as the following lines show.

**Luna**        **Luna** provided some examples of the activities she gave in different skills which appear in daily usage:

*"I'm teaching the second year using Arabic; I'm not teaching them grammar anymore because this is a different kind of module; it's on the health context. So, it could be giving advice to a pregnant mother speaking in a role-play. It could be reading a*

*medical report, it could be reading findings from a newspaper about what's going on in health, it could be designing a poster about a health awareness campaign against smoking. So, these are what we call the language-in-action modules”.*

Luna seems to use two terms which can be strong indications to authenticity; that are “daily usage” and “language in action”. She points out that this aspect should be considered in the test’s tasks, which reflect the use in daily life; such as reading a passage in a newspaper or speaking as or to an expert.

**Fida** **Fida** also gave examples about the tasks that she usually conducts in her class;

*“If they’re going to work we tell them to do an interview for the work as well, so we tell them to prepare and come and they will be the interviewed”, and, “We do a TV programme and in this programme, there is like two people arguing and we’re going to discuss their argument and which one you support, and why he supports this point of view not the other point of view”.*

The examples that Fida provided seem to be also taken from the daily life situations. They are based on putting the student in a hypothetical situation that usually happens in day-to-day life such as a job interview, or a political debate in a daily show.

**John** **John** also offered the characteristics of the sort of activities he usually employs in his class and also of a proficiency test’s tasks that he would do.

*“We want our students to perform the language in a way that is natural and so it has to be based on real-life and when I mean real-life that’s a very wide... you know, framework, but as I said to you, asking them to listen to a news broadcast that is a real-life situation because in real-life you switch on the television and you see that”.*

John regards the term real-life as a wide framework that can have a range of meanings but, again, he seems to relate the real-life activities to daily life situations; to the activities that can be accomplished in a normal day; listening to a news broadcast for example. For him, the test’s tasks and classroom activities should be authentic because

it is a requirement to teach students how to perform naturally. Describing his understanding of a communicative proficiency test, John said,

*“The communicative test of proficiency has to be, has to reflect reality. Now, the reality here is that they have to be able to read in fuṣḥā and obviously at different levels. They have to be able to speak in a dialect”.*

In this statement, John seems to be linking real-life tasks to the bi-dialectical knowledge as well. The reality that the test task should reflect is the usage of the different varieties of Arabic, whether written or spoken.

The three ATs appear to have similar opinions regarding authenticity being a requirement for the tasks, which a communicative proficiency test could consist of. John made a clearer link to the fact that the tasks should reflect the reality of how Arabic language is used in daily life; namely the different varieties in different contexts.

As discussed in section 3.2.3, Brown (2004: 28) put emphasis on the authenticity of the test’s tasks and that their features should correspond to the way the target language is used in actual situations. As also mentioned in section 3.2, proponents of bi-dialectical basis of the models of Arabic proficiency have considered the issue of how Arabic is actually used in real-life according to the contexts and styles. Blanc (1960), Badawi (1973), Ryding (1991) and Younes (1990, 2015) are examples. Bachman and Palmer (1996: 24) argued for authenticity as a crucial aspect and ‘a critical quality of language tests’, and that it has a potential effect on test-takers’ performance. Including authentic tasks in an Arabic proficiency test appears to imply that the test should not be confined to tasks that assess one variety only (MSA or the colloquial). Neglecting one of them would not reflect how language is actually used in different situations.

## II. Teachers’ responses

In their responses to different questions regarding their testing practices and the way they perceive a communicative proficiency test of Arabic to be, the teachers have pointed to the authenticity of a test’s tasks as well.

**Walid** **Walid** emphasised that the “*test’s tasks should be authentic*” and the activities vary in this regard. They can be listening to a “*programme in*

*which the presenter is speaking fuṣḥā and the guest is speaking the educated spoken form of Arabic” which is the case of “most of our TV programmes”.*

Walid’s opinion clearly points to using authentic test tasks in testing, corresponding with the ATs’ opinions; but his opinion also seems to closely reflect John’s in terms of relating authenticity to the varieties of Arabic in different contexts. Despite this, the only difference is that John mentioned MSA and the colloquial while Walid talked about MSA and ESA. This difference would reflect the reality of the contested opinions amongst the linguists in this regard, as the literature shows; but also reflects what varieties each one has taught. As described in section 4.7.3, John is the only participant who teaches LESA following Younes’s (1990, 2015) IA, whereas Walid taught MSA, CA, and the colloquial separately in different institutions. As discussed in section 3.2, some of the models that conceptualised Arabic proficiency argued for the existence of one variety between MSA and the colloquial, and it is basically an *ammiyyah*-oriented one. These models are those of Cadora (1965), Ibrahim (1986), Ryding (1991) and El-Hassan (1977). Only the model of Bishai (1966) considered his proposed modern inter-Arabic variety to be *fuṣḥā*- based.

**Farah** In her description of the characteristics of a communicative proficiency test, **Farah** said,

*“Tests have two main functions; one is assessing the student’s learning - have they learned what we really want them to learn? The second one is the performance so in the exam we give the students... they have to give a presentation which is a real-life task because sometimes you present. They have to ask questions; we call it social interaction. So yeah, that’s an essential part to incorporate in the exam”.*

According to Farah, the test is not only a measure of learners’ different knowledge but also a reflection of the quality of the application of this knowledge and skills in a daily life situation in the environment of the target language. An example she provided is “*giving a presentation*” with the learner’s willingness and readiness to discuss and negotiate further on the topic of this presentation as this is how tests are designed normally. In her statement, she seems to be focusing on an idea of two complementary sides of a language test and that test tasks should take into account; knowledge and

performance that incorporates interaction. Farah's opinion resonates with Walid's in terms of the authenticity of test tasks although they tend to perceive it from different perspectives. While Walid related it to the use of different varieties of Arabic for testing, Farah does not seem to specify what she means by "real-life tasks" apart from exemplifying it by giving a presentation.

**Iman** Describing what she understands by a communicative proficiency test, and the type of tasks she would expect it to include, **Iman** said,

*"Speaking should involve the dialect, depending on which dialect the students are comfortable with [...] you test fuṣḥā as well, listening and speaking, listening also does the same thing, and then the variety of Arabic as well, the context, the topics you're talking about, there is media Arabic, there is the Arabic fuṣḥā that we hear in different conversations, and there is fuṣḥā that we don't hear at all; there is fuṣḥā that's not actually, there are lots of scenarios we hear, like we hear in the cartoons, for example. The language of the cartoons, the way they speak is not realistic... like that's not how people speak in streets, if it's a way of teaching children I understand but that's a kind of fuṣḥā that's not spoken, that's not used".*

In her statement, Iman seems to emphasise the assessment of the variety in actual use. According to her, testing should include the colloquial and the type of *fuṣḥā* that is actually spoken. She made a strong statement against testing the *fuṣḥā* used in the television cartoons, as an example of the *fuṣḥā* that is not used in reality, as she stated. Her opinion seems to correspond to those of the AT, John and the T, Walid regarding relating actual language use to the Arabic varieties. She has also made reference to the "context" and "topic" which might indicate the language registers and the appropriacy of using the language in a particular social context.

### III. Summary of findings

Authenticity is a theme that appeared repeatedly right through the data of the ATs and Ts. All participants from the two groups seem to share similar opinions. The ATs tend to be talking about authenticity as a characteristic that should be considered when writing the test's tasks. Authenticity here seems to be represented by the daily life situations and the activities that can be accomplished in a normal day like watching a television show or reading a newspaper. They all seem to talk about activities that

require high-level processing skills. Examples like ordering a meal, buying bread, or asking for directions were missing. Either they considered these as taken-for-granted activities or it is because these can be conducted mainly in *ammiyyah*, and most of them teach and assess *fushā* only. Similarly, the Ts thought that all test tasks should be authentic and this authenticity can be represented by the activities that bring together different aspects of the language such as religion, media, culture, and history.

In the literature of language testing and assessment, authenticity appears as an essential indicator to the test validity; which is a key factor for making an efficient test. According to Fulcher and Davidson (2007: 6) content validity refers to ‘any attempt to show that the content of the test is a representative sample from the domain that is to be tested’. Testing Arabic proficiency considering authentic test tasks implies testing the learner’s ability in the two varieties of Arabic; MSA and the colloquial. However, careful consideration should be given to the way these could be tested, particularly when it comes to which variety of Arabic is to be tested in each skill. They could be included in listening and speaking basically since reading and writing can only be carried out in *fushā*.

### 7.2.3. Cultural knowledge

As discussed in section 6.3, culture was perceived by most of the participants as a unified, fixed category that incorporates a set of collective norms, behaviours and traditions. They all focused on social appropriacy and socio-cultural elements as indications of the cultural knowledge. Only the AT, Luna conceptualised her understanding of culture in an intercultural framework. I also asked them if they think this competence they mentioned (be it cultural or intercultural) should be assessed. Their responses were as follows:

#### I. Assessor teachers’ responses:

The ATs were asked to explain whether they think the learners’ cultural knowledge should be assessed. In their responses to this question, some identified some ways of assessing this competence in a classroom or through tasks. They were as follows:

**Luna** According to **Luna**, the social cultural aspect of the language should be taught and assessed. The assessment of the learners' intercultural knowledge can be conducted by many ways; it could be through measuring their *"interacting with different people from different backgrounds,"* where students are supposed to *"know how to talk differently in different registers"*. It might *"come out in the scenarios you give"* so, in a speaking test, an examiner would have two types of tasks; *"the formal one like job interview, and then you have another informal one to see whether the students can switch their level from formal to informal"*; also the way the learner develops an argument should be measured and *"that's culture"*, according to her. The reason she gave is that *"the way you do it in Arabic is not the same as how you do it in English. In English you state this and you say you did use this, while in Arabic you might say the same thing five times; so that is cultural, and that would be part of it"*.

Luna is the only participant who clearly indicated the intercultural knowledge as an essential component of Arabic proficiency. In the literature of foreign language education, many models were designed to identify and assess the aspects of intercultural competence, such as those of Byram (1997), Sercu (2004) and the European 'framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures' (2012). In the latter, the knowledge of culture consists of different aspects including the knowledge of 'the role of culture in intercultural relations and communication', which Luna seems to point out to. There is no reference in Luna's data that shows how she understands intercultural knowledge; be it between the different Arabic cultures, or among Arabic learners who come from different backgrounds. Her statement above *"interacting with different people from different backgrounds"* could imply both; non-native learners of Arabic and native learners from different Arab cultures.

**Fida** **Fida** was asked whether the cultural knowledge as she described should be assessed in a proficiency test; she said,

*"Yes and the cultural knowledge is very important as well because you're not learning the language itself, you should also be learning about where it comes from. And why this language and how this language be applied and where it can be applied"*.

According to her, learning the language involves learning about *"where it comes from"*, and here culture is the major resource. She also seems to be talking about whether the



students can apply the language they learn appropriately. I then asked her in what way she would assess this cultural knowledge. Her response was;

*“Maybe in speaking I would concentrate on the family and the culture and religion. Maybe for the writing I would say, I will tell them to talk a little bit about the differences between Arab countries: if you want to go abroad, what you would do? Have you been to an Arab country? So see how much he knows about the culture itself through the piece of writing”.*

Fida seems to point out testing the cultural knowledge through the language, and particularly through the productive skills; speaking and writing. The themes she tends to focus on are family and religion, which represent social life, and also on the learner’s awareness of the cultural differences amongst the Arab countries. When Fida explained what she understands by the cultural knowledge, her responses covered a wide spectrum of social life aspects such as family, values and religion. Yet, as noted in section 6.3.1, she did not conceptualise it within an intercultural framework. Unlike when talking about assessment, Fida seems to be talking about the learners’ knowledge of the *“differences between Arab countries”* which would imply some intercultural elements. In fact, the European framework of reference for pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures (2016) stated that the learner should have the “knowledge about cultures which are the object of formal learning, which belong to other learners in the class or which one finds in the immediate environment”. This statement seems to accord with Fida’s point regarding the learner’s knowledge of the differences between Arab countries. This aspect reported in the European framework is deemed an essential component of the intercultural knowledge.

**John** also thinks that the cultural aspect of the language should be taught and assessed:

*“I think we should assess it through the language as we were talking about before”.*

The assessment of the cultural knowledge according to John should be conducted through the linguistic tasks. I asked him to explain how he usually assesses the cultural aspects in his classroom. He said,

*“What we do is we do a picture presentation so, for example, I might show them a picture of Jerusalem. They have to talk about Jerusalem, why is it important to different*

*religions? To see if they know about it and of course it is important that they need to know the name of the places, they do need to know qubbat al-sahrah (Dome of the Rock), hā'it al-mabkā (Wailing Wall), kanīsat al-qiyāmah (Al Qiyama Church), all this they need to know all of these in Falastīn [Palestine] particularly the ones who were going there”.*

The skill he seems to use for testing culture is speaking, and that is to be conducted in an interactive way in the classroom. The themes he tends to focus on in this example are religious, historical and also contemporary knowledge of certain places and names. In his reply to the way the culture can be assessed in a proficiency test, he said;

*“You could contrive some scenarios where you know ... to see how they would manage, what type of Arabic they would use in such a situation or, I don't know, just to see if they have the sensitivity of speaking to an Arab using some culture”.*

John seems to be talking here about the criteria on which the assessment of culture should be based; one of them is the learner's appreciation of the culture and the other one is the type of language used in a certain cultural context. John's statements would refer to the knowledge of Arabic culture only. In the literature, when conceptualising culture and how to be assessed, models would consider three or four dimensions in this regard. For instance, the European framework of reference for pluralistic approaches to languages and cultures (2012) identifies knowledge, skills and attitude. Chen and Starosta (1998), for example, added the personality traits to these three dimensions.

Overall, ATs agreed that it is essential to test culture in an Arabic proficiency test. However, each of them referred to the aspects that they think the culture comprises. Luna pointed out that the intercultural knowledge can be tested in the written language as well as in the oral skills. Fida referred to the productive skills for assessing the intercultural competence. John on the other hand spoke about testing “*some culture*” which is basically about “*religions and names of places*” through speaking.

## II. Teachers' responses:

The same questions were asked to the Ts. They were required to reflect on their practices or to suggest ways for testing the Ls' cultural knowledge if they think it should be tested. Their responses were as follows:

**Walid** In his response to whether he considers that the cultural aspect of the language should be assessed, **Walid** said,

*“Yes of course it should be assessed, yet as for Arabic we need a linguistic proficiency test at the first place and then we can think of adding the cultural element to it”.*

In this statement, Walid points out the cultural knowledge to be assessed in a proficiency test, but also seems to refer to the fact that an Arabic proficiency test that measures the linguistic abilities does not exist yet.

He added;

*“The majority of Arabic learners are meant to understand the culture, politics or media of the middle East, and that’s mainly what the proficiency test should measure”.*

His response perhaps indicates that a proficiency test should be based on the Ls’ communicative needs for learning Arabic. This is probably why it should aim at assessing the Ls’ cultural and social knowledge, *“politics and media of the Middle East”*. Walid then gave some examples on how Arabic culture would be reflected in a proficiency test. He stated,

*“I start with reading comprehension which should contain three reading texts. One of them is a report or a piece of news; it can be political or economic, the other a short story or a small chapter of a novel in a form of dialogue that involves different characters. The third can be a literary text; it can be a piece of a contemporary poem like those written by Nizar Qabbnī, Mahmoud Darwīsh or Najī Al-‘alī. The purpose is testing his (the learner’s) cultural and linguistic competences”.*

Walid’s way of testing the cultural competence seems to be through genres in which culture could be embedded like literature, poems, arts, media, politics or economics. His response perhaps indicates that culture can be assessed through the language itself by including different genres in a proficiency test. As noted in section 6.3.2, Walid’s understanding of the culture refers to the knowledge of the culture of the target language (Arabic), but does not seem to be confined to one Arab state. In the literary example he has given, he mentioned *“Najī Al-‘alī”*, a Palestinian cartoonist whose

drawings reflect his criticism of Israel and the Arab regimes; “*Nizar Qabbnī*”, a Syrian poet and diplomat who is famous for his poems in politics and love; and “*Mahmoud Darwīsh*”, who is considered the Palestinian national poet and noted as the resistance poet. Yet Walid does not clearly speak about the intercultural aspects of the language either in teaching or in testing. His opinion seems to resonate with John’s in terms of focusing on the cognitive side of culture that is confined to the knowledge.

**Farah** Farah was also asked if she thinks the cultural knowledge should be assessed.

Farah: “*I am not sure how practical it is to include it in a proficiency exam*”.

I: “*So you’re saying it should be taught but not necessarily assessed?*”

Farah: “*It is tricky to which extent you can assess it, the basic ones yes, then you get trapped in the details*”.

Farah seems to be hesitant when it comes to assessing the cultural knowledge; she does not think it is practical because the term ‘culture’ is very broad and detailed and might be a move away from assessing the language itself. She gave an example about the themes of the culture that she might assess;

*“One aspect for the culture and language is the use of terminology and idioms, so in Arabic everything is ‘lā rāsī, or min ‘aynī (at your service)<sup>9</sup>, which doesn’t have the same meaning in English if you translate it literal translation. So, if I want to play like a tricky, I could include a few examples of idioms and terminologies and ask the students in which context do you use this?”*

Unlike all other participants, Farah seems to be talking about assessing the culture in a separate test and probably that is the reason she is hesitant to have such kind of assessment. The example she provided shows that the theme she would consider to assess is the usage of a particular terms and expressions in Arabic which may not have equivalents in English for example. Again Farah is talking about a task devoted only for examining the culture behind certain expressions, and using them in an appropriate context.

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<sup>9</sup> ‘lā rāsī, or min ‘aynī: are basically Levantine expressions which literally mean “on my head, from my eye” and are equivalent to the English expression “it is a pleasure to help, or at your service”.

**Iman** **Iman** was also asked about her opinion regarding assessing the culture and about the way of doing that. She said;

*“The culture maybe through topics but not necessarily through a cultural test separately”.*

Iman seems to be talking about assessing the cultural knowledge through language. I asked her to give me an example about the way she usually assesses culture. She said;

*“I’ll give you an example, very nice example. When I gave a student a piece to translate from Arabic to English and I said ... and it was talking about Ramadan, and in that test it said, “Wa ba’dū al-nās, tamām? ba’d al-’iftār yusallūna al-mağrib” (and some people pray “the sunset” prayer after breaking their fast). Imagine what translation they had. A good translator who is aware of the culture says they do mağrib (sunset) prayer, and some people say they pray to the west, so for me they don’t know what mağrib (sunset) is so I tested the culture as understanding the prayers of Muslims”.*

Iman gave an original example about testing the culture through translation. The word “*mağrib*” has many meanings in MSA; the west (as a direction), Morocco, sunset and a name of a prayer. Of course, the context determines which meaning should be used. From asking students to translate one word in a given context, a religious aspect of the culture was tested. So, she seems to be talking about testing culture through testing a language function. The three Ts have different opinions regarding the assessment of the cultural knowledge. Walid and Iman considered it to be part of a proficiency test. Walid suggested testing it through various genres, while Iman considered the assessment through translation. Farah, on the other hand appeared hesitant in talking about the assessment of culture, as she perceives it to be a separate test and to avoid going into the cultural huge spectrum of details.

### III. Learners’ responses:

Learners were asked to give an opinion on whether they expect a proficiency test to be testing their knowledge of Arabic culture. Their responses were as follows:

**Naya** I asked **Naya** if she thinks it is important to assess the cultural aspect of the language. She replied,

*“To some extent, it’s just important to see if a person can reply appropriately in this respect. It doesn’t mean a thick knowledge of history or something, but obviously yeah”.*

So according to Naya, culture should be tested, but the way she described culture is confined to *“the use of certain expressions correctly”* and that for her *“would be a good enough indicator of somebody’s cultural knowledge”*.

Like the T, Farah, Naya’s opinion seems to point to testing social appropriacy, mainly in speaking, exemplifying that by certain expressions. Again her opinion on what cultural aspects to be tested in a proficiency test accords with the way she conceptualises the notion of culture as explained in section 6.3.3). The knowledge of social expressions could reflect the learner’s cultural knowledge and that what is to be tested, according to her.

In his response to the assessment of the cultural knowledge, **Yaman** said;

*“I mean from the perspective of a company, it is in the interest to be assessed because ultimately if they’re hiring someone who has no awareness of the culture, etiquettes and all these kind of things, it is probably gonna cause problems for them. So I think within their interest, yeah, particularly depending on the situation of that country, I mean in times where there is political or economic problems, I think these kinds of things would become much more significant because the societies are generally that much more divided anyway”.*

In Yaman’s statement, there are certain contexts where testing culture is essential. The first one is when a person is considering relocating to work for a company in one of the Arab countries. The other one is when the country considered for relocation is experiencing economic and political hardships. He seems to be referring to the importance of the cultural awareness for professional interests

**Glen** Glen’s opinion regarding testing the cultural aspect of the language was as follows;

*“I don’t know. Perhaps, the reason I hesitate is that it sounds like it is going to get into anthropology, which is, you know even ethnography, which is a whole different thing”.*

Like the T, Farah, Glen was hesitant to talk about testing culture, and interestingly for a similar reason; that is the fear of moving away from testing the language itself to get into “*anthropology*”. He seems also to be talking about a separate cultural test and probably that is the reason behind his hesitance.

The three Ls seem to have different opinions regarding testing cultural knowledge. While Glen seemed reluctant to talk about a test that considers cultural elements; Yaman spoke about the necessity of this knowledge for survival in dangerous places and also for those who consider relocation for work. Naya seems to be talking about a bottom line of testing culture, which is the social expression. Nevertheless, none of the Ls talked about testing communication across different Arab cultures or with learners of Arabic who come from different backgrounds.

#### IV. Summary of findings

Clearly, the participants of each group looked at testing cultural knowledge from different perspectives and, therefore, the opinions converged sometimes and diverged at other times. The ATs agreed that the cultural knowledge should be assessed through language in a proficiency test; and each of them gave a different example on the way it could be assessed. Luna suggested assessing it through language registers and in activities that show if the learners interact appropriately in a certain context. Fida thought it can be assessed through different language skills; where each skill can include certain topics that contain cultural aspects. John recommended introducing activities and scenarios that reflect the learners’ sensitivity towards culture.

It does not seem that there is an agreement amongst the Ts in this regard. While Walid and Iman think the cultural knowledge should be assessed through language, Walid suggested activities and different registers, and Iman thought that topics and language functions like translation could be a good way. In her turn, Farah showed hesitance towards assessing culture that is for the issue of impracticality, as she seems to be talking about a separate cultural test. The Ls also have different opinions and foci. Naya and Yaman both think that it should be assessed but what Naya understands by assessing this culture is different from Yaman’s perception. Yaman thinks testing

culture is sometimes an interest and a necessity, while Naya's opinion is testing social expressions as an indicator of cultural knowledge. Glen's point of view, on the other hand, matches Farah's (the teacher) view. He is hesitant to talk about testing cultural knowledge as I assume he looks at it as a separate cultural test, and he sees it moving away from the main goal to a different place.

Overall, only the two ATs, Luna and Fida have regarded it essential to assess the intercultural aspects of the language, whereas others only talked about the cultural competence. In the educational realm, cultural competence was defined as 'the ability to successfully teach students who come from different cultures other than your own' (Diller and Moule, 2005: 2). This definition also implies aspects of intercultural interaction particularly in a classroom where learners come from different backgrounds: or at least they come from a background that is different from the teacher's. Sercu (2004: 74) pointed out the importance of assessing intercultural competence as part of the learning components for two main reasons: firstly, teachers and learners will 'realise that all communication in a foreign language is intercultural' and therefore, teaching practices 'should promote the acquisition of intercultural competence'. Secondly, it would enhance the role of washback effect on teaching intercultural competence. Teachers tend to test what they teach and, therefore, testing the intercultural competence would promote teaching its aspects and not limit the teaching to the cultural knowledge of the target language (Sercu, 2004: 75). The other participants' opinions (the AT, John, and the Ts, Walid, Iman, and Farah) would locate culture in the models that focused on the sociolinguistic knowledge as part of communicative proficiency such as the models of Canale and Swain (1980) and Bachman (1990). These models consider cultural references, registers and dialects as the components of the cultural knowledge the learners are required to be aware of; or, in the socio-cultural competence included in the model of Celce-Murica *et al.* (1995) that incorporates the contextual factors and social appropriacy.

#### 7.2.4. Inter-dialectal intelligibility

Assessing the participants' responses, one can identify their tendencies to relate the different aspects that have been discussed (proficiency, communication, culture and interaction) to the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic, and the bi-dialectal knowledge.



Therefore, I asked them how many dialects they expect the learner of Arabic to be aware of, and to be assessed on. Their responses were as follows:

I. Assessor teachers' responses

The ATs were asked whether they think that the learner's knowledge of one dialect is enough to be taught and assessed. Their replies are shown in the following lines:

**Luna**        **Luna**, as discussed in section 5.2.1, put significant emphasis on the learners' knowledge of the dialect in order to be called proficient users of Arabic. She added to that what she called the "*passive and active knowledge of skills*" by which she means that the learner is not only required to "*be actively competent using a dialect but also to have the precept of understanding of some other dialects*". Her argument was supported by reflecting on her experience as a learner of Arabic and a speaker of the Egyptian dialect where she stated that,

*"It's no good for me only speaking Egyptian. I need to be able to understand Iraqi, even though I might reply in Egyptian, and in my inter-Arab relation, this is the most successful way of communicating"*.

Despite that, when she was asked about her opinion regarding learning and being tested on more than one dialect being a requirement for the learner at the level of proficient user, she replied, this is "*an unrealistic requirement, and I would not agree with it at all*".

Luna seems to be talking about the importance of mastering one colloquial for speaking but also being able to understand other dialects in the context where different native speakers from different countries are involved. Based on her experience as a non-native speaker of Arabic, she assumes that her knowledge of Egyptian would allow her to understand other dialects even if her response was in Egyptian. Therefore, she tends to consider that requiring the learners to speak more than one dialect is rather "*unrealistic*".

**Fida**        **Fida** also considers the knowledge of the dialect a characteristic of the proficient user of Arabic, as mentioned in section 5.2.1. I asked her about the number of dialects she expects a proficient user of Arabic to have.

I: *“Do you think the knowledge of one dialect is sufficient to say they’re proficient users of Arabic?”*

Fida: *“No”*.

I: *“How many dialects would you require?”*

Fida: *“I would say 2 dialects but not very close to each other like not Palestinian and Lebanese, like Lebanese and Moroccan, Lebanese and Egyptian like at least half of the Arab countries”*.

I: *“Why do you think one dialect is not enough?”*

Fida: *“Because you know especially like I was looking at the Moroccan dialect, I can see there is lots of fuṣḥā inside the Moroccan dialect so if the student knows two dialects he will know the relation between fuṣḥā and colloquial as well”*.

Fida seems to be making a strong statement about learning more than one dialect. She requires the proficient user of Arabic to have the knowledge of two dialects. She also specifies that the two dialects should not be semantically close to each other like the Lebanese and Syrian. The reason behind her attitude is that there is a greater opportunity for the learner to explore the relationship between the dialects and MSA, which probably leads to a better understanding. I then asked her which dialect she would test in this case, she said, *“I would include some choice base, to choose one dialect and answer the questions”*.

Unlike Luna’s view, the learner according to Fida should have the knowledge of two dialects to say he has reached the proficiency level, but in terms of testing he is free, he can choose the dialect that he feels more comfortable being tested with.

**John** Similarly, I asked **John** whether the dialectical knowledge of Arabic should be assessed in a proficiency test. He said,

*“The communicative test of proficiency has to reflect reality. Now, the reality here is that they have to be able to read in fuṣḥā and obviously at different levels. They have to be able to speak in a dialect”*.

The statement implies that the knowledge of one dialect of the learner’s choice should be assessed in terms of oral production. The reason he gave is that reality in the Arabic context implies using MSA for reading and the dialect for speaking. I asked him if he favours any dialect for any reason. He has given an example as a response:

*“I don’t think it matters that much and I’ll tell you why because what we need to understand Rahaf is that, okay we have to – well, I compare it to Apple computers and Microsoft; Apple is fuṣḥā, it is one system, ammiyyah is Microsoft. Each ammiyyah uses that but the difference is one is Toshiba, one is Dell, one is this... but if you think of it, all of these dialects use miš (not in ammiyyah) not laysa (not in fuṣḥā), they all use šuft (I saw in ammiyyah) not raʔaytu (I saw in fuṣḥā)”.*

In this example, John seems to explain how he understands the difference between MSA and the different spoken dialects through making three points; a) MSA, for him has a fixed system, while all the dialects has a more flexible system; b) his example seems to imply that all vernaculars share one system that is distinctive from the *fuṣḥā* system; and c) there is one way of saying a word in *fuṣḥā* (raʔaytu = *I saw*), and a different way of saying the same word in all vernaculars (šuft). I personally agree with the first statement and disagree with the last two. I think that MSA has a fixed grammatical system and most probably resists syntactic or lexical changes, influenced by other languages. On the other hand, there is not always one shared way of saying things in all the vernaculars. For example, “miš”, which is one of John’s examples, can be “mū” in the Syrian colloquial, and “mši” in the Moroccan.

Perhaps his statement seems to be talking about the semantic and linguistic inter-rules that can be shared among the different dialects. This implies that the knowledge of one dialect, regardless of what it is, would guarantee some understanding of the other dialects. Another reason he gave to support his claim is;

*“Arabs themselves only know one dialect; you know how many Arabs know more than one dialect? But that doesn’t mean that they can’t understand. Maybe Moroccan is a bit difficult but generally they understand each other you know”.*

John seems to be saying that if the knowledge of one dialect allows the learner to understand other dialects at some level, why would they be learning more than one? He brings Arabs into the comparison, and states that most Arabs do not have the knowledge of more than one dialect but they can still understand each other. It gets harder when the interlocutor is speaking Moroccan and the same happens with the non-natives as well. At the end, he added; *“Generally speaking, it is probably better to learn one of the central white dialects probably”.*

John does not specify which one dialect should be learned but he gives an option of learning one of what he called ‘*the central white dialects*’. This probably refers to the Levantine and Egyptian Arabic dialects. The gulf and the North African dialects seem to be excluded. He also seems to exclude the local aspects that come within each dialect; that means certain expressions or ways of pronunciation that different groups of people in any Arab country have, and probably that is what he meant by “white”. Or: that a “*white dialect*”<sup>10</sup> might be a reference to any spoken form of Arabic that is free of any signs of localism of a certain country.

Overall, the ATs seem to have different opinions about the number of dialects, a learner should be aware of or tested on. Luna reflects on her experience of learning Egyptian which was sufficient for her to understand other dialects. Fida on the other hand tends to suggest two dialects from different geographical locations to be learnt and tested. John seems to agree with Luna in terms of just one dialect, regardless of which one it is. He further seems to suggest that learning one colloquial guarantees understanding the others in an inter-Arab setting since the form being spoken would be free of localism. This type of Arabic that John seems to mention here refers to ESA; which several models have considered, such as those of Cadora (1965), Bishai (1966), Ibrahim (1986), Mitchell (1986) and Ryding (1991). Mitchell (1986: 7) describes ESA as the variety of Arabic created and maintained by ‘the interplay between written Arabic (*fushhā*) and vernacular Arabic(s)’ and that when NSs from different Arab countries meet they modify their speech to ESA in the interests of mutual intelligibility (Mitchell, 1986: 9).

## II. Teachers’ responses

The same question was posed to the Ts. They were asked to give an opinion about the number of dialects they expect a proficient learner to understand and to be tested at. They replied as follows:

**Walid** does not require the proficient learner to know more than one dialect. According to him, “*we should not expect from the learner of*

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<sup>10</sup> This term is informal and used mainly in media or by some Arabic teachers to describe the produced spoken forms of Arabic that are neutral from particular local features.

*Arabic what we, as natives can't do*". He did not refer here to just speaking the dialects, but also to understanding them. From his perspectives *"this is not realistic and should not be required either"*. The reason he gave was *"we as Syrian native speakers can't understand all other dialects at the same level"*.

He sees a proficient user of Arabic as the one who *"learns fuṣḥā and the dialect of the country he's planning to stay in"* which, in a way, are *"the tools that will enable them to learn the dialect of the new country"* in case they moved to another Arab country.

Walid, like the ATs (Luna and John), tends to regard the knowledge of one dialect as enough for the proficient learners to know. He further seems to consider it unrealistic to require the non-native speakers to be able to do what the natives themselves cannot do. However, in his last statement *"we as Syrian native speakers can't understand all other dialects at the same level"*, he seems to assume some inter-dialectal intelligibility or 'mutual intelligibility' (Ibrahim, 1986) among the speakers of different dialects.

**Farah** I asked **Farah** whether one dialect is sufficient for the learner to understand and to be assessed on. She said,

*"One variety is enough. If it is a dialect, it is a dialect, MSA then MSA. So one of them, you give tolerance to whatever variety and the rest of the exam should be in standard Arabic"*.

Farah's opinions continue to reflect her flexible and tolerant approach towards the variety of Arabic a student chooses to learn and use. As discussed in section 6.2.2, Farah tends to suggest that it is up to the learner to decide which variety of Arabic they choose to communicate in or to be tested on, whether it is MSA or the colloquial. My question was about the 'dialect' and her answer was *"any variety"*. Nevertheless, in the following statement she seems to show some flexibility with the knowledge of two varieties if the student is comfortable about using them and if it is demanded in a certain context. She said,

*"We have the most recent expression, the educated spoken Arabic, which is a simplified MSA and closer to regional variety so that would be the ideal thing. However, it again depends on the learner and the context"*.

Generally speaking, the test for her should measure one variety, but the variety she accepts for testing the oral production is the educated spoken Arabic, which is *ammiyyah*-oriented. As mentioned in sections 3.2 and 7.2.2, ESA represents the informal language used among educated Arabs, to generally fit into their daily language needs. El-Hassan (1977), Blanc (1960), Badawi (1973), Meiseles (1980), Ryding (1991), and Younes (2006, 2015) have proposed ESA as the variety to be taught and tested in their pedagogical models.

**Iman** **Iman** was also asked if the knowledge of the dialect should be assessed or not. She said,

*“Speaking should involve the dialect, depending which dialect the students are comfortable with, it doesn’t matter, make people select the dialect they want to be tested on”*. This statement seems to be talking about testing the knowledge of one spoken form of the learner choice in the speaking skill. Then I asked her if she thinks that the knowledge of one dialect is enough for successful communication.

*“Well, this comes back to why I chose to teach our students the Egyptian colloquial because I thought it is helpful, it is useful. However, it is not enough. I think I give it for someone who speaks one dialect to listen to another dialect. It doesn’t take so long to adapt; you don’t have to learn the whole dialect from scratch. It takes you only some time to adapt to the new dialect and what code they use”*.

In her answer to my question she justifies the reason she chose to teach her students the Egyptian dialect, which is because it is widely understood in the Arab world: yet she also states that it is not enough and probably the reason is that almost all Arabs understand the Egyptian people.

The last part of her statement – *“you don’t have to learn the whole dialect from scratch. It takes you only some time to adapt to the new dialect and what code they use”* – seems to indicate that the knowledge of one dialect facilitates the learning of other dialects as the learner becomes familiar with the colloquial code in general and how it is different from MSA. Therefore, it remains a matter of adaptation to the new dialect being learnt. Iman’s opinion seems to correspond to Walid’s regarding the sufficiency of one dialect for a proficient user, and that this knowledge would make learning other dialects easier. Yet Walid and Iman used the same statement to justify contrasting opinions; while

Walid used it as a proof for the sufficiency of one dialect, Iman looked at it as a motive for learning more than one dialect.

Apart from Farah, none of the teachers talked about an educated spoken form of Arabic. They rather talked about MSA and one colloquial, while Farah tends to avoid talking about more than one variety, be it MSA or the colloquial. She tends to prefer the knowledge of ESA as long as the learner is comfortable with learning it.

### III. Learners' responses

Learners were asked to reflect upon their learning experiences of the different varieties of Arabic; whether the knowledge of one dialect sufficed them in real communications. I also asked them to describe which variety they expect a proficiency test to measure. Their responses were as follows:

**Naya** **Naya** stated that learning “*one dialect is enough*” and that learning more than one dialect – “*ideally that’s a good thing*” – but should not be a requirement for the proficient user “*I would like to speak more than one dialect eventually but I don’t think a proficiency student should be*”. Reflecting on her experience, she was put in a situation where people were speaking Egyptian and she could understand what they were talking about. Therefore, she thinks that understanding other dialects “*just comes eventually from learning one dialect. This is from my experience. This is how I feel at the moment*”.

Naya’s experience seems to conform to most of the ATs’ and Ts’ opinions if we exclude Farah’s and Iman’s. She put emphasis on the bi-dialectical knowledge contrasting with Farah in this regard. She also appeared to regard learning one dialect as sufficient for a proficient user, unlike Iman.

**Yaman** **Yaman** was also asked which variety he expects a proficiency test to be assessing; he said,

*“I’d expect that they will be testing my fuṣḥā, what I think they should be doing is testing both because if I’m writing at work even any kind of report, it would be probably in fuṣḥā, where but day-to-day working inside the office with staff, and working with the public is going to be in ammiyyah”.*

I also asked him if he thinks the knowledge of one dialect is enough for communication.

I: *“Do you think knowing one dialect is sufficient for successful communication?”*

Yaman: *“It depends on the dialect”*.

I: *“Which dialect would you use, say, if you weren’t interested in the Egyptian dialect?”*

Yaman: *“In order to be able to communicate?”*

I: *“To be able to communicate with all people, the majority of Arabs”*.

Yaman: *“Probably the Levant”*.

Yaman’s expectation is different from what he thinks should be done. He emphasised that the test should take into account the context that suits the variety being tested.

In the last conversation, Yaman seems to be unsure whether one dialect is enough for communication. This would also lead to Soliman’s (2014) study on mutual intelligibility between the different ammiyyahs, which emphasises that the familiarity of the different interlocutors’ dialects is key to achieve mutual understanding in inter-dialectal settings.

**Glen**

**Glen** was asked if learning one dialect is enough to achieve successful communication: he said,

*“If you speak one of that kind of central Middle Eastern dialects, then you almost certainly going to be to talk to people and they’ll be able to talk to you”*.

So, according to him, as John also stated, learning one of those central Middle Eastern dialects as an indication to the Levantine and the Egyptian is sufficient for successful communication as mentioned earlier. I asked him whether the knowledge of a dialect should be tested:

I: *“In an oral test, if you were to take a proficiency test in Arabic, what kind of test tasks would you expect me to do?”*

Glen: *“I suppose just talk to me...”*

I: *“In fuṣḥā and ammiyyah or in both?”*



Glen: *“Well I’d have expectations based on the knowledge of who you are, and equally depend on what you said you’re going to test me in”.*

Glen does not seem to have very clear expectations in this regard. However, the statement implies that a test can be testing any of the varieties, but what matters is that the learner is aware of what he is going to be tested in, conforming to Fida’s opinion in this regard.

The Ls’ opinions in general seem to fit in different areas. Naya regards the knowledge of more than one dialect as unrealistic and that is based on her experience that knowing Moroccan allowed her to understand Egyptian. Yaman seems to be hesitant to give an opinion regarding the number of dialects to be learnt and tested, since the case of Egyptian would not provide a fixed statement. The Egyptians tend to be understood by all, but this is a one-way communication in general given that they find it hard to understand speakers of other dialects. Glen’s opinion conforms to this statement and suggests learning and testing one of the Middle Eastern dialects to guarantee successful communication among different interlocutors.

#### IV. Summary of findings

It is clear there are divergent opinions among the participants in general, and among those who belong to the same group as well. These differences appear in different aspects:

The ATs’ opinions seem to diverge when it comes to testing the dialect in an oral proficiency test and they agree that the dialect should be based on the learners’ choice. However, they do not match when it comes to the number of dialects that a student should have the knowledge of in order to be called a proficient user of Arabic. Luna says one is enough with a condition of understanding other dialects, Fida says one is not enough and the proficient learner is the one who has the knowledge of two, while John says one is enough and this knowledge guarantees understanding other dialects to some extent.

On the other hand, two of the Ts (Walid and Iman) have a shared opinion regarding the dialectical knowledge as a component of language proficiency. They both think that one dialect is enough for successful communication and that the knowledge of one dialect makes it smoother for the learner to familiarise themselves with the other dialects.

However, Farah seems to have a very different opinion; she adopts a flexible approach in dealing with the learner's choice in terms of which variety they choose to learn and so to be assessed in. For her, MSA or a dialect is enough for a proficient user of Arabic and a successful communicator in it to know. ESA for her would be a preferable option only if the learner finds it necessary and is comfortable with it.

The Ls seem to have different points to focus on when it comes to this issue. Naya emphasised that learning one dialect is enough for communication and for understanding other dialects. Yaman in his turn thinks that testing the dialect is essential regardless of which one is tested, whereas Glen focuses on learning one of the central Middle Eastern dialects if the learner needs to understand others and to be understood by them, corresponding with the opinion of the AT, John in this regard.

Amongst the ATs and Ts, only the AT, John and the T, Farah pointed out ESA as an option. None of the Ls talked about it, probably because they are not aware that it does exist in the literature. Others like the AT, Luna, the T, Walid and the L, Naya pointed to the mutual intelligibility among the different dialects of Arabic.

Overall, this issue still seems contested among the participants as is the case in the literature. Cadora (1979) carried out a study on the concept of mutual intelligibility between MSA and different Arabic dialects; Syro-Lebanese, Egyptian, Iraqi, Saudi and Moroccan. Syro-Lebanese proved to be compatible with MSA by 91% followed by Egyptian, Iraqi, Saudi and Moroccan, respectively.

Ezzat (1974) emphasised the role of formal education, represented by borrowings from MSA, for achieving the mutual intelligibility among Egyptian, Jordanian, Palestinian, Bahraini and Algerian speakers. He suggested that Arabs from different parts of the world can understand each other in an inter-dialectal setting depending on how much classicising and borrowings feature in their dialects. He also added that 'the preceding analysis of the phonology, grammar and lexis of ESA proves that there are common linguistic features among Arabic dialects that warrant their mutual intelligibility' (Ezzat, 1974: 51).

Younes (2015) proposed an integrated model of Arabic varieties based on teaching and testing what he called LESA (Levantine Educated Spoken Arabic) based on the study of Cadora (1979). To date, though, Cadora's (1979) and Ezzat's (1974) are the only

studies that were carried out on the issue of mutual intelligibility, and even Younes' (2015) model does not clearly show how the testing practices are being carried out. Neither does it report on the process of teaching or testing LESA.

On the other hand, Soliman (2014) investigated the extent to which different Arabic dialects are mutually intelligible. She analysed cross-dialectal conversations among native speakers of various Arabic vernaculars, and concluded that, unless the native speaker is familiar with the colloquial that is being spoken, inter-dialectal comprehension becomes harder to achieve. Also, another interesting finding was that native speakers tend to rely on their spoken dialect in an inter-dialectal setting with some borrowings from MSA. This point, in my opinion, contrasts the assumption by the advocates of ESA, FSA or LESA about the role of formal education in achieving cross-dialectal intelligibility, since formal education is carried out through MSA, and that mutual intelligibility is based on the borrowings from MSA.

### **7.3. Discussion**

Attempting to answer the third research question, which is the construct/s on which a testing framework of Arabic communicative proficiency should be based, ATs and Ts spoke about interaction. The participants highlighted the importance of testing the cultural knowledge. Only the ATs Luna and Fida referred to testing the intercultural skills.

- As the analysis has shown, communication seems to be directly related to the learners' ability of "interaction" in daily life situations; which means carrying out long conversations, and negotiating intended meanings (Kramersch, 1986). Therefore, the construct for testing the listening and speaking skills is perceived by most of the Ts and the ATs to be the interactional competence. Nevertheless, most of the ATs and Ts spoke about the interactional competence only at advanced levels of proficiency; such as C1 or C2 as the T, Farah suggested for example. Kramersch (1986: 368) on the other hand argued that 'mutual understanding is less impaired if one's vocabulary and grammar are correct than if one's intercultural skills are deficient'. This statement assumes that what could lead to failure in interaction would be the shallow intercultural background knowledge of the learner rather than their level of linguistic proficiency. From the same position Kramersch (1986) argued that such failure

could be due to postponing the intercultural concept development until the superior levels. This leads me to the second point I want to discuss here, which is the intercultural competence.

- Most of the participants spoke about cultural knowledge rather than intercultural skills. In their responses, all participants seem to view culture as a homogeneous concept. Apart from the T, Farah and the L, Glen, the remaining participants point out that culture should be taught and tested through the language. The cultural aspect on which all participants agreed was social appropriacy. Nevertheless, cultural competence as defined in the literature seems to incorporate the intercultural aspects as well. Defined by Diller and Moule (2005:2), cultural competence refers to ‘the ability to successfully teach students who come from different cultures other than your own’, and as mentioned in section 7.2.3, this type of skill is important for content validity and the washback effect of tests on teaching practices as Sercu (2004) suggested, in addition to its necessity for maintaining successful interaction according to Kramsch (1986).
- The participants proposed several types of tasks in different skills to teach and test culture or intercultural knowledge; such as presentations, activities based on literary texts, and role-plays. Sercu (2010: 18) suggested that in the literature of foreign language education, such as that of Byram (1997), all techniques proposed for testing the intercultural competence are basically teaching techniques as well. They are aimed at reinforcing the learner’s ‘culture-specific’ or ‘cultural general awareness’ such as ‘cultural mini-dramas, critical incidents, culture assimilators or simulation games with oral or written reflective work and documentation in the foreign language’. Although most of the participants did not talk about the intercultural competence to be assessed in a proficiency test, most of their examples fit into one or another aspect of these intercultural categories. Shoman’s study (2011) that formulated a model of the intercultural competence of Arabic language that incorporates MSA and the Egyptian colloquial suggested the importance of intercultural competence in the Arabic context. It highlighted the relationship between the learners’ intercultural knowledge and their level of proficiency. Therefore, if this competence is to be

considered as a component of the framework this study aims to develop, details on what aspects of it would be considered for teaching and testing should be provided. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 9 where I propose the features of my pedagogical framework.

- The knowledge of the dialects implies two categorisations of competence. The first is bi-dialectical competence: in addition to the learner's ability to speak and understand MSA, he or she should speak one dialect at least; and the second is "Inter-dialectal intelligibility" (Younes, 2015): the learner's ability to understand what is being said and interact when the context carries different Arabic dialects at once.
- The ATs and Ts spoke about the authenticity of test's tasks as a prominent attribute of a communicative test. Younes's (2015) integrated model seems to correspond to this feature considering the reality of Arabic language use. It includes the use of MSA in certain contexts and the colloquial in others. However, because mixed forms – whether FSA, ESA or ELSA – seem to be rather grey areas in the research, basing assessment on any of them would affect the validity and reliability of assessment tools. Implications of this issue on the assessment of actual language use and suggested alternatives are discussed in more detail in chapter 9.

#### **7.4. Conclusion**

This chapter addressed the third research question, which is the construct/constructs on which a pedagogical framework of Arabic communicative proficiency could be based. Also, it attempted to identify the essential features of the test of Arabic communicative proficiency in the light of its sociolinguistic situation. The participants referred to two constructs that should be taught, observed and measured in a communicative test; namely interaction and culture/intercultural skills. They also pointed out the importance of including authentic test's tasks that reflect the learners' ability to use different varieties of Arabic according to the context, in order to seek to understand and be understood by using MSA, the colloquial or ESA according to what the situation requires. The next chapter is the last data analysis chapter; it addresses the fourth

research question, and discusses whether or not the native speaker model should be adopted as a norm for teaching and testing Arabic proficiency.

# 8

## Analysis 4 - CAP assessment norm

### 8.1. Introduction

This chapter is the last data analysis chapter. As mentioned in section 3.1, one aspect my research is concerned with is the norm to which an Arabic assessment framework should conform; whether it is the native speaker (NS) of Arabic or otherwise any existing alternative. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to explore the participants' opinions in this regard, and to discuss the way they understand the NS of Arabic, given the complex sociolinguistic situation of Arabic language.

The chapter addresses the fourth research question:

RQ.4: What is the role of the native speaker model for testing communicative Arabic proficiency?

The following three sections, respectively, present the assessor teachers', the teachers' and the learners' opinions about the description of NS, and the idea of taking it as a norm. This is then followed by a discussion section of the overall findings that endeavour to answer the stated research question.

### 8.2. Model of native speaker (NS)

The concept of the 'native speaker' (NS) remains a constant interest in the field of language pedagogy due to the need the field has for models, goals and norms (Davies, 2003: 1). Ferguson (1983: vii) stated that 'linguists ... have long given a special place to the NS as the only true and reliable source of language data'. On the other hand, as discussed in section 3.5.2, some other linguists such as Byram (1997) in his ICC model and Cook (2012) in his model of multi-competence argued against the NS as a norm of

assessment and deemed it an idealistic, unrealistic goal. From my perspective, the question here would be how useful is the NS as a norm for determining the non-native learner's level of proficiency? As shown in section 3.2, there are several models that conceptualise Arabic proficiency from a sociolinguistic perspective given the different varieties spoken in the Arab region besides MSA; the written and the formally spoken form. Each of the models provides a number of language categories spoken by different types of NSs based on their level of formal education (Badawi, 1973; Meiseles, 1980 in section 3.2.1, and Ryding, 1991 in section 3.2.2, etc.). In such a complex sociolinguistic situation of Arabic language, who is the NS of Arabic that could be taken as a norm? Or should that be the case at all? This is what I attempt to discuss in the coming sections through presenting my participants' perspectives in this regard.

#### 8.2.1. Assessor teachers' responses

The ATs and Ts were all asked to provide their opinions regarding using the NS as a norm for identifying the non-natives' levels of proficiency. Then I asked them to reflect on the Arabic situation, and whether this model could be/should be applied. Also they were required to describe the NS of Arabic that they think should be taken as a norm, and if so, why. The ATs' responses were as follows:

**Luna** In her responses to whether the NS should be taken as a norm, and who this could be in the case of Arabic, **Luna** said;

*'Good question. I think, yes and the native speaker that should be taken as a norm, if I want my students to get jobs which I do and enjoy their jobs, is an educated fuṣḥā comfortable speaker and user at least even if they make mistakes in fuṣḥā, and can read comfortably whatever the documents were, also is fluent in a colloquial'.*

Luna gave a comprehensive definition for the NS of Arabic, which covers the knowledge of two varieties of Arabic that she advocated in conceptualising proficiency and communication (section 5.2.1).

She also emphasised the NS level of formal education, she stated that he should be *"fully literate [...] educated up to at least university level"*. The reason behind her selection of and insistence on the model of an educated native speaker (ENS) is that those who have a lower level of education *"don't have the registers of language. You*



*need formal language, you need written language, you need different kinds of discourse if you want to operate successfully”.*

Luna’s responses perhaps imply the need for a model of an ENS who has the knowledge and skills of two varieties (MSA and the colloquial) and registers of the language. She seems to adopt an idealised NS model to be taken as a norm for her students to meet. Luna also would put emphasis on the level of formal education for the NS to be a norm; however, she did not talk about the educated spoken variety as the productive form that the NNSs should seek to learn. As discussed in section 3.2, the models of Arabic proficiency such as those of Badawi (1973), Meiseles (1980) and Ryding (1991) identified a category of spoken Arabic used by the ENS which contains features of MSA, named ESA and FSA. Luna did not point to this category although she referred to the level of formal education. She instead talked about the knowledge of MSA and the colloquial as two separate varieties.

I asked **Fida** whether we should take the NS as a norm. She replied;  
**Fida**

*“Why do we need to choose people to put them as a norm, why don’t we put some specifications instead of that?”*

*I: “yeah where do you take these specifications from?”*

*Fida:” we make them”*

I asked Fida if she could explain that further and give me an example about the way we allocate these specifications and on what basis. She said;

*“There are some students who come to us and we turn them back. We tell them, ‘no you don’t need our courses’ because they know how to speak, they know how to write, they know how to read, they understand everything and they want to learn more, so we tell them either to take one-to-one or go and learn in an Arab country. So, this is the person that I choose”.*

For her the model of proficiency that we should take as a norm for our teaching is a specific type of NNS who “understands everything” in Arabic in the different skills. Unlike Luna, Fida seems to disagree with the idea of NS as a norm, and she instead

suggests a knowledgeable L2 user as an alternative. This idea corresponds to the L2 user concept that Cook (2012) argued for. Cook (2012: 243) stated that ‘an L2 user should be compared with another successful L2 user, a member of the same group, not with a native speaker, who by definition is a member of group that the L2 user can never join’. Accordingly, instead of the idealised unachievable goal of nativeness, Cook (2012) suggested a successful L2 user; the one whose language development in the L2 has reached near-native levels. Yet this definition that Cook gives does not seem to be clear in terms of the norms that make a successful L2 user, as discussed in section 5.3.2. Cook (2002) acknowledged this and stated that teachers can create these norms based on learners’ needs and effective language use.

I asked Fida to describe what is known to be the native speaker of Arabic. She said;

*“People say look at Aljazeera people who speak that, but I don’t agree, I don’t agree from one point of view because they do sometimes stick to something like what do I call it, like, you know, the sukūn”<sup>11</sup>*

As a response to this question, Fida gave an example of the news presenters on Aljazeera channel, with which she perhaps does not agree. Fida seems to refer to the fact that in the field of Arabic teaching, many teachers and programmes use Aljazeera news as authentic materials for their teaching; they also consider the news presenters as NSs of Arabic as models that should be followed by the non-native learners. She however does not seem to agree with this Arabic teaching culture due to what she called the “*sukūn*” that features the language used by those presenters. Their language could be classified as a formal spoken Arabic that is based on MSA not on the colloquial. This is due to the fact that most of their structure is MSA, their vocabulary is taken from MSA, and the only colloquial feature can be in the ways certain words are pronounced. The only model of proficiency that based the educated spoken Arabic on MSA is Bishai’s (1966) Modern inter-Arabic variety. This variety is a blending of elements of MSA and dialects. According to him, it is the form ‘used in various inter-Arab meetings

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<sup>11</sup> The sukūn is a circle-shaped diacritic placed above a letter. It indicates that the consonant to which it is attached is not followed by a vowel; this is a necessary symbol for writing consonant-vowel-consonant syllables, which are very common in Arabic.

which include representatives from different countries of the Arabic Middle East' (ibid.:320).

Fida referred to the word “*sukūn*” as the reason for not taking the language that “Aljazeera people” produce as a norm to follow by the NNS. “*sukūn*” is one of the diacritic marks of the Arabic scripts. Diacritic marks in Arabic are used for two purposes. The first one is phonetic: each consonant of the Arabic script is marked by a short vowel to make it clear how a word is actually pronounced. The second purpose is syntactic; this specifically relates to the case endings. The diacritic mark placed on the last letter of the word refers to the position of the word in the Arabic syntax (subject, object, or part of genitive structure). The “*sukūn*” that Fida mentioned would refer to the fact of neglecting the case endings that features “Aljazeera” channel’s talk shows nowadays, even though MSA is in use. Replacing the case endings by the “*sukūn*” is a spoken feature, which Fida does not seem to accept if it was featuring the language produced by NSs who are taken as models in the Arabic teaching activities.

**John** I asked **John** to explain what he understands by the NS of Arabic and if it should be regarded as a norm. He said,

*“I don’t know we’re not allowed to use the word native speaker, it is very old fashioned”.*

John seems to be using the term of NS with some hesitance, and describes it as “*old-fashioned*”. He added; “*Not every Arab has got a university degree, and there are plenty of children, they’re very fluent in Arabic [...] in the Arab world you could be illiterate; you could have beautiful Arabic*”.

In his statement John seems to refer to categories of NSs that Badawi (1973) talked about, which are the colloquial of the cultured, the colloquial of the basically educated, and the colloquial of the illiterate. I asked John whether it is valid then, given the various types of NSs of Arabic, to regard it as a norm. His answer was,

*“Yeah, I think we should take the native speaker as a norm. Obviously one would aim to be like a native speaker, and everybody’s aim as a learner is to be as close as possible to the native speaker, you know in any language”.*

John actually acknowledges that there are different NSs in the Arab world, which does not seem to be an issue for him. He mentioned that all language learners aim to be native-like, and he does not seem to disagree with that. I then asked him which one of those NSs he mentioned he thinks can be taken as a norm. He said;

*“Somebody who is educated to secondary school level maybe [...] If we do an Arabic IELTS, I think it needs to be general and I think we want to aim it to be at a good level, it doesn't have to be, you know, somebody at university level. Personally I don't think so”.*

Despite his hesitance at the beginning to use the NS term, he made a clear selection of an ENS to be a norm for the NNSs. For him, the norm that should be aimed at when learning Arabic is the one who is educated to a secondary school level rather than the one who finished their university degree.

The ATs seem to look at the model of NS from different perspectives. When it comes to describing the NS of Arabic, Luna and Fida tend to give a definition of the type of NS to be taken or that which is taken as a norm. However, whereas Luna specifies the ENS to a university level to be the norm she wants her students to meet, Fida describes Aljazeera Channel news presenters as the norm followed in the field of Arabic pedagogy. Fida, though, unlike Luna, seems to strongly reject the model of NS in general and considers a successful L2 user as an alternative. She also disagrees with Arabic teaching practice that treats the TV presenters as models due to what she considered inaccurate production. There seems to be some contradiction in John's response in this regard. He hesitated at the beginning to use the term of NS as it is “*old fashioned*” according to him, and that NSs of Arabic can be many different types according to their level of formal education, but this hesitance has been turned into assertiveness when it came to considering it as a norm. My interpretation is that John may have given a general definition of the Arabic NS at the beginning which includes all types of speech they produce, and regardless of their level of formal education. However, when taking one NS as a norm, he seemed determined regarding the usage of the ENS as a norm. Although there seems to be an agreement between Luna's and John's opinions on choosing an ENS as a norm, disagreement emerged over the NS's level of education; whether it should be to university level as Luna suggested or to secondary school level as John recommended.

### 8.2.2. Teachers' responses

The Ts also responded to the same questions; whether they think the native speaker should be taken as a model, and the way they understand the concept of native speaker of Arabic given the different Arabic varieties spoken in the Arab region. Their responses were as follows:

**Walid** I asked **Walid** to explain what he understands by the NS of Arabic. He gave the following definition:

*“The one who can understand what he reads and listens to without a dictionary [...] the one who can express the ideas he knows in a clear and understandable language and who doesn't make semantic mistakes”*. He added, *“Nativeness is not confined to knowing a language but it is also connected to the social context of the language. So, for me the Armenian who speaks the dialect but can't read fuṣḥā is not a native speaker”*.

Walid interestingly, expands his definition and relates it to the social awareness as well as the literacy level of the language. As for the NS as a norm, Walid said that the NS *“should be educated, and I mean the one who successfully passed his secondary school education”*. Walid also identifies the ENSs who passed their secondary school to be the norm for NNSs. The definition Walid has given to the NS of Arabic seems to clearly indicate the level of formal education, and highlights the ability of reading. He seems to confirm this by the example he gave about the Syrian Armenians<sup>12</sup>. He tends not to deem those of them who speak the colloquial but cannot read MSA as NSs. This is to say, Walid seems to neglect the colloquial of the illiterate that Badawi (1973) considered a category of native speakers who have no education in MSA. In reality, the variety that NSs of Arabic acquire in childhood is actually the colloquial, through which

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<sup>12</sup> The Syrian Armenians have had their own private community schools since the 1970s. They also have the option to study in any Syrian state or private school, just like Arab and non-Arab Syrians (Kurds, Assyrians and Circassians). The curriculum of the Armenian schools has been determined by the Syrian Ministry of Education. They must adopt in full the standard state curriculum in Arabic. They, though, are allowed to have three religious classes per week through the Armenian language in addition to four periods weekly for the language itself. The Armenians of the old generations are likely to speak the Syrian colloquial with some Armenian influence, and would or would not understand MSA. New generations speak Arabic and think in Arabic as it is their first language, just like the Arab Syrians (Migliorino, 2008: 207-211).

they learn MSA. Therefore, from my perspective, Walid's definition does not seem to be comprehensive to all types of NSs. As for the norm that should be followed by the NNSs, Walid appears to agree with John in terms of the NS who is educated to a secondary level.

**Farah**            **Farah** was asked to describe an Arabic NS. She said,

*“A native speaker in any language is that the person who speaks this language as their first language, they have it at home, they think in that language”.*

Farah's definition seems to relate to the acquisition of the language from an early stage “*speaks this language as their first language [...] they think in that language*”, and the exposure to it in the surrounding “*they have it at home*”. I then asked her if NS should be taken as a norm. She replied,

*“At a university level, we should not aim to be like a native speaker, we should aim to have communicative abilities because it is limiting the students by saying ‘you need to speak Arabic like a native speaker’. They don’t have the experience, the exposure to the language, they don’t have the million hours of teaching to learn like a native speaker, so I don’t think we need a norm”.*

Her reply perhaps states that teaching students to the norm of NS is “*limiting*” and has an idealistic nature as her description implies. Her response resonates only with Fida's reply and contradicts the others. Alternatively, Fida gave the ‘advanced’ non-native as a norm whereas Farah talked about the learners' communicative abilities instead. She also expressed a very interesting idea to explain when a learner needs to imitate the native speaker:

*“Sometimes I feel I do teach my students to be like an Arabic speaker because you need someone to imitate [...] so I teach my students how to hesitate in Arabic like a native speaker, like we use the word yʕni (I mean) [...] and then they will look like a native speaker of Arabic, but not because it is just ideal because it is just listener-friendly, the listener to them will be like ʔah (I see), natural! so in this field it is okay to consider the norm as a native speaker but it won’t be like a learning goal to sound like a native speaker”.*

Farah here seems to be focusing on three points; one is that the NS can be imitated but cannot be taken as a norm and, she seems to make a distinction between the two. The second point is that the imitation can take place only during the performance of the language, and that NNSs can act like natives. Finally, the reason she tolerates these in this regard is for the purpose of speaking naturally. Comparing this latest statement of Farah to her opinion that rejects teaching the learners to a norm would imply a native-like norm. Farah seems to support the idea of looking like or “*imitating*” a native but disagreeing with aiming at becoming a NS, or being taught to become it as a norm.

When I asked **Iman** about the NS as a norm, she confidently said,

**Iman**

*“The language we aim our students to learn is luġat ʔlmuṭaqqafīn (language of the educated). I don’t think the highly educated works; it depends on their level of education”.*

Iman did not give a definition of whom she considers a native speaker of Arabic or of any other language. She immediately related this to the language that she expects her students to aim at. She called this variety “*language of the educated*”. This implies that there is a type of NS whom she regards as a norm and that is the one who speaks this specific variety of Arabic. I then requested that she explains what she means by that, she said;

*“The educated native speaker is like the teacher that teaches the people who are studying anywhere, so whoever gets to a degree level, that’s an educated native speaker in my opinion. I probably find people who never been to university but they’re still educated native speakers, it is not necessarily ... it depends on what they have been doing in life”.*

Another interesting example about the NS of Arabic is given by Iman this time – that is the “*teacher*”. Iman seems to be ambivalent about whether the norm of NS should be the one who is educated to a degree level or the one who has not attained that level. I believe this contradiction comes from the word ‘education’ that, in Arabic, does not always have the same usage as in English. This conforms to her statement that some people have not been to universities but they are still educated. The translation of education that Iman used is ‘*taqāfa*’, as she said “*ʔlmuṭaqqafīn*” (that is the educated). ‘*taqāfa*’ means knowledge, any kind of enlightening knowledge and it is usually used to

refer to life knowledge and experience rather than school or university instructions. That is to say, the term ‘*taqāfa*’ in Arabic carries meanings that can be lost in translation. A good reader of books, or a person who has a good historical or geographical knowledge can still be called ‘educated’ – that is *mutaqqaf* in Arabic – even if they have not been to universities. Overall, Iman seems to agree with the assessors Luna and John and the teacher Walid in terms of choosing the educated NS as a norm: yet her opinion and those three participants diverge in terms of the level of formal education of the NS.

The Ts also seem to look at the NS as a concept and as a norm from different points of view. They all seem to be hesitant and not very assertive either in terms of defining or describing the NS of Arabic, or in identifying the norm. Formal education appears to be a very important variable for defining the NS according to Walid; hence the reason why he excludes the illiterates and other ethnicity members that cannot read MSA from the nativeness umbrella, and instead chooses the ENS as a norm. Farah seems to have interesting opinions about the NS as a model. She makes a distinction between imitating a native speaker and studying it as a norm. She agrees with the former and suggests focusing on communicative skills as an alternative to the latter. Iman, like Walid, clearly chooses the educated NS as a norm but she interestingly provides a different definition of education which does not always relate to doing a university degree or passing secondary level at school.

### 8.2.3. Learners’ responses

Learners were asked to explain whether they aspire to any kind of norm to sound like, or abilities to achieve, through their journey of learning Arabic. They were also required to describe the NS of Arabic, and whether they aim to achieve a native-like state in Arabic. Their responses were as follows:

**Naya**                    **Naya** was first asked if there is a model that she would like to sound like, being a learner of Arabic. She said;

*“Well, I do now, this is what am doing at the moment actually because I moved to Bahrain and am trying to, because what I did before was MSA but now I am trying to learn the dialect; something I haven’t done before. So, yeah, I am trying to, while I am trying to learn the dialect. I’m trying to imitate and watching a lot of TV series and trying to imitate exactly what they’re saying there”.*



In her response, Naya seems to clearly state that she aspires to imitate NSs of Arabic. Interestingly, she related the concept of Arabic nativeness to the knowledge of the colloquial, hence the reason why she is learning Bahraini colloquial as it is the spoken form of the country where she lives now. I then asked her about the reasons she directly mentioned the colloquial. She replied,

*“I think I must have said this before that fuṣḥā is not something, it doesn’t have any native speaker really. And it is something people learn later in life, something, of course when I want to say like I want to sound like a native speaker to me it is always the dialect”.*

The NS concept in relation to the colloquial is coming out strongly in her statement. In her description of MSA as *“something people learn later in life”* perhaps Naya is referring to the fact that Arabic language acquisition has to do with the different regional vernaculars, through which Arabic native speakers learn MSA. Responding to another question about the reasons for her choice of sounding like a native speaker, she said,

*“I don’t care about sounding like a native speaker that much. It is just, well, I’d like people to understand me better and I’d like to understand, I mean I understand it to a certain degree, yeah I’d just like to understand it more to, sort of be, you know, to have a conversation when I’m treated as an equal [...] especially I feel this a lot here now that I’m a foreigner, they don’t speak to me the way they speak to each other”.*

In her statement, Naya’s aspiration to Arabic nativeness would help her feel more *“equal”* rather than being treated as a *“foreigner”*. Striving for this equality with NSs in terms of the way they speak to each other seems to be one reason behind Naya’s aspiration to sound like a native speaker. Another reason is being able to understand what Bahraini people say, and to be understood by them as well. The way Naya describes the NS of Arabic is as follows:

*“Anyone who speaks an Arabic dialect and as any native speaker, a person who acquires the language as his first language as a child. So, anyone has done so whether they were born outside the Arab world or somewhere in an Arab country and required an Arabic dialect growing up as a native speaker”.*

Naya described the Arabic NS as the one who acquired an Arabic colloquial in their childhood, whether in the Arab world or outside it. Her definition of the NS of Arabic seems to correspond to the definition of Arabic nativeness model that she stated she aspires to attain, a model that incorporates the knowledge of the colloquial as a means of achieving “*equal*” communicative relations.

What strikes me in Naya’s responses is the reference she made to “*equality*” and her desire to interact with Omani people the same way they interact with each other. This reference seems to indicate the idea of ‘membership of the same cultural group’ (Davies, 2003: 99); which Naya seems to seek for in her aspiration to nativeness. It might be that it offers her security in face-to face interaction. Davies (2003: 100) suggested that the model of membership and belonging to a particular group of natives assumes not only the knowledge of others’ behaviours, but also of the cultural and linguistic behaviours that the others in the group expect from us. Perhaps Naya’s attempt to “*imitate exactly what they are (Bahraini people) saying*” relates to the linguistic or cultural behaviours or both; since Naya did not specify which. However, from my perspective, being like a native or imitating a native does not only relate to the knowledge or performance of the ritualised behaviours of their social group, but also requires being accepted and welcomed by them first.

**Yaman**            **Yaman** was also asked to explain if he aspires to a native norm to conform to or to any specific abilities to attain. He responded,

*“Yeah, kind of. I want to be fluent, I think mainly to be able to understand and to be able to communicate but not necessarily. I’m not sure to what, maybe to a certain extent because of some idea about my identity or something, or feeling that I should know Arabic because of my background”.*

Like Naya, Yaman seems to adopt a model of Arabic NS that he aspires to conform to. He related his aspiration to fluency, communication and being understood. Also, though, as a heritage learner of Arabic, Yaman perhaps refers to his identify and background as incentives to learn Arabic and to direct his ambitions towards Arabic norm of nativeness. I then asked him to describe his native norm in terms of the abilities they would have. He said,

Yaman: *“I’m always attracted to the idea of being able to extract meaning which isn’t necessarily obvious. So, for example to be able to extract new words of a word based on its roots; or root rather. [...] in terms of a level that I aspire to it might be one where am sensitive to differences that the forms of the words can have on the meaning, the affect or the how the roots constitute the meaning or how even the vowels can affect the meaning”*.

I: *“Do you think all native speakers of Arabic can do that?”*

Yaman: *“No, I know that most of them can’t”*.

Perhaps the abilities that Yaman would be hoping to achieve in his aspiration towards nativeness are mainly linguistic. He spoke about the morphological system of Arabic lexical derivation, *“the root system”*, and the relationships between form and meaning; namely *“differences that the forms of the words can have on the meaning”*, and also the diacritic marks and its influence on the meaning of the sentence; *“how even the vowels can affect the meaning”*, as he said<sup>13</sup>. His focus on the formal side of the language comes out very strongly in his statements; despite the fact that he believes that most of native speakers of Arabic do not have such a high linguistic level. Describing the NS of Arabic, Yaman said,

*“Anyone who speaks a dialect of Arabic and picks it up informally and anyone who is from that background and then goes on to study formal Arabic formally, standard Arabic formally”*.

The definition Yaman gave to the NS of Arabic seems to refer to the one who acquired an Arabic colloquial informally; which corresponds to Naya’s definition. Perhaps, though, Yaman is also focusing on learning the standard side of the language, which Naya does not seem to be adding. What appears very interesting is that he speaks about this linguistic knowledge in relation to nativeness; which he conceptualised in terms of the colloquial and the standard knowledge, whereas, in reality, some NSs of Arabic would not consider learning that formal side of the language, and those are described in Badawi’s (1973) model as the ‘illiterate’. One, yet, can argue that natives of this

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<sup>13</sup> The last consonant of the word in a *fushā* structure needs to be marked by one of the Arabic diacritic marks (short vowels). Each of these vowels refers to the position of the word in the sentence (subject, object, etc.). Changing the mark of the word implies a change in the word’s function which would alter the meaning of the sentence.

category would still have intuition about the standard language; since MSA is not only learnt in schools but also through going to the mosque, and being exposed to the different media tools. But the question here is, would they be able to produce the *fuṣḥā* that they get exposed to, or would they still have the high linguistic skills that Yaman perceived the natives to have? In fact, I argue that not only the “illiterates” category that Badawi (1973) mentioned, but also most Arabs, regardless of their level of education, have inaccuracy in *fuṣḥā* production – be it written or spoken – which does not reflect the high linguistic skills that Yaman aspires to. From this perspective, Yaman’s understanding of the NS of Arabic does not seem to resonate with the norm he seeks, despite his focus on the linguistic abilities in both definitions. He requires his norm of aspiration to have very high linguistic knowledge; but he simultaneously believes that “*most of them (Arabic native speakers) can’t*” achieve or conform to this.

Another feature that comes over strongly in Yaman’s statement as a motive for learning Arabic and for sounding like a native Arab is identity. In fact, researchers such as Weiyun (2006), He (2010) and Noels (2005) argued that most heritage language learners relate their interest in learning their heritage language to their desire for maintaining their cultural identity and staying connected to their heritage culture. He (2010) and Phinney *et al.* (2001) suggested that by learning their heritage language, heritage learners seek to maintain relationships with family and friends who speak that language; which is confirmed by Yaman’s statements.

**Glen** Responding the same question on whether he has a set of abilities or a specific norm that he aspires to conform to, **Glen** said,

*“Well because when I was in Syria, then definitely there was an objective to sound, to be able to speak like a Syrian certainly. And when I, yes but then I, because I spent nine months in Syria then a couple of months in Jordan, that was then confusing because do you still kind of keep aiming to be like a Syrian or do you adjust to then becoming a little bit more Jordanian? So, I mean that was obviously heavily conditioned by where I was and the dialect I have been surrounded by”.*

Obviously, Glen’s response appears identical to Naya’s and Yaman’s in terms of the reference he has made to the colloquial, although it seems to diverge from Yaman’s as Naya’s does too, in that there was no indication of the standard side of the language. Also, Glen relates the model of nativeness to which he aspires to the colloquial spoken

by the inhabitants of the Arab state where a learner is located – i.e., sounding like a “Syrian” or a “Jordanian”; a point that Naya has referred to in her aspiration to sound like “Bahraini people”.

I asked Glen about his reasons of the relation he made to the colloquial. He replied,

*“You do have to adopt an accent in a dialect [...] I mean fuṣḥā is a different thing [...] if you can only speak fluent fuṣḥā I don’t know that is not, in an important way that is not nearly as pleasing [...]no one is a native speaker of fuṣḥā”.*

*“I enjoy being able to imitate accents, and I enjoy being able to reproduce the pronunciation to it so it is part of that too and obviously, you know the accent ... the intonation is a big part of a particular Arabic dialect”.*

Perhaps what Glen seeks to imitate in the norm of NS he aspires to mainly relates to pronunciation, accent and intonation of that native model’s colloquial. Glen speaks about imitating NSs in terms of accent and intonation; which appears in Naya’s statement *“trying to imitate exactly what they’re saying there”*. Yet, unlike Glen’s, Naya’s statement does not appear to be specific in terms of what exactly she seeks to imitate; behaviours, accents, both or other things. In addition, in this statement *“no one is a native speaker of fuṣḥā”*, Glen seems to discard *fuṣḥā* from the attributes of ANSs, and states that the learner’s fluency in *fuṣḥā* *“is not nearly as pleasing”*.

Despite the fact that Glen can understand and produce three varieties of Arabic – CA, MSA and the Levantine – his focus on the colloquial in the norm he aspires to was salient. I therefore asked him to explain the way he describes the NS of Arabic.

Glen: *“Someone who’s spoken it since they were a child. It is becoming vague, isn’t it? Yes, but I.”*

I: *“Spoke what?”*

Glen: *“An Arab..., one of the languages which are conventionally identified as dialects of Arabic”.*

Glen described the Arabic NS as the one who acquired an Arabic colloquial in their childhood. His definition seems completely identical to Naya’s in this regard. His definition of the NS of Arabic seems to correspond to the definition of Arabic

nativeness norm that he aspires to, a norm that incorporates the knowledge of the colloquial of the Arab country where a learner of Arabic lives.

In his definition of the NS of Arabic, Glen seems to relate it to the one who acquires the colloquial in their childhood. Naya's opinion appeared to resonate with that, while only Yaman talked about the features of standard language as properties of the ANS. On the other hand, advocates of the NS idea (Davies, 1991, 2003; Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson, 2000) identified several ways of defining NS, discussed in section 3.5.2 including NS by birth, by virtue, and by education among others. This aspect is discussed in more detail later in section 8.4, whereas my learner participants have defined it from the perspective of childhood acquisition.

The three Ls share similar opinions regarding adopting the NS of Arabic as a norm but obviously they tend to describe their norms differently. Naya's and Glen's opinions relate to the knowledge of the colloquial, while Yaman's incorporates the colloquial and the standard language as well. The reasons behind their choices have also diverged; Naya's choice goes back to the equality she needs to feel when interacting with Bahraini people. Yaman justified his choice by his desire to maintain his heritage identity, whereas Glen's decision was based on the need to imitate the accent and dialect of the inhabitants of the Arab state where a learner lives.

The Ls' responses clearly referred to the norm of NS to which they aspire to conform. Also, obvious, however, is the diversity of descriptions of the norm each of them has provided. Perhaps this focus on the NS norm may be attributed to two aspects. The first is the prevailing broader discourse of the NS concept within the language teaching profession. Most, if not all, foreign language curricula, teaching and assessment practices, and proficiency frameworks and scales are still based on the norm of NS. Adopting the NS theory in FL pedagogy may have created a culture of aspiring to sound like native or near-native amongst FL learners, which perhaps impacted my participants' responses. Second, despite the NS ambition that Ls have emphasised, what seems to be evident and common in their different responses is the focus on their communicative needs; mainly speaking the colloquial, feeling integrated, and maintaining social identity. This might be due to privileging *fushā* teaching in the UKHE context, and the continuous demand of the learners of this context to have to be taught the colloquial as well.

### 8.3. Summary of findings

Overall, the model of NS appears to be a very contested term. ATs, Ts and Ls have diverging opinions in this regard, and that is in terms of two enquiries: the first is who is the NS of Arabic? and the second is who should be/is taken as a norm of proficiency?

For the AT, Luna, the NS of Arabic is the one who has the knowledge of different varieties of Arabic language. The NS that should be taken as a norm, according to her, is the one educated up to a university level. The AT, Fida tends to disagree with the need to consider the NS as a norm when speaking about proficiency. The alternative can be an advanced learner who is very knowledgeable or the one classified as near native. The third AT, John seems to talk about the different categories of Arabic NSs and regards them all as natives, but the NS he seems to be talking about as a norm is the one educated to a secondary school level.

As for the Ts, Walid's definition of the NS comprises two aspects; the social awareness in addition to the literacy level of the language. According to him, the one that can be taken as a norm is the one who passed their secondary school education. The second T, Farah defines the NS as the one who thinks in the language and speaks it at home as a first language. She tends to believe that we do not need to teach our students to a norm, because what matters at the end is mastering the communicative abilities, but she simultaneously argues that students should imitate NSs to sound natural. The T, Iman takes the one who speaks the educated Arabic as a norm.

According to the Ls, the Arabic NS seems to be the one who acquires the colloquial in their childhood. Naya adds anyone who acquires it in an Arab country or outside. She considers the knowledge of the colloquial as the native norm that she aspires to. Yaman highlights the standard language as another feature of nativeness, although it is learned, not acquired. He aims for a norm of NS who has the knowledge of both the colloquial and a high level of formal linguistic knowledge. Like Naya, Glen aspires to speak the colloquial as spoken by the NS inhabitants of the Arab state where he lives.

Clearly there is no agreement amongst the participants on who the NS of Arabic is or whether it should be taken as a norm. Those who support the idea of taking the NS as a norm have diverging opinions on what type of NS they mean. They basically choose the ENS but each of them selects a different level of formal education, or defines education

differently. Two of the participants – one AT (Fida) and one T (Farah) – think that there is no need to take the NS as a norm. The teacher does not give an alternative but she thinks that the communicative abilities are those to be measured. The assessor provides the advanced NNS who is skilful to a near native level as a norm as an alternative of the NS. Surprisingly, all Ls seem to share similar opinions regarding the adoption of NS as a norm regardless of their different reasons beyond that. Their perspectives generally correspond to the ATs and Ts who went for that choice as well (AT, Fida and T, Farah excluded), but they define their norms differently. Unlike the ATs and Ts, advocates of the ENS norm, the Ls Naya and Glen make no reference to the standard language represented by the knowledge of MSA. Only Yaman's opinion seems to refer to the knowledge of formal language, that was referred to by the term 'educated' by those ATs and Ts.

#### **8.4. Discussion**

The fourth research question which this chapter addresses consists of two parts; the norm which an assessment framework of Arabic proficiency should follow according to the participants of this research, and the way they understand the concept of NS and the type that should be taken as a norm if they think it should be.

The idea of an ideal NS has probably come up through the distinction that Chomsky (1965) drew between competence and performance in his linguistic theory. The former refers to 'the linguistic system that an ideal native speaker of a given language has internalized, whereas performance mainly concerns the psychological factors that are involved in the perception and production of a speech' (Canale and Swain, 1980: 3). This theory was later criticised by Hymes (1972) for lacking the social factors and by Wesche (1983) who disapproved the NS model as ideal. The NS as a norm has been questioned by many researchers in the field of second language teaching (e.g., Kramsch, 1997; Cook, 1999). Davies (2004) also stated that this concept is rich in ambiguity. According to Piller (2002: 180), the NS as a baseline provider of data against which the higher level of attainment can be measured is no longer tenable. At the same time, the research of second language learning has not suggested a different approach. The available alternative seems to be through emphasising the communicative skills associated with the linguistic knowledge. Models like Byram's (1997) ICC and Cook's (2012) multi-competence have argued against the NS model for its idealism and not



being able to achieve in reality. Perhaps the calls of the L2 learner to be considered a whole real person in an L2 social setting has brought to attention the learner's identity and its role for developing language learning (e.g., Ushioda, 2009). Dörnyei's (2009: 29) L2 Motivational Self System has also put emphasis on the learner's perspective and different motivators in learning a foreign language. Cook (2012) suggested a successful L2 user to be the norm against which NNSs' performance can be measured, but has not clearly identified it. As discussed in section 3.5.2, Cook (2002: 335) stated,

‘at present there are no adequate descriptions of successful L2 user goals. It may of course be that no single L2 user goal will suffice but that, rather like English for Specific Purposes, teachers need in principle to specify where, when and why each student needs to use the second language before settling on their goals. But the logic is nevertheless that teachers should aim at getting people to use the second language effectively’.

His statement perhaps places this decision in the hands of the teachers, to be made on the basis of the learners' needs and effective language use.

In relation with the Arabic context, the issue appears even more complex. Reviewing the responses of the participants regarding the definition they have given to the concept of Arabic native speaker, one can realise that the answers can be placed in the following categories:

- Native speaker as a concept: The concept of NS appeared contested amongst the participants as shown in sections 8.2.1 and 8.2.2. There did not seem to be an agreement on the definition of NS as is also the case in the literature. For instance, as mentioned in section 5.3.2, opinions regarding what the NS is are different due to the different interpretation of this concept: e.g., the five categories provided by Hyltenstam and Abrahamsson (2000) (NS by birth, NS by virtue, NS through education, NS through long residence, and an exceptional learner) and the six categories of Davies (1991, 2003) (NS since childhood, has intuitions about idiolectal grammar, has intuitions about the standard language grammar, has capacity of producing fluent discourse, creative writing and translation and interpretation) Most of the participants (ATs: Luna and John, Ts: Walid and Farah, L, Yaman) have related the concept of NS to the one who

acquires the two varieties of Arabic; the colloquial and the standard. The assessor Luna and the teacher Walid emphasised the level of education so that the definition of NS includes MSA, the written form, as it is learnt through the colloquial, not naturally acquired. The assessor John seems to speak about different NSs; those who acquire the colloquial only and others who continue in learning MSA through it; but both are considered ANSs. The learner Yaman seems to speak about one NS who has the colloquial and learns the standard. In the Arabic context, the variety that is acquired in childhood is the colloquial through which MSA is normally learnt. So, a native speaker would either have the colloquial, or the colloquial and MSA; which conforms to John's definition and contrasts those of Luna, Walid and Yaman. There seemed to be some uncertainty in the teacher Fida's response regarding who she considers a native speaker of Arabic. The reason for my interpretation is that she only mentioned Aljazeera TV presenters when she was asked to describe the native speaker of Arabic.

- Native speaker as a norm: One variable that appeared repeatedly through the discussion on the model of NS is their level of formal education. The ATs, Luna and John and the Ts, Walid and Iman have emphasised the native speaker's level of formal education since it guarantees the knowledge of MSA. It is worth noting that the assessor Fida suggested that there should be some "*communicative specifications*" or successful L2 users to be taken as models other than the NS. The teacher Farah has given a similar opinion in this regard; that is, focusing on communicative skills rather than on an NS norm with encouraging learners to imitate the NS. The Ls all seemed to confirm their aspiration to the NS as a norm but defined it differently. It was related to the knowledge of the colloquial only in Naya's and Glen's responses, whereas the knowledge of MSA alongside the colloquial appeared as essential in Yaman's opinion. Davies (2003) referred to this distinction between the model of NS and native speaker-like, which would raise important questions. For instance, to what extent can the L2 user become a native speaker? Or can they ever become so? Cook (2012) stated that the status of NS is no longer relevant and that even imitating the NS has resulted in L2 learners' successive failure in looking like

NSs. The successful L2 user that he suggests as an alternative model helps the L2 learners maintain their social and cultural identities while communicating with the NSs and the other L2 learners of the target language who come from different cultures (Cook, 2012).

In my opinion, it seems unrealistic to maintain the Chomskyan notion of competence and consider it the only absolute criterion, particularly for an Arabic proficiency scale. That is due to the complexity of actual Arabic language use given its diglossic nature. That is to say, more focus should be given to describing the language use of NSs of Arabic in terms of real life situations in the light of the learners' needs. Although the Chomskyan concept has been and can be theoretically justified and defined, it remains hard to operationalise in reality. Therefore, linguistic competence in Arabic should be redefined from the non-nativeness perspective of language pedagogy where "intelligibility" might be validated as a norm of communication and interaction. First, though, the linguistic rules used by NNSs themselves need to be identified, following which the linguistic competence in Arabic can be redefined from the perspective of non-nativeness.

A great deal of complexity appears when talking about the NS in the Arabic context, particularly in relation to the level of formal education as a variable. For instance, given that the "illiterate" are considered NSs, can they be norms for L2 learners? If yes, then the learners would be missing the formal variety of Arabic (MSA). If no, then the NS of Arabic as a norm should include, together, the colloquial as it is the language of acquisition and MSA as it is the language of formal education. That is to say, if the NS of Arabic should not be taken as a model, then an alternative L2 user norm should have the possible end state of proficiency in the two varieties; someone who is a diglossic competent L2 user (DCL2).

## **8.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has addressed the fourth and the last research question. It has tried to show the complexity of the NS as a concept and as a norm. It also reported the various participants' opinions regarding the model of Arabic NS. There have been divergent opinions on the norm that should be considered to measure the L2 learners' level of

proficiency. Some have identified the ENS but they diverged in the level of formal education this native should have; whether it is up to university level, or secondary level. Some others have identified an advanced or a successful L2 user but have not been clear on the criteria that describe those learners.

The next chapter discusses the framework that I intend to propose in this research. It takes into account all aspects of this research; the model of communicative proficiency, the constructs upon which the framework should be based, and the norm it should follow.

# 9

## **A proposed Assessment framework of CAP**

### **9.1. Introduction**

This chapter proposes an assessment framework for CAP based on the data emerging from this research, alongside my personal perspectives and examination of the relevant literature. The chapter consists of nine main sections; the first provides the rationale for this framework in relation with the research context and the Arabic sociolinguistic situation. It is followed by an explanatory section on the factors that contribute to the design of this framework; namely the learners' needs as they emerged through my participants' responses, and the reports that described the demands of the UK universities' context described in section 2.3. The third section offers my understanding of CAP, which I consider the theoretical basis of the proposed framework. The fourth section illustrates the major principles that are considered for formulating this framework; a) the five competences of which the framework consists; – namely languacultural, diglossic, interactional, discourse, and strategic competences; b) the interactional construct on which the framework is based, and c) the model of L2 user for which the framework is designed. Following that, the next section describes some broad guidelines for testing proficiency based on the proposed framework. The implications of these guidelines for testing proficiency in practice come after. They are addressed in three sub-sections; the testing objectives, instrument's specifications, and notes on their validity and reliability. The penultimate section describes the two contextual challenges that the application of this framework would encounter in practice in relation with the issues of the washback effect and practicability. The conclusion follows.

## 9.2. The rationale of the framework

The purpose of this framework is to create an assessment guideline for teachers and learners of Arabic in the UKHE context. Its aim is to help understand the relationship between Arabic language proficiency and its actual use when conducting communicative assessment. As shown in the previous four chapters, the data illustrate that learners' expectations regarding testing CAP, particularly in chapter 7, entail serious changes in the assessment of language use. Their developing needs of being able to communicate in Arabic in both its varieties (MSA and the colloquial) within different contexts and discourses bring into play the demand for reconceptualising proficiency and changing its teaching and testing practices accordingly. As illustrated in section 2.3, only a few out of 16 British universities where Arabic is taught as part of a degree course such as Cambridge, Durham and Edinburgh, consider teaching and testing the colloquial alongside *fuṣḥā*.

In general, teaching and testing practices in the UKHE context tend to consider one variety of Arabic which is MSA in terms of the four skills. Several factors contribute to making this contextual decision; they can be summarised as follows;

- a) The washback effect of GSCE and A-level exams on teaching MSA: pre-university Arabic teaching in state or supplementary schools relies on teaching mainly Modern Standard Arabic regardless of the learner's purpose of study, be it Islamic, academic or communicative. According to Tinsley's report (2015: 12), 'Eton College is the only school which claims to teach a regional variety – Egyptian – alongside MSA and Qur'anic Arabic'. Therefore, learners who have chosen Arabic in their GCSE or A-level exams would be prepared to take these exams in *fuṣḥā* only, due to these tests' specifications.
- b) Learners who do Arabic as part of their –four-years university degree have an opportunity to spend their third year abroad in an Arab country of their choice. It is then assumed that they will learn the colloquial of that country through living there and interacting with native speakers.
- c) The fact that there is variation in spoken forms of Arabic makes it challenging for the UKHE contexts to make a choice in terms of what spoken variety they

should teach. Therefore, concentration is on *fushā* since it is the variety of the two skills – reading and writing – as well as the spoken form used in the media.

- d) Some higher educational contexts have insufficient resources to have different entry levels. Therefore, they accept only novice learners to have one level of entry in one classroom (Tinsley, 2015: 19). The basis on which learners' level of performance is determined tends to be mainly the CEFR; which is based on characteristics of European languages and does not actually take into consideration the features of Arabic in terms of script and variation (see section 2.4.2).

Consequently, the context of UKHE has shown a lack of mutual principles for teaching and testing learners for proficiency. Learners' needs and expectations to be able to communicate in Arabic have not mostly been met when it comes to speaking the colloquial. Therefore, it is crucial to fundamentally rethink the learning objectives of Arabic teaching to meet these expectations. The framework I propose in this chapter is meant to bridge these gaps and correspond to the actual use of the language.

### **9.3. Factors for the design of the framework**

The factors that influenced my choice of the content and construct of the framework are the learners' needs that emerged through my participants' responses. The previous four chapters showed that learners' expectations through and after their journey of Arabic learning is to be able to communicate in the colloquial as well as to comprehend what they read in *fushā* as shown in section 6.2.3. Also, learners spoke about the ability to interact with NSs from different Arab countries, which implies the ability to understand different dialects and respond appropriately as in section 6.4.3. ATs and Ts also emphasised the relationship between the learners' level of proficiency, and their ability to communicate in different contexts as in sections 6.2.1 and 6.2.2. They required the learners to have the knowledge of the colloquial and to be able to interact with native speakers in different settings. They also focused on the learners' cultural knowledge and social appropriacy as part of communicative proficiency as in section 5.2.1, 6.3.1 and 6.3.2. Only the AT, (Luna: section 6.4.1) made reference to the intercultural skills (Byram, 1997); which corresponds to Agar's 'languaculture' (1994: 28) 'language fills the spaces between us with sound; culture forges the human connection through them.

Culture is in language, and language is loaded with culture'. The T, Walid and the L, Yaman made an indirect reference to the concept of "languaculture" though indicating the bond between language and culture; yet neither Walid nor Yaman referred to the intercultural skills or attitudes.

Some of the Ts highlighted the ESA as the form of the language they expect their learners to be able to produce as a replacement of the colloquial (section 6.2.2). The implication of this suggestion would be a diglossic learner who can mix and switch between *fushā* and *ammiyyah* confidently and appropriately. However, as discussed in section 3.2.2, the definition of ESA in the literature seems a bit of a grey area in terms of its features, and whether it is based on MSA or on the colloquial. This would create difficulties in basing assessment on it because it is hard to establish consistency in assessment unless there is shared understanding of what is/is not acceptable. ATs, as in section 7.2.1, and Ts, as in sections 5.2.2 and 7.2.2, highlighted the authenticity of test tasks as an attribute of a communicative test.

On the other hand, many other issues were not agreed on amongst the participants, and appeared to be highly contested. For instance, although they all deemed cultural knowledge as important for communicative testing, they seemed to conceptualise cultural knowledge differently, with one (the AT, Luna) only considering it from an intercultural perspective as shown in section 6.3. Also, diglossic competence was considered an essential component of communicative proficiency by all participants, but there was no agreement on the number of dialects the learners should understand or produce (section 7.2.4). In addition, neither the separation nor the integration of *fushā* and *ammiyyah* in terms of oral production has been agreed on (section 6.4.2). The participants also had different opinions regarding the model against which a scale of proficiency would be designed. Those who talked about an educated native speaker as a model disagreed on the native speaker's level of education (section 8.2.1), whereas the ones who considered a non-native model had no agreement on its definition (section 8.2.2). In my attempt to propose the framework, I consider my participants' opinions, and also try to make decisions on the contested aspects as well as on the other aspects based on the literature.



#### 9.4. Conceptualising CAP

Proficiency as I perceive it is an abstract concept that can be observed and measured through certain interactional functions along multiple levels of attainment. The data show divergent opinions in this regard. Of all Ls participants, two ATs and two Ts conceptualised proficiency from a multi-level perspective, which also indicates my position in this regard, whereas the remaining perceived it as an ultimate single level, as shown in sections 5.2.1, 5.2.2 and 5.2.3. Only the AT, Luna made a direct reference to the intercultural skills in her conceptualisations of Arabic proficiency, in terms of being able to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds using Arabic. Her perceptions relate to Byram's (1997, 2008) ICC *savoirs*. ICC is also consistent with Agar's (1994) 'languaculture', which implies ties between language and culture and that culture is part of the language. The remaining participants talked about the interconnection between language and culture, but they seemed to be talking about the culture of the target language only, which is Arabic as in chapter 6. In my opinion, when conceptualising language proficiency, a consideration of the knowledge of cultural elements, behaviour, habits and traditions is essential. This is to include the attitudinal dimension, and the learner's ability to 'decentre' and empathise which Byram's (1997, 2008) *savoirs* imply. I also think that it helps in carrying out successful communication, as it requires considering the cultural context where each variety and register could be used.

From my perspective, CAP consists of two main features that distinguish it from other languages, as discussed in chapter 2. This would create different challenges for the learners to learn it and the applied linguists to conceptualise it. One prominent feature is that its formal code is used for reading and writing and in spoken and written media, and that the formal code is different from its spoken codes. The spoken varieties are also diverse and differ to various degrees from each other in terms of their phonological and morphological systems, based on the area where each dialect is being spoken. Another important feature in relation to MSA relates to its highly inflectional system that influences the grammatical accuracy of sentences. These two main features make it challenging for educationalists and applied linguists to determine what it is appropriate to expect the learner of Arabic to be proficient at.

Therefore, the models of Arabic communicative proficiency introduced in section 3.2 attempted to conceptualise it in the light of its sociolinguistic reality; the existence of MSA, and multiple spoken varieties. Some models considered several varieties in between MSA and the colloquial, such as those of Blanc (1960) and Badawi (1973), depending on the native speaker's level of education, whereas others considered one variety in between which they call the ESA (Bishai 1966; Cadora 1965) or FSA (Ryding, 1991). Thirdly, looking at Arabic language as a continuum that includes a spectrum of varieties, between which there are no neat boundaries, has produced a different type of model that considers the integration between these varieties depending on the context where they are being used. Abboud (1971), Younes (1990), and Al-Batal (1992) spoke about an integrated approach to Arabic instruction as an application of their understanding of Arabic language use along a continuum. My participants' views on the actual use of Arabic and its varieties were divergent. Only one participant (the T, Walid) spoke explicitly about Arabic language use along a continuum, and that the varieties of Arabic should be included in the Arabic syllabi as registers not as different languages (section 6.4.2). The T, Farah also mentioned ESA as an accepted variety for communication if a learner has chosen to use it (section 6.4.2), but emphasised the knowledge of MSA at the same time. The rest of the participants highlighted the importance of knowing MSA and the colloquial at the same level; with no reference made to the integration of MSA and any other colloquial (section 6.4). Clear identification of the relationship between MSA and the colloquial in terms of use; whether along a continuum or as separate codes appears essential. Unless there is a mutual understanding of this relationship, achieving validity and reliability of the assessment instruments that are based on it would be very difficult. Therefore, in the coming paragraphs, I offer my own position regarding the actual use of Arabic language, and then provide measures to be considered for the assessment to ensure consistency.

In my view, the way Arabic language is being used can be best reflected by the concept of a continuum. However, the application of this concept in teaching and testing would appear more complex than Younes (1990, 2015) described. Figure 1 below (section 9.4) adapted from Hary (1996: 72) helps illustrate my opinion regarding Arabic language use as a continuum.

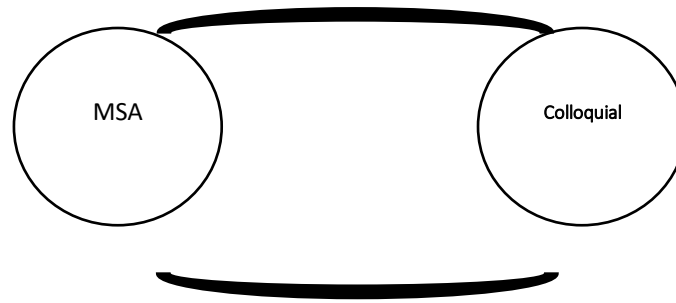


Figure 1: Arabic continuum

The figure shows MSA and colloquial as two poles of the Arabic language use along a continuum, which would mean that one end is pure MSA and the other is pure colloquial. Hary (1996) suggested that a pure version of MSA and colloquium does not exist in oral production. I, yet, argue that in oral production, both MSA and colloquial co-exist and a series of hybrid versions of both can emerge based on several variables; such as the level of formality, the situation, the interlocutors, vocabulary selection and the context (when, where and how). MSA could be used for broadcasting, preaching, and formal political/academic speeches and discussions. Mixed varieties are used in schools and in less formal discussions, and sometimes in TV shows, and radio programmes. The colloquial is also used in daily life activities in the market, on the street, at the barber shop, in restaurants, and so on. In contrast with Hary (1996), I argue that a pure version of MSA does exist but is less used than the colloquial or the mixed varieties in oral production. The mixed varieties result in the shifts between the two ends (MSA and any colloquial), and the moves along the continuum that the speaker makes back and forth between the two poles according to the previously-mentioned variables. I consider these shifts and moves natural, but they result in an unlimited number of intermediate forms being produced depending on the demands of speech. In other words, the resulting production appears as rather: a) situation-oriented; the setting, the audience, the topic, and the purpose of the topic determine what standard features or colloquial elements the produced forms would contain and b) a personal preference: a speaker might choose their moves along the continuum to be closer to MSA or to the colloquial as they are more confident to use one than they are to use the other.

Therefore, I disagree with the idea of having a third pole between the two extreme ends (Bishai, 1966; Cadora, 1965; Ryding, 1991). I rather argue that there are several

intermediate mixed varieties, but with no rigid boundaries in between which does not accord with Blanc's (1960) and Badawi's (1973) categories either. In principle, Younes's (2015) IA seems to reflect the idea of the actual use along a continuum, but also implies the existence of a third pole that results in merging MSA and the Levantine. Ferguson (1996: 59) supported the idea of a continuum and the existence of intermediate varieties in between the two poles, but rejects the existence of a third pole. I agree with Ferguson in this regard, and see no rigid boundaries amongst these varieties. IA seems to imply this third pole and introduces it as a replacement for MSA and the colloquial in oral production. My understanding implies the existence of a mixture of MSA and the colloquial in between the two poles but I believe that it cannot suffice as a replacement of either of the two poles. Empirical research that explores the rules and features of this intermediate variety or any other mixed forms does not exist yet. It is demanding to conduct studies that attempt to answer two important questions; firstly, where is this variety located in the continuum? And secondly, if another dialect were to replace the Levantine – Egyptian or Moroccan for example – would the features and rules differ? These inquiries should be empirically responded to before approaches to teaching and testing an intermediate variety are considered. Assessing any of these mixed forms before answering such questions seems rather complex. Unless it is clear what exactly is under assessment, what is acceptable and what is not, consistency and reliability of the testing instrument would be affected. Table 3 below illustrates my view in terms of teaching and testing Arabic varieties:

Table 5: My view on teaching and testing Arabic varieties across the CEFR levels

<b>Levels</b>	<b>Teaching</b>	<b>Assessment</b>
<b>A1</b>	MSA	MSA
<b>A2</b>	MSA/colloquial separately	MSA/colloquial separately
<b>B1/B2</b>	MSA/colloquial separated in speaking and listening. Integrated in listening only.	MSA/colloquial separated in speaking and listening. Integrated in listening only.
<b>C1/C2</b>	MSA/colloquial; separated and integrated in speaking and listening.	MSA/colloquial; separated in listening and speaking, and integrated in listening only.

As shown in the table, the approach I consider in my research argues for teaching and testing the two poles separately starting from A2 in listening and speaking. Then forms of a mixed variety can also be added to the teaching and testing practices starting from B1 in listening only. The rationale is to get the learners receptively and implicitly exposed to forms of mixed varieties that exist in actual language use. In other words, introducing a hybrid version does not imply teaching it as a separate code but rather including listening tasks in the teaching activities that contain a discussion held in MSA and a colloquial as in a debate around current affairs. Students then are free to discuss it orally in any hybrid version as it is in the activity, since a pure colloquial in such situations would not be appropriate or sufficient. This way of integration in my opinion can act as an indirect exposure to naturally occurring spoken forms that draw on elements of MSA and the colloquial rather than teaching it as a separate code.

Indeed, what I deem as essential for conceptualising communicative proficiency is how appropriate the production is to the situation at hand. That is to say, if a non-native learner lives in an Arab country, they will be exposed to some situations where they find out that their knowledge of MSA does not seem to be useful; in situations like ordering a taxi or booking a room in a hotel. My learner participants have spoken about their experiences in section 6.2.3 for instance, which conforms to my statements in this regard. Therefore, in this case the language functions a learner is required to perform are mainly in the colloquial, and MSA would not be considered appropriate since the communication would be interrupted at any moment due to a potential misunderstanding by any of the interlocutors. In other words, from my point of view, communicative proficiency does not only have to do with what variety is being used, but also it has a great deal to do with the context, the interlocutors, and the functions of language use.

As such, the test's tasks would identify which variety is being assessed in oral production (MSA or a colloquial). What would indicate the most appropriate variety is the situation of the task (where, when and with whom it is taking place). To ensure the consistency of the measurement criteria and reliability of the test's tasks, mixed forms would not be aimed at for assessment purposes, although it would be acceptable if a learner's production included some elements of these mixed forms if used appropriately. That is to say, if the task's situation requires the usage of MSA, the

structure of the discourse is expected to be in MSA, but it would be accepted if the learner's production contained *ammiyyah* elements, which does not affect the meaning or the communication. Examples of such elements can be skipping the case endings that are a distinctive attribute to the *fushā* structure, occasionally using *ammiyyah* expressions/proverbs to support an idea, or the phonetic influence that one's dialect has on their MSA.

On the other hand, I argue that CAP should not only be conceptualised from a sociolinguistic perspective, but should also include other linguistic, cultural and intercultural aspects which are also required for appropriate communication. Although more focus was put on conceptualising proficiency from this sociolinguistic side by Badawi (1973), Ryding (1991) and Younes (2015), among others, as in sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2, my participants' views included other aspects such as grammar, accuracy and authenticity alongside the knowledge of dialects. In other words, when conceptualising CAP my participants linked it to the knowledge of dialects and the ability to communicate in the colloquial with concentration on appropriacy as shown in section 6.2. Yet only one AT participant considered the ability to communicate with interlocutors from different backgrounds as part of successful communication (section 6.3.1). Therefore, my understanding of the concept of CAP incorporates a number of aspects;

Firstly, *interaction*: as a collaborative activity that involves establishing a relationship between the sender, the receiver and the content, suggested by Kramsch (1986), Wells (1986) and Young (2011). Accordingly, my perception of communication implies being able to follow an argument provided in a written text, read between the lines, guess the sense of the text, assess the attitude of the writer, and reflect upon it in terms of opinion and social background. Also, I believe that the oral communication with an interlocutor should result from good listening skills where the learner listens first, responds appropriately and gives an opinion.

Secondly, *appropriacy*: I consider this aspect as essential in terms of linguistic forms to be used in addition to social appropriacy

Thirdly, a *counterbalanced approach* between accuracy and fluency: where learners can make themselves understood when they speak in the colloquial with a degree of

tolerance when it comes to grammatical errors that do not affect the meaning. Based on this definition, the components of which the framework consists are proposed in the following section.

## 9.5. Components of the assessment framework

The assessment framework incorporates three main components; the competences that reflect the relationship between proficiency and communication, the construct on which the assessment is based and the model against which the learners are tested.

### 9.5.1. The framework competences

The approach adopted in this study takes a behavioural-linguacultural view of proficiency, which includes Agar's (1994) linguacultural competence and Kramsch's (1986) interactional competence, and adds diglossic competence as a central component in terms of assessing listening and speaking skills. This view broadens the definition of Bachman and Palmer's (2010) strategic competence to include Hymes's (1972) ability for use, and Canale and Swain's (1980) discourse competence. Figure 2 below illustrates these components of the communicative Arabic proficiency (CAP) framework I propose.

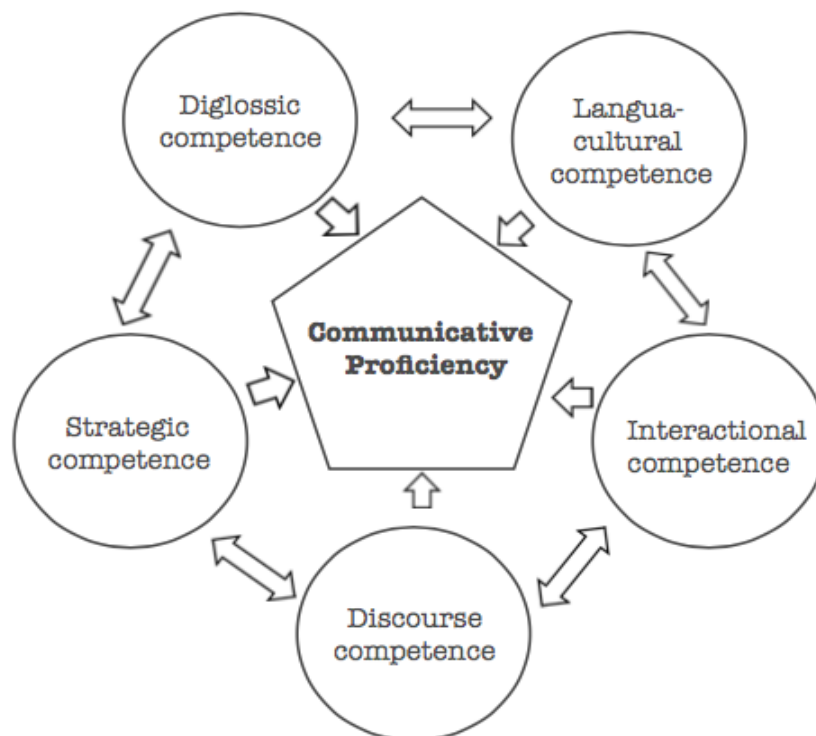


Figure 2: Proposed Framework of Communicative Arabic Proficiency (CAP)

According to my behavioural-languacultural view of proficiency, and as the figure shows, the competences that I consider the framework should include are listed as follows:

- I. Languacultural competence: Only two of my participants; an assessor (section 6.3.1) and a teacher (section 6.3.2) pointed out intercultural competence as part of communicative proficiency. Other participants' views seem to fall under the socio-linguistic knowledge described by Canale and Swain (1980) that considers the influence of culture of the target language, social appropriacy and contextual factors on successful communication. I consider the languacultural competence as essential in the Arabic context. As explained in section 3.4.2, Agar (1994: 28) talked about the concept of 'languaculture' to sum up language and culture; he states:

*'Language, in all its varieties, in all the ways it appears in everyday life, builds a world of meanings. When you run into different meanings, when you become aware of your own and work to build a bridge to the others, 'culture' is what you're up to. Language fills the spaces between us with sound; culture forges the human connection through them. Culture is in language, and language is loaded with culture'.*

The reason I consider this competence a key aspect of CAP is that Arabic is spoken across 23 countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Although there are mutual cultural similarities amongst these countries imposed by the shared religions, and history, there are still national and local cultural aspects that differ from one country to the other. This is where the intercultural skills are needed. Also, I consider this competence a significant means for improving advanced language functions such as analysis, research, comparison and critical thinking.

The following two sub-sections introduce the two components this competence comprises (language and inter-culture), considering my participants' opinions and adding the implications drawn from these into the Arabic context.



a. Language: my participants' responses regarding the linguistic knowledge were various as shown in chapter 5. They all looked at it from a four-skills perspective and highlighted different aspects such as the knowledge of grammar, syntax, morphology of MSA, vocabulary and different language genres (section 5.2.1). Focus was given to accuracy rather than to fluency in oral and written production particularly concerning MSA (section 5.2.1). One of the teacher participants as in (section 6.4.2) considered writing a secondary skill which, according to him, is why some inaccuracy that does not affect the communication can be tolerated. Only two called for the balance between fluency and accuracy for successful communication as in section 6.2.2. Most of my participants required a bi-dialectical knowledge as part of the linguistic knowledge as shown in chapter 6; however, two teacher participants (section 6.4.2) were flexible about the variety the learner chooses to use for oral interaction; MSA, the colloquial or mixed forms of both. My understanding of this linguistic knowledge includes the ability to use this linguistic knowledge consciously and appropriately in production. I adopt a trade-off perspective between the two constructs – accuracy and fluency – as put forth by Swain (2000) and Lyster (2007). I expect the learner to be able to produce a comprehensible account of the language associated with awareness of its forms. Grammatical errors that do not affect meaning and interaction can be tolerated when the learner can appropriately communicate messages and negotiate meaning. Also, as part of this linguistic knowledge, I consider the knowledge of two varieties – MSA and the colloquial – as essential to maintain the social and contextual appropriacy. The style and the variety of the language should adapt to the interlocutors and situations in terms of formality and word selection; particularly in an Arabic context where the young, for instance, should always show a great deal of respect to the elderly, and the university student should never refer to his or her teacher by name.

b. Inter-culture: The concept of 'languaculture' comes in accordance with Byram's (1997; 2008) intercultural competence. The latter includes four

dimensions; knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness. In the Arabic context, this involves the knowledge of the colloquial and cross-cultural communication, and awareness of values, beliefs and living conditions. Sensitivity towards Arabic culture is key for successful communication in the Arab world. ICC savoirs help the learner achieve the appropriate form of utterance to fit a particular context, and also to use it as a tool to master so many linguistic aspects of the language itself. Several instances can be given in this regard; religion and politics seem to be the strongest influential factors in people's daily life interaction. In Syria, for instance, a non-native speaker should be aware that Syrians cannot (used not to be able to) explicitly reveal their political opinions and therefore one should never approach them asking them to do so. Another example is that the diversity of religions and sects in the Arab world and in Syria in particular imposed a tacit cultural understanding that the differences should never be discussed in any social setting. Interestingly, in reality, cultural inter-rules amongst the various religious groups have a strong presence. For example, expressions include the word 'Allah' (the name of God) is used by almost everyone regardless of their religion or sect. Such expressions have become more cultural rather than being associated with one religion or another. That is to say, the learner should be aware of those cultural aspects to enrich their knowledge, which leads to a better and quicker understanding and production in the Arabic discourse. I also see the intercultural skills essential due to their relationship to the Arabic sociolinguistic situation. They help the learner improve their ability to recognise and produce different Arabic varieties and cultural aspects associated with these varieties. Also the implications of intercultural skills on what the learners could do are significant; they include their ability to research, analyse, critique, detect bias, empathise and interpret a variety of texts across different genres including stories, poetry and films reflecting on their own and others' backgrounds.

- II. Diglossic competence: As shown in section 6.4, all participants indicated the knowledge of MSA and at least one spoken form of Arabic to successfully communicate in different contexts. They also put emphasis on this competence

as an important factor for significant communication due to its relationship with the cultural knowledge and with maintaining social appropriacy. In order for the Arabic language learners to carry out communicative tasks, they need to be able to use MSA and the regional dialect in the country where they live or where they are planning to stay depending on what a particular social context requires. In the Arabic context, usage of Arabic varieties should be situated in, and appropriate to, the social setting and interlocutors, as explained in section 9.4. Discussed in section 3.5.1, MSA that is not influenced by any colloquial features is spoken in formal situations such as TV news, and political or religious speeches, (as in section 9.4). In less formal discussions, MSA can include some colloquial vocabulary or expressions which do not make it a pure version of MSA. I contend that if students were exposed to the two varieties of Arabic, as my framework implies, they will be able to produce them separately and mixed. This however raises a number of questions: Can any produced mixed variety be reliably assessed when it is still uncodified? What would best correspond to the context of UK universities that varies a lot in terms of Arabic teaching pedagogy. As described in section 2.3, in most contexts MSA is still the only variety taught, while very few programmes teach a dialect alongside, and only the University of Edinburgh considers teaching the integrated approach of Younes (2015). Therefore, in order for this framework to be accessible for the context for which it was designed, I consider testing MSA only in the novice levels, and MSA and the colloquial starting from the intermediate levels. Production of any mixed forms will not be assessed to maintain consistency of assessment criteria but it would be accepted if it was appropriate to the situation at hand, as discussed in section 9.4.

- III. Interactional competence: The concept of interaction was identified by most of my participants when conceptualising communication as shown in section 6.2 and as a construct for testing communicative competence as the data presented in section 7.2 showed. According to Kramsch (1986), the concept implies the ability to dynamically negotiate intended meanings, clarify one's and the other's intentions, and predict what understanding and misunderstanding would occur between the interlocutors. It also implies establishing a relationship with the written text and the author, following the text's argument, evaluating it and

analysing it. From my perspective, I believe this kind of competence is needed particularly for teaching and testing the speaking and listening skills. In a real-life (authentic) situation, a non-native speaker of Arabic gets exposed to a situation where he or she needs to ask questions and clarify, unlike what typically happens in an oral interview test, and the level of success in this communicative task can be identified only to the extent that the message is conveyed between both interlocutors, since it is a two-way process.

- IV. Strategic competence: This was defined by Canale and Swain (1980: 30) as ‘verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence’. It implies strategies of avoidance (avoiding topic of conversation, repair, rephrasing) (Canale and Swain, 1980). It also covers the learner’s ability to use the verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to negotiate and exchange meanings and cope with the diversity, changes and surprises that may occur when carrying out a communicative task. My participants did not explicitly mention this competence when conceptualising communicative proficiency. As mentioned in section 3.4.2, Nielsen (1996: 234) pointed out that only one research study is available on this kind of competence in relation to Arabic, which is that of Fakhri (1984). The study analysed the strategies of an English-native speaker who lived in Morocco, and showed that this woman used the universal interactional strategies any learner could use when learning a foreign language such as; explicit demanding for help, using fillers to play for time, recasting, repeating, rephrasing, circumlocution, and avoidance. I consider strategic competence an essential component of communicative proficiency since it is not only needed for social communication, but also demanded for the interaction between the learners and in the written discourse of Arabic as well. It seems to be also central for relating interactional, languacultural, and diglossic competences to each other when a communicative task is carried out.
- V. Discourse competence: Discourse competence is defined as the learner’s ability to relate messages and sentences in a coherent and meaningful way (Canale and Swain, 1980, Celce-Murcia *et al.* 1995). Its two core aspects are; cohesion and

coherence, where the former deals with how the text markers are linked structurally in the text by using references, ellipsis and conjunctions, while the latter concerns the relationships between the textual meanings of utterances (Canale and Swain, 1980: 20). The data do not show any reference to this kind of competence as a component of communicative proficiency; however, I deem it essential when it comes to delivering a message in Arabic, and so it should be taught and included in the TAFL curriculum for two reasons. Firstly, since there is limited research focussing on the Arabic discourse features and aspects, learners naturally tend to use simplified handy ways to survive and deliver a particular utterance. For instance, and from my own experience, translation has always been the way to convey a particular concept in Arabic, particularly if the learners had not been familiarised with it previously. They ultimately use Arabic words following L1 structure, which may sometimes cause miscommunication or misunderstanding. Secondly, the Arabic discourse is very culturally coded and a learner should be able to understand that the coherence of an Arabic text is often achieved by cultural references and codes. For instance, selection of vocabulary, giving floor most of the time, and agreeing to most of what an elder says to a young man/woman is highly encouraged in cultural practices. The learner is not only required to understand that, but also to be taught how to use it at a certain level.

#### 9.5.2. The framework construct

In this section I provide an explanation of the construct I adopt to best conceptualise proficiency from a communicative/post-communicative perspective. As discussed in section 3.4, identifying the construct of an assessment framework is very important in pursuing the validity of the framework as well as of the tests that will be based on it. As discussed in section 3.5.3, Shoman (2011) proposed a framework that is based on an intercultural construct to design and evaluate a course of Arabic instruction that includes MSA and the Egyptian colloquial. Shoman's study, though, has not referred to assessment in this regard. ACTFL gloss (2012) adopts a functional construct as mentioned in section 2.3. As shown in chapter 7, this issue was also contested amongst my participants. Most of the participants spoke about interaction, although some of them confined it to the advanced level. Others linked interaction to the cultural

knowledge, whereas only two (an assessor teacher and a teacher) associated it with the intercultural skills.

I deem interaction to be the measure that best reflects learners' communicative ability as discussed in section 3.4.2. Interaction does not only require linguistic knowledge but also requires intercultural knowledge so that the communication carries on successfully. In language testing, the construct of a framework represents the philosophy upon which tests based on this framework are designed. The interactional construct not only includes knowledge but also expands to comprise the employment of this knowledge in different contexts of use. I argue that the interactional construct in the situation of Arabic language emphasises the competences set out in section 9.5.1 of which the assessment framework should consist. It requires an autonomous learner who uses non-verbal communications skills to be able to initiate a conversation or be involved in a debate for instance. Interaction also demands command of Arabic culture as well as the interlocutor's background when involved in an oral conversation, or the writer's attitude and argument when listening to or reading a text or an article. Expanding interaction to the written texts would relate to the concept of 'symbolic competence' described by Kramsch (2006: 251) and discussed in section 6.2.1. This concept refers to the learner's ability to communicate 'not only with living others, but also with imagined others and with the other selves they might want to become', and that is through the study of literature that helps reflect learners as 'whole persons with hearts, bodies, and minds, with memories, fantasies, loyalties, identities'. Consequently, interaction becomes not only about vocabulary and communication strategies, but also 'embodied experiences, emotional resonances and moral imaginings'. One more competence that interaction implies, in my opinion, is the knowledge of different varieties of Arabic. In order for the learner to be able to successfully interact, they should be ready and confident to be involved in any linguistic situation within different settings where they could produce the variety that suits the situation and the context. They also should have the intercultural awareness that allows them not only to interact, but also to use the structure and semantics of the language in its intercultural aspects.

### 9.5.3. The norm of assessment

As discussed in section 8.3, the issue of 'native speaker' is complex and contested regarding who the native speaker of Arabic to be taken as a model of assessment should

be. My participants' responses also varied between the educated native speaker and the advanced non-native learner. I personally consider the successful L2 user to be the most appropriate model for the assessment framework, a notion proposed by Cook (2005). Cook (2007: 241) argued that the concept of L2 user is different from the concept of L2 learner; which my participants used in terms of the way they approach the target language. L2 learners learn the language as a system, for potential later use, while the L2 users exploit 'whatever linguistic resources they have for a real-life purpose whether that be ordering a CD on the internet [...], translating a letter, or visiting the doctor'. According to Cook (2005, 2007), the successful L2 user is the one who has the non-native competence that arises from the interlingual interaction between the learner's L1, L2, and Arabic and the process of language and culture transfer, and who has reached the highest level of attainment in the L2. I argue for this norm for my proposed framework since it enhances the intercultural competence of learners through creating an achievable multilingual/multicultural model which reflects the linguistic and culturally transferable skills between L1 and L2/L3. Therefore, the competent L2 user that can be taken as a norm of my assessment framework is the CEFR's C2; with two basic added competences; *intercultural* and *diglossic*. The reason for this choice is that a) the CEFR is already used in the UK universities for identifying Arabic learners' level of attainment as mentioned in section 2.3; and b) as mentioned in section 2.4.2, C2 mastery level is not meant to reflect NS or near-NS competence. It is rather intended 'to characterise the degree of precision, appropriateness and ease with the language which typifies the speech of those who have been highly successful learners' (CEFR, 2001: 35).

According to the global levels of the CEFR (2001: 24), at the mastery level, C2, the user

*'can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations'.*

Another feature I consider essential for the L2 user's model is their ability to make cultural, historical, and political references embedded within the language, which relates to the languacultural competence, and helps understanding and being understood. In

addition to that, I consider essential the ability to use intercultural references when organising an extended discourse, be it spoken or written. Based on this model, the construct identified in section 9.5.2 and the competences outlined in section 9.5.1, the next section offers general guidelines for the type of knowledge and skills expected in an Arabic assessment scale of proficiency.

## **9.6. Guidelines for testing CAP based on the proposed framework**

This section recaps the context, learners, and the type of varieties this framework is designed for. Then accordingly, general guidelines for the process of testing the learners based on the proposed model will be offered.

The context is UKHE, considering the range of students enrolled and the different purposes of their learning. Explained in section 2.3, those students can be those who learn Arabic as part of a university degree of three or four years' duration with the third year abroad, or those doing a joint degree, in addition to heritage language learners, who may be taking Arabic as an ancillary course. The proposed framework is meant to design proficiency tests for the learners of that context, a framework that can be used as a reference for testing the communicative abilities of the learners in such a multicultural environment. In the proposed framework, in principle, I argue for an integrated approach that incorporates the two varieties, based on Younes (1990, 2015) and explained in section 3.2.3, but with some modifications that make it suitable to the contextual factors and learners' needs.

Firstly, as suggested by Kendall (2014), an approach that takes MSA as a foundation for students with various purposes of learning seems to be demanded in the British university contexts. Accordingly, students then can be guided to different 'streams of specializations' such as Classical Arabic for textual research or 'dialect work' for social science (ibid: 4).

Secondly, UK university students who do Arabic as part of their degree spend their third year abroad in different Arab countries depending on the choices of their home universities. Currently, Morocco, Jordan, Palestine and Egypt could be potential destinations for students of one UK university. Therefore, it does not seem practical to impose the Levantine when students might have learnt the Moroccan. Therefore,



learners will be assessed on the spoken variety they choose; be it Egyptian, Levantine, Moroccan or any other one they are confident to be assessed on. I recognise that this would have significant cost implications due to the number of oral examiners it would be necessary to train and employ. However, I consider this flexibility very necessary in order for the framework not to be limited and confined to one spoken variety, given that UK students still consider going to different locations abroad.

I am aware that Younes' choice of the Levantine is based on an assumption that the knowledge of this spoken variety would be of benefit to the learners in terms of the ability to communicate with different native speakers of other dialects. It is also based on the fact that the Levantine covers a wide geographical area of the Arab homeland which provides the learners with confidence in communication when located in more than one Arab country. Despite this, there is insufficient research supporting the former assumption. Also the fact that many learners go to Egypt and Morocco given the security situation in most of the Levant countries makes it impractical to specify one variety. Therefore, my adaptation to this approach lies in the following:

Firstly, the freedom I give to the learners to choose the spoken variety they are confident to be tested on. This flexible approach towards the spoken variety the learners choose to use was also pointed out by all participants as shown in chapter 6. None of the participants spoke about one specific spoken variety to be taught and assessed.

Secondly, I suggest that introducing the colloquial alongside MSA starts from the pre-intermediate level where learners can be introduced to the colloquial system (a variety of their choice) after they have been familiarised with MSA script and structure. There are practical and contextual reasons behind my proposal to start with MSA at A1 level.

- a) The data analysis shows that novice learners of Arabic in all cases are first introduced to the Arabic script which means they normally learn how to write first alongside orally producing some expressions they had to memorise. Introducing them to MSA first seems to correspond to the existing institutional policy in terms of the Arabic language content.
- b) The data analysis generally shows that MSA is the only taught variety at most of the UKHE institutions, which would allow the proposed framework to be applied.

- c) MSA has a one unified linguistic system wherever it is used across the Arab world. Whereas, the spoken varieties are various and not proved to be mutually consistent in terms of morphology, syntax and phonology. They linguistically converge and diverge from MSA and from each other with no sufficient empirical research or documentation of that, which would result in inevitable inconsistency in what to be taught or assessed. Plus, there is no standard accepted writing system for vernacular dialects (Younes, 2006: 165).
- d) The majority of the UKHE learners need to pass exams in MSA only, even after they come back from the year abroad with different levels of *ammiyyah* knowledge. My participants have not highlighted any potential of using, investing or assessing the learners' knowledge of colloquial after their year abroad. Hence why, it seems vital to establish a mutual basis of MSA system at the early stage of learning with references to colloquial at vocabulary and cultural levels. For instance, they learners can be taught that “*kayfa haluka?*” is to day “*how are you?*”, but “*kifak*” and “*izzayyak*” are other varieties.

Thirdly, I expect the learners to be able to produce the two varieties of Arabic separately, according to the situation; but they can also mix the two forms since they are to be taught in listening starting from A2. The usage of any variety is based on the context and interlocutor which reflects the appropriacy I explained in section 9.4. For instance, ordering food in the restaurant cannot be appropriate if carried out in MSA or in mixed forms, while an academic discussion would appropriately be held in an integrated language and ideally in MSA. Writing an article, reading a newspaper or following news on TV or radio is confined to MSA. The data show that only the assessor John and the teacher Farah pointed to ESA (Educated Spoken Arabic: that is a colloquial-based integrated version of MSA and the colloquial) as an option learners can adopt to speak. Others highlighted the knowledge of the MSA and the colloquial separately as shown in sections 6.4 and 7.2.

As part of linguistic competence, I consider the learners' awareness of the syntactic features and differences of these systems essential. Therefore, when testing the four skills, a clarification of the variety that is being tested should be offered. The variety to be tested in reading and writing is confined to MSA, since it is the only written form of

Arabic in different registers. In listening, three types of varieties can be tested; MSA, the colloquial of a learner's choice and any mixed form of both. In speaking, the learner is expected to produce either MSA or the colloquial based on the question asked and the situation they are put in, starting from the intermediate levels. A hybrid version of both is not aimed to be tested in oral production, since the criteria of assessment can be subjective due to the free style of this variety, and its features that do not seem to be clear so far, whereas what is under assessment in listening are comprehension, listening skills and the use of listening strategies.

A test's tasks can include discrete point questions in addition to other tasks that assess skills in an integrative way; such as cloze tasks. The purpose is to have tasks that are as reflective as possible of the interactional construct an Arabic communicative proficiency test would aim to measure. Questions that test listening or reading comprehension, multiple choice questions after a reading text or a listening task, monologues, dialogues, role-plays or interviews would be tasks for testing interactional competence in an integrative way.

Intercultural skills can be tested through a task analysis of an idea, or a phenomenon reflecting and comparing its conception in other places or cultures. This could take place through reading, analysing and interpreting a literary text, listening to, commenting on and/or critiquing a political opinion, or speaking to or questioning an expert for example.

Strategic competence, as this framework suggests (section 9.5.1), is involved in all types of language knowledge. It makes connections between the intercultural setting – 'goal setting', the appropriate variety to be used – 'planning', and the way structures can be chosen and organised – 'control of execution' (Douglas, 2000:29). Assessing this type of competence can be carried out through tasks that evaluate 'the communicative situation and engage a discourse domain, a cognitive interpretation of the context' (ibid: 29). A test's tasks can be those that require deciding on the best way to respond to a particular situation, in terms of what language elements and intercultural and background knowledge is required (Douglas, 2000:29).

Discourse competence can also be assessed through tasks that require extracting inter- and intra-sentential relations with and across sentences in a reading test for instance.

Situating the text in its appropriate context could be another task for assessing this type of competence. In integrative testing, a task can aim to assess more than one competence at the same time, and also more than one skill.

## **9.7. Implications of the guidelines on testing CAP**

My vision of the implications of the above-mentioned guidelines are outlined in this section across three sub-headings; under the first one comes an explanation of possible primary objectives of the framework in each of the CEFR levels. The second offers an illustration on how these objectives can be reflected in the process of instrument design. The last one sets out two fundamental concepts that should be considered to make the most efficient use of the test.

### 9.7.1. Primary objectives

This section outlines a primary description of the potential objectives that would reflect the behavioural-languacultural approach of my framework. It mainly includes examples of the possible descriptors that support assessment in each level of attainment. It considers discussing potential objectives of two competences I consider distinctive for Arabic language; languacultural and diglossic. Generally speaking, these descriptors are based on three existing proficiency scales, and two sets of cultural/intercultural objectives; which can be listed as follows:

- CEFR (2001) scale for the rating categories and linguistic functions,
- ILR ICC (2012)
- ACTFL (2012) as a reference
- Byram's (1997) *savoirs* (section 3.4.2).
- Al-Batal's (1988) Arabic cultural objectives (section 3.5.3).

It is worth noting that the CEFR levels were chosen to formulate these descriptors since it is already used in the UKHE context as discussed in section 2.3. I am aware that each of the six main categories of which the CEFR consists is classified into more sub-levels to provide detailed account of the abilities required in each level; yet I consider only the major six categories where each reflects the overall highest abilities expected in each level. The reason is that, as mentioned earlier in this section, these are general guidelines that consider embody my own vision on how the languacultural view of

Arabic can be reflected when rating the levels of CAP in terms of two competences; languacultural and diglossic. Following the levels of CEFR, these descriptors can be listed as follows:

**Breakthrough (A1):** As described by the CEFR (2012), this category refers to the lowest level of language use in a social context, and represents the basic user. Accordingly, in this level, learners' overall social interaction is basic due to the lack of required linguistic and cultural knowledge and social interactional skills. Therefore, the abilities that seem to be suitable to this level can be:

Languacultural competences: In addition to the ability to produce memorised social expressions, polite greetings, I expect the learner in this level to be able to recognise Arabic names including countries and people in spoken and written forms in MSA. The learner in this level is also starting to develop knowledge about the cultural differences between his own culture, those of others, and the culture of Arabic. The learner though is able to identify and challenge the stereotypes (ILR ICC: 2012).

Diglossic competence: In my opinion, the learner in this level can produce the memorised greetings when initiating or responding; in spoken and written forms in MSA. Other oral language functions expected in this level are to be tested in MSA only; such as introducing oneself and responding to basic personal questions.

**Waystage (A2):** According to the CEFR, this category describes a low to a middle level of ability for a basic user. In this level, social interaction is limited to the ability 'to handle very short social exchanges, [...] discuss what to do, where to go and make arrangements [...] and make simple transactions...'. (CEFR, 2001: 34) Abilities that seem to be suitable to this level can be:

Languacultural competence: The learner is able to deal with survival social situations; such as interacting with a 'culture bearer accustomed to foreigners' and using 'behaviour required for the purpose of greeting and leave-taking' and 'tipping' as described by ACTFL. (2012). The learner can recognise main Arab historical monuments or/and important political or/and historical occasions (Al-Batal, 1988). I add that the learner is also aware of the most noticeable red lines in social interaction such as speaking about internal governmental policy in an Arab country for example or

Israel as a state. Misunderstanding and miscommunication is expected in this level when exposed to unfamiliar situations.

I also expect that the learner in this level is able to identify cultural differences between their own culture, those of others, and Arabic cultures in terms of norms, values, religions and behaviours. The learner can also interact with another culture bearer and exchange perspectives. Through interaction the learner is able to discover and acquire some main Arabic cultural practices and apply them in their real communication. This would include intercultural skills of inquiry, research, and seeing another perspective (Byram, 1997).

Diglossic competence: According to the integration I explained in section 9.4, the learner is able to orally interact using the colloquial to survive basic daily life situations; such as shopping, introducing oneself or describing routines and habits. The learner can communicate short messages using MSA in highly predictable situations. The learner is also required to use the variety that suits the situation, and/or the variety that the examiner has chosen to test.

**Threshold (B1):** This level is one of the two levels that represent the independent user according to the CEFR, and that is the visitor to a foreign country. In this level, the learner is generally able to maintain interaction in a range of contexts. Accordingly, the abilities that suit this level in each competence could be:

Linguacultural competence: The learner is able to handle communication in everyday predictable social situations as well as in daily work-related contexts (CEFR: 2001). The learner shows comprehension of etiquette rules, and avoids taboos and sensitivities according to ACTFL (2012). The learner can also recognise and interpret ‘contributions Arabs have made to the World Civilisation’ including architecture, literature and arts (Al-Batal: 1988). The learner is also able to recognise ‘active everyday cultural patterns (e.g., eating, shopping, ways of greeting people, entertainment, sports, music, etc.) (Al-Batal, 1988: 445).

I add to that: the learner in this level can analyse and interpret Arabic cultural events or documents and relate them to their own culture or other cultures; for instance, eating habits in Arabic cultures in comparison to their own and others’ culture.

Diglossic competence: In this level, I expect the learner to be able to participate, follow, and maintain a discussion or a conversation using the suitable variety, make points, express or ask about an opinion in formal and informal settings. For instance, they can summarise their opinion about a certain topic or an article they have read in *fushā* if that was required in the classroom or in the colloquial if involved in an informal conversation: or they can describe symptoms to the doctor or report a problem to a police officer in the colloquial. They also can interview a writer or a politician in MSA or give a presentation about the different types of music, art, literature, film and others among Arabic and Western cultures. They can also understand a discussion of familiar topics held in a hybrid version of MSA and the colloquial.

**Vantage (B2):** This is the other level that represents the independent user and was originally labelled as full independence according to the CEFR (2001). Abilities that seem to accord to this level can be the following:

Linguacultural competence: I expect the learner in this level to be able to act appropriately and successfully in everyday different formal and informal situations, and behaviours; such as have the ability to appropriately address and speak to an elderly person, or know how to treat the other gender (not to initiate shaking hands for example, or offering one's seat to a woman on public transport). The learner is also able to analyse, interpret and compare 'passive everyday cultural patterns (e.g. marriage, customs, education, politics, etc.)' (Al-Batal, 1988: 445). The learner can discuss and interpret reading materials and different registers in politics, literature or arts, and is able to discuss or produce these issues in writing, making appropriate references to the subject matter (CEFR). An example would be two literary texts from two different Arabic eras that reflect the role of women in social or civil life between the past and the present.

The learner is able to analyse, compare and evaluate a variety of issues and subject matters making appropriate use of cultural, literary and historical references of their own and other cultures (ILR ICC, 2012). For example, a learner can give a presentation about relatives' marriage in the Arab world, a comparison and carry out evaluation. They can reason that from their own perspectives and from others' perspectives; they can relate to their own and other cultures, and then an evaluative commentary would be expected from them and the other interlocutors or student audience.

The learner in this level is also able to rephrase in the case of being misunderstood, and explain and repair when miscommunication or misunderstanding occurs (ILR ICC, 2012).

Diglossic competence: I expect that the learner in this level is able to initiate, negotiate and sustain clear connected discourse in both MSA and the colloquial. The learner shows conscious awareness of the variety that is most appropriate to the situation at hand. The learner is also able to effectively and confidently use that variety to communicate with native speakers skilfully using relevant supporting detail. The learner can also comprehend long debates and discussions held in MSA and the colloquial they are familiar with in an integrated way.

**Effective operational proficiency (C1)**: According to the CEFR (2001), this level was originally labelled full effectiveness, to reflect the learner's ability to communicate fluently and spontaneously.

Linguacultural competence: The learner is able to recognise the main principles of Islam, and to appropriately adjust and adapt to these rules when interacting with other native speakers. The learner is also aware of the role of religion in the cultural and political aspects of Arab life (Al-Batal: 1988). In my opinion, testing this can be done through discussing and reflecting on the centrality of religious norms in daily life (food, eating etiquettes, dealing with the opposite gender) and in political life (parliamentary representation based on sect or religion in some Arab countries).

Based on explicit criteria, the learner is able to critically evaluate cultural perspectives or practices of own and other cultures (Byram, 1997). The learner is also able to effectively employ a wide range of sophisticated communicative strategies to persuade, dissuade and negotiate when involved in deep discussions on the culture's traditions, beliefs, history, national policies, and public issues (ILR ICC, 2012). An example of testing intercultural proficiency in this level would be through writing an essay [or, to give communicative context, a magazine article, a blog entry, etc.] of reflective commentaries on the role of religion in political and cultural aspects of life in the Arab world and a learner's own country.

Diglossic competence: I expect the learner in this level to be able to use coherent extended discourse of both MSA and one colloquial of their choice separately in formal



and informal situations effectively with accuracy and fluency. The learner can understand and interact with one own-learnt colloquial in any inter-dialectal setting (when more than one dialect is being spoken by native or non-native speakers). The reason this skill is added in the advanced levels only is that understanding non-standard varieties of a particular foreign language is believed to be an advanced skill. Hence why, it requires a high level of proficiency in that language (Major *et al.* 2005). The learner, yet, may make occasional errors when colloquial deeply cultural structures or very local expressions are being used within that inter-dialectal setting. The learner is also able to appropriately use MSA and the colloquial based on the context, interlocutors, and the situation at hand. The learner is able to understand with ease mixed forms of MSA and the colloquial they speak. They are also expected to use this hybrid version with ease, even though it is not going to be assessed.

**Mastery (C2):** According to the CEFR, this level is labelled as the native speaker or the near-native speaker level, which I called it the ‘proficient language user’ in section 9.5.3. The competences that seem to be suitable to this level can be:

**Linguacultural competence:** The learner in this level is able to evaluate the validity of generalisations, misconceptions and stereotypes about Arab cultures (Al-Batal: 1988), analyse the reason for their publicity, and distinguish between and offer a reasoned argument for what is real and what is popular from an outsider perspective.

I also expect that the learner should be able to distinguish major cultural, political and social differences amongst the Arab countries; for instance, women’s role in society in countries like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, or the disunity of Arabs’ political attitudes towards Israel. The learner in this level is also able to distinguish features of colloquialisms and regionalisms in native speakers’ production (ACTFL, 2012). Accordingly, I expect the learner can also deal with non-native speakers of Arabic regardless of the dialect they speak and the accent they might have. The learner in this level has mastered the intercultural skills described in all previous levels and is able to act as a mediator who has values of openness and curiosity (Byram, 1997). The learner is also able to decentre themselves from their own culture and to look at their own culture and other cultures from a perspective of an empathetic outsider (Byram, 1997).

**Diglossic competence:** I believe that the learner in this level is able to produce an extended discourse fluently, accurately, and skilfully with efficiency and effectiveness

in both MSA and one colloquial or more. The learner can completely understand and respond to what is being said when involved in an inter-dialectical discussion when more than one dialect is being spoken; either by Arab natives or non-native users of different dialects. The learner is confidently and appropriately able to understand and produce a mixed version of MSA and the dialect when needed, based on MSA or the colloquial (using this mixed version is not to be assessed in oral production though).

#### 9.7.2. Suggested specifications of testing instruments

This section is a brief description of the specifications of each proficiency instrument that aims at reflecting the primary objectives explained in section 9.7.1, and the framework main components introduced in section 9.5.1. It is worth noting that test specifications provided are first-thought general guidelines to how the proposed framework can be applied. Some aspects of the specifications are literature-driven such as the CEFR levels, while some others are highlighted in the emerging data, such as the examples given to test cultural competence. The relevance of these guidelines to the UKHE context needs to be researched before application. Empirical validation studies should be carried out to explore how the components of the framework can be reflected in an assessment tool. It should also involve checking if test specification provides clear evidence to what is meant to be tested, and whether or not the assessment objectives are met.

Each communicative Arabic proficiency instrument is to include five main components; reading comprehension, listening comprehension, oral interaction, writing, and translation.

Reading comprehension: The variety to be tested is MSA only at all levels. Reading comprehension tasks would contain three main parts (they could be one or two at the novice levels, though, as the novice is not required to deal with long texts). The first could contain a series of short texts in different genres (three or four) such as job forms, posters, or advertisements. The second may include two longer texts, which might be a newspaper article, a report or a blog. These could be cloze texts with words removed from the passage or missing paragraphs from the main text body, which examinees need to appropriately match. The third part includes a long literary text or article taken from social science books followed by multiple choice items or/and comprehension questions, or summary of main points.

Regarding the rationale for my choices, short texts demand understanding of the context, culture and factual linguistic information. They also help in examining the strategic competence by evaluating the correctness or the appropriateness of responses. The second part allows for examining textual, contextual and discourse knowledge by testing the learner's level of understanding the flow of the ideas and the way the paragraphs are organised. Cloze testing requires the ability to understand context and vocabulary in order to correctly identify the missing words. The third part tests more advanced language functions such as analysis, comparison and evaluation, and the knowledge of registers and genres. In addition to that, literary texts are usually rich in cultural references, which can show the learner's level of cultural knowledge and social appropriateness.

Listening comprehension: This section would consist of two main parts: the first one includes three or four short audio/video recordings that contain mini-dialogues that vary in terms of topic and language variety. This part would be aimed at testing MSA and the colloquial according to the level. For example, according to the objectives in A1, the colloquial is not meant to be tested; therefore, tasks in this part can be confined to MSA, while in C1 or C2 they all can be in the colloquial. The second part consists of a longer dialogue that can test MSA or a dialogue that includes a hybrid version of the two varieties.

Short dialogues can examine the learner's ability to cope with various situations, different voice tones, topics and interlocutors, in addition to different language varieties (according to level). In striving for tasks' authenticity, they can vary from open-ended to multiple-choice items where learners can be asked to make judgments or comments, or to suggest an end to a particular situation or find a solution for a problem. Such tasks also help reflect the learner's awareness of culture and context sensitivity through deciding what particular communicative nonverbal cues might imply, in addition to the communicative skills and strategies of interpreting a particular cultural reference.

Intercultural competence in reading or listening comprehension can be tested through the suggested open-ended or multiple-choice items. This could be through measuring how the learner interacts with the reading text or the situation he or she has been shown. Comprehension occurs through an established interactive relationship between the reader (that is the examinee learner in this case), the context and the text according to

Shor (1992). This could apply to comprehending a visual or an audial input as well. The examinee learner needs to interact with the dialogue, the interlocutor and the situation in order to establish an attitude or make judgments. Measuring the way the learner interacts with the reading input for example would reflect their intercultural abilities through questions that demand understanding of ‘the textual ideological perspectives, authorial intent, the condition of its production and its effect on audience’ and the cultural distance between the examinee, the input and the author/interlocutors (Urlaub, 2013: 69).

Oral interaction: This section would consist of three parts; the first would be a one-to-one interview between the examiner and the examinee. The purpose of this part is to measure the learner’s individual linguistic skills in MSA and the colloquial according to the level. A1 is always to be tested only in MSA. This part consists of two or three introductory questions about the learner’s background, current interests and aspirations. The second part can be devoted to measuring the interactive abilities of two examinee candidates through a role-play or a hypothetical problem where both need to identify, discuss and exchange ideas. In striving for the test’s authenticity, learners can be shown visual prompts or they can discuss a piece of news the examiner has asked them to listen to. This allows for more integrative testing, which relates to the authenticity of test’s tasks. The third part is devoted to a longer discussion among the two candidates and another interlocutor examiner. The purpose is testing the examinees’ interactional and intercultural abilities in a group where at least one native speaker is involved. Depending on the level, learners can be asked to discuss issues that show their intercultural skills such as arranged marriages in their cultures in relation with the Arab culture, or a discussion on a certain number of proverbs across particular countries.

An example of a test’s tasks of an A2 level can be as follows:

Part 1: Task 1: greetings and self-introduction in the colloquial

Task 2: asking about the daily routine in MSA

Part 2: role-play: a discussion between a tourist who wants to go to Damascus museum and a taxi driver (directions- destination ‘the museum’- occupation- place of stay- attitude towards the city- price). The situation here requires using the colloquial. The

learner would still be awarded the mark for communication if MSA was used by any chance.

Part 3: a group discussion, which is based on comparing three pieces of newspapers from different countries. Those pieces should be simple and short including advertisements, offers for shopping, or timetables for coming events. This is to be conducted in MSA since the prompt is written.

Written composition: For the novice learners (A1, A2), this section could contain a cloze task, where they have a short text with missing words. It could also be a job application form which they have to fill in with their personal details or a schedule of their daily routine activities. As for the intermediate learners (B1, B2), this test could contain a short writing task about familiar topics such as describing a best holiday (or what makes a good holiday), dream/enjoyable job in the form of an email to a friend etc.). It could also be writing a description/summary of a visual prompt (picture or video) in 80-100 words. Testing the advanced learners (C1, C2) in writing could basically be done through a 250- to 300-word reflective essay about a given situation; or it could be a description of a chart that contains information/data about a particular topic (demographic geographical, political, etc.) where the learners have to illustrate, compare and contrast in words; or it could be both tasks with less words required for the essay part. Several competences can be assessed through writing compositions; linguistic, cultural and discourse competences. Writing can also allow testing any of the intercultural savoirs (Byram, 1997) through a given context and clear task.

Example for C1 level:

Context: In Cairo, you have been to a wedding ceremony of a friend from a different religion and background.

Task: Write between 250 and 300 words giving a description of what this wedding ceremony was like, comparing it to the traditions and customs of similar ceremonies in your culture, and a traditional ceremony of another culture that inspires you or surprises you. Give examples to support your argument.

Translation: Translation, according to the ILR, is the process of ‘transferring a text from one language into another’ according to the ILR (2012). As discussed in section 3.4.3, translation was re-emphasised in the post-method pedagogy to enhance bilingualism

and multilingualism in the light of a shift in pedagogical perspective about keeping L1 and L2 separate. It is considered a complex skill since it does not only require a good command of linguistic knowledge of the two languages but also challenges and assesses other non-linguistic abilities such as cultural and intercultural competences, and awareness of social appropriateness. From my perspective, a translation text as part of a proficiency test would act as an extra writing task which also reflects the learner's writing level in Arabic, the learner's awareness of the cultural distance between Arabic and the text's language (which might not be their L1 in the case of the UK students), their ability to manipulate the grammatical system, and their familiarity with different language registers. According to the ILR, increasing the level of translation tasks can be done through increasing the complexity of the text to be translated, taking into account that 'each level implies control of all functions at the lower levels'. It is worth noting that a translation task at for novice levels can be conducted at sentence level; and that the higher the level the longer the text can be. See the following example task aimed at assessing translation skills in A1 level:

**Choose the best Arabic equivalent of the following English sentence:**

I went to the mosque	أَذْهَبُ إِلَى الْجَامِعِ
	ذَهَبْتُ إِلَى الْجَامِعَةِ
	ذَهَبْتُ إِلَى الْجَامِعِ
	أَذْهَبُ إِلَى الْجَامِعَةِ

In this example, learners are asked to match an English sentence to the suitable equivalent in Arabic. Two options provided contain the word *Jāmiʿ* (mosque) with the verb *go* in the past and present forms. The other two sentences contain the word *Jāmiʿa* (university) with the verb *go* in the past and present forms.

This section provided the specifications that reflect my vision about the application of the proposed framework's objectives in testing practices. The competences to be assessed in every skill and each task should always be clearly specified in addition to identifying a clear scoring method to maintain the instrument's validity and reliability, as is explained in the next section. Table 4 below illustrates the test's specifications described in this section (9.7.2) in relation with the objectives provided in section 9.7.1.

Table 6: Testing specifications in relation to the objectives

<p>Reading comprehension (MSA)</p>	<p>Consists of three parts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A series of short texts in different genres (job forms, posters, advertisements) (cloze tasks/ missing paragraphs).</li> <li>- Two longer texts (newspaper article, blog, report, etc.).</li> <li>- Literary text or article from social science books.</li> </ul> <p>The novice can be assessed on the first part only in A1, and the first two parts in A2.</p>
<p>Listening comprehension (MSA or/and Colloquial)</p>	<p>Consists of two parts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A series of short audio/video mini-dialogues.</li> </ul> <p>MSA <u>only</u> with the novice.</p> <p>The novice can be assessed on this part only.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Longer dialogue</li> </ul> <p>MSA and/or a hybrid version starting from B1.</p>
<p>Oral interaction (MSA or/and Colloquial)</p>	<p>Consists of three parts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One-to-one interview (introductory background questions).</li> <li>-Role-play problem solving (two examinee-candidates).</li> <li>-Longer discussion among two examinees and one interlocutor examiner.</li> </ul> <p>The first two parts are to be assessed with the novice in MSA. Otherwise, MSA and colloquial should be tested separately starting from A2.</p>
<p>Written composition (MSA)</p>	<p>Novice (A1, A2): cloze task, job application form, or activity schedule.</p> <p>Intermediate (B1, B2): paragraph to a short essay (familiar</p>

	<p>topics)- email- description of a photo, etc.</p> <p>Advanced (C1, C2): description of a chart – essay of 250-300 words about a particular topic.</p>
<p>Translation (MSA)</p>	<p>Sentence level in the novice (e.g., assessing social appropriacy- memorised expressions).</p> <p>- Sentence/short paragraph level in the intermediate.</p> <p>-Essay, report in the advanced aiming at assessing intercultural, discourse competences, etc.</p>

### 9.7.3. Fundamental considerations for instruments' design

The proposed framework in this research paper is based on a communication-oriented approach to language proficiency, which requires detailed descriptions of what the instrument is like and what exactly it aims to assess. Two fundamental qualities should be taken into account in the process of test's design, which are validity and reliability.

Validity: To design a communicative proficiency instrument based on this proposed framework, it should be clearly identified what exactly the test is measuring. The competences each task aims to assess in every skill needs to be specified, and also scores need to be distributed accordingly. For example, in the third part of the reading comprehension section, where learners have a long literary or social science text followed by comprehension questions or/and multiple-choice items, competences to be assessed should be clearly identified. Marks weighting for each type of competence (cultural, intercultural) should be assigned in addition to the mark for comprehension. The test also should be reflective of the learners' needs, and testing objectives and specifications to maintain content validity. The instrument, for example, should contain the variety of Arabic that corresponds to the learner's need and testing specifications in each level of attainment. It is also essential that learners/examinees are aware of the variety they are going to be assessed on in each skill.

Also, to ensure the instrument's validity, construct validity should be maintained since it influences the content of the test. Evidence should be sought to build a valid



instrument use through ensuring that the instrument's specifications correspond with the course objectives and the framework's descriptors.

For instance, in oral interaction, the learner should be aware of the variety to be assessed. In the novice level only MSA should be tested, and the more the level increases, and the variety to be tested becomes dependent on the situation/or the variety the examiner chooses to assess; following the objectives illustrated in section 9.7.1. The examinee learner should be aware of this criterion on which testing oral interaction is essentially based in this framework.

Reliability: This quality is concerned with the degree to which an instrument tool can produce consistent scores. As discussed in sections 9.7.1 and 9.7.2, the objectives of my measurement paradigm attempt to reflect Arabic actual use in different domains. Simultaneously, they imply that the content of these tasks should be consistently and reliably measured. In other words, subjectivity in distributing marks should be minimised to the lowest possible level; this is the reason why mixed forms that result in merging features of the colloquial and MSA are not aimed at assessment in oral production.

Also, as discussed in section 9.7.2, my assessment framework considers designing some tasks/items that aim at integrative assessment; such as cloze texts in reading comprehension, and translation tasks. It also, though, includes discrete items tasks to increase the reliability of any assessment tool based on it; as suggested by Davies (1978: 149), and discussed in section 3.6.1. Weir (1990: 2) argued that, in practice, most tests contain elements of both types either in the test format or the assessment procedures adopted. Hence, my measurement paradigm suggests including the two types of task while keeping careful consideration of the intercultural/interactional construct.

## **9.8. Contextual challenges for the framework**

The proposed framework is meant to be applicable in the context of UK universities and their affiliated institutions, at which there seems to be two main challenges for the application of the framework. The two competences that the framework highlights are the intercultural and the diglossic competences. The first challenge comes from the

washback effect of this framework on teaching practices in a context where intercultural and diglossic competences are still not considered for Arabic teaching pedagogy.

The second challenge arises from the lack of resources in the context of teaching Arabic in the UK as illustrated in chapter 2 and previously in section 9.2. The effect this contextual limitation has on the possibility of applying the framework can be observed through teaching mainly MSA, whereas the framework requires teaching and testing MSA and at least one colloquial.

A typical Arabic classroom in a UK university context would have learners from different parts of the world who come from multiple backgrounds and cultures, and maybe want to learn different dialects alongside MSA. Therefore, and for communicative purposes, a contextual shift towards teaching and testing the Arabic language in use and a more intercultural perspective to Arabic language teaching and testing is very much demanded.

### **9.9. Conclusion**

This chapter described an assessment framework on which a detailed scale of proficiency can be based. Also, a description of the variety of Arabic to be tested in each skill was provided. An explanation of the components, construct and norm of communicative proficiency was also offered. Based on the CEFR, ILR ICC, ACTFL and Al-Batal's cultural objectives, the assessment objectives were outlined following the sequence of the CEFR levels. Also, testing specifications on which assessment instruments can be built were offered. Suggestions to maintain the validity and reliability of the assessment instruments based on this proposed framework were also provided. The chapter has finally emphasised the need for some contextual changes to facilitate the applicability of the framework.

The next chapter is the concluding chapter of the thesis, which includes implications for theory and practice of the research, and recommendations for further research areas.

# 10

## Concluding chapter

### 10.1. Introduction

This chapter provides the conclusions and the implications of this research study. First it summarises aims and key findings in relation with the four research questions. It then discusses the implications of these findings on the field of Arabic language testing in the UK Higher Education context. The contributions this research has made to the literature of Arabic pedagogy and language testing come after. Finally, directions for future research in this field are suggested.

### 10.2. Summary of aims of research and key findings

Discussed in chapters 2, 3 and 4, this research aimed to develop an assessment framework of CAP in the light of the complex sociolinguistic situation of Arabic, and in relation to the UKHE context. Discussed in chapter 4, a qualitative small-scale study was carried out to explore the concept of CAP from the perspectives of Assessor teachers, teachers and learners of Arabic in this context. Four topics were dealt with in this research, each of which has shaped one research question. Those topics are the meaning of CAP, its components, the construct upon which assessing it can be based and the role of NS in assessing it.

Accordingly, the four questions that this research has addressed are:

- In the light of the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic, how is communicative Arabic proficiency conceptualised?
- What competences does communicative Arabic proficiency consist of?
- What construct(s) should a testing framework for communicative Arabic proficiency be based upon?
- What is the role of the native speaker model for testing communicative Arabic proficiency?

Findings that offered answers to these questions and which informed the design of the proposed framework can be summarised as follows:

#### 10.2.1. Conceptualising CAP:

Research on Arabic language pedagogy that attempted to conceptualise communicative Arabic proficiency (CAP) has proved lack of consensus on this, as shown in section 3.2. Several models of Arabic varieties resulted in the different views on the actual use of Arabic language (Blanc, 1960; Cadora, 1965; Bishai, 1966; Badawi, 1973; El-Hassan, 1977; Meiseles, 1980; Ryding, 1991; Younes, 1990, 2015). Findings reported mainly in chapters 5 and 6 were in line with those of cited researchers in terms of conceptualising CAP from a sociolinguistic perspective. They put great emphasis on the learner's bi-dialectical knowledge as an essential component of CAP; which was a mutual opinion among all participants. The lack of consensus among them in this regard was on the separation or the integration of MSA and the colloquial.

My research has given careful consideration to the arguments in support of Younes's (1990, 2015) Integrated Approach (IA), that is based on Arabic language use along a continuum. It, however, argued against the existence of one mixed variety between MSA and the vernaculars referred to as FSA by Ryding (1996), ESA by El-Hassan (1977), and LEA or LESA by Younes (1990, 2015). Corresponding with my participants' opinions presented in chapter 6, this research has followed a flexible approach towards the colloquial that learners choose to learn and use, and ultimately be assessed on other than the Levantine. It has also called for a situated integration between MSA and any colloquial; where a number of mixed varieties can result in merging MSA and any colloquial depending on the task/situation at hand. The resulting varieties have no rigid boundaries in between, which contrasts with Blanc's (1960), Badawi's (1973) and Meiseles's (1980) models. Those models rely on the native speaker's level of education as a norm to classify the emerging middle varieties. Unlike that, I argue for several variables that contribute to producing merged forms; such as the extent to which the user knows both/each of them, the colloquial in use, the interlocutors, the situation at hand, and the background knowledge of the subject matter.

In my framework, I call for situated assessment (SA) which entails the learner's knowledge of MSA and a colloquial of their choice, and the usage of the variety that is

most appropriate to the situation of the task under assessment. Mixed varieties that result in merging features of MSA and any colloquial will not be assessed in the oral production; yet it would be accepted if used appropriately as discussed in chapter 9.

#### 10.2.2. Competences of CAP

A number of competences were found in chapter 6 to mutually shape one another and develop communicative Arabic proficiency. They are diglossic competence, interactional competence (Kramsch, 1986), cultural/intercultural competence (Byram, 1997) and socio-cultural competence (Celce-Murcia *et al.* 1995). These competences have shaped three components of the model of communicative Arabic proficiency that this research has proposed (chapter 9). My research has added two more competences to this model; strategic competence (Celce-Murcia *et al.* 1995) and discourse competence (Canale and Swain 1980, Celce-Murcia *et al.* 1995). Also, the cultural/intercultural and sociocultural competences were replaced by the languacultural competence (Agar, 1994), to include Byram's ICC *savoirs* (1997).

#### 10.2.3. CAP testing construct

Interaction, the concept identified by Kramsch (1986) and Young (2011) was reported in the findings (chapter 9) to be the measure that best reflects the learners' ability to communicate orally or with written texts. The relationship between learners' interactional and cultural/intercultural knowledge for accomplishing effective communicative tasks has also been highlighted in the findings. My research has supported my participants' view on that, and thus argued for 'interaction' and 'intercultural skills' as measures for designing CAP assessment instruments; be it a framework, a scale or a test.

#### 10.2.4. The role of the NS model in CAP assessment

Findings of chapter 8 reported contested opinions in terms of the norm that should be considered to measure the L2 learners' level of proficiency. Some participants identified the educated native speaker but they diverged in the level of education this native speaker should have; whether it is up to university level, or secondary school level. Some others identified an advanced or a successful L2 user but were not been clear on the criteria that describe those learners. The existing scale of Arabic proficiency

(ACTFL, 2012) takes the well-educated native speaker as a norm of proficiency assessment (section 3.5.2); that is a native speaker of Arabic who has finished a university degree.

In accordance with some of my participants' views, I consider the 'successful L2 user' (Cook, 2005) to be the most appropriate norm for the assessment framework. I argue for it as I believe it creates an achievable multilingual/multicultural model which reflects the linguistic and cultural transferable skills between the learners' L1, the foreign languages they learned, and Arabic. The L2 user that has been adopted in the assessment framework I proposed in chapter 9 is Diglossic Competent L2 which can be a diglossic C2 proficient user of the CEFR global level classifications, adding languacultural and diglossic competences this user needs to be mastering.

### **10.3. Implications of the findings**

Firstly, findings in chapter 5 located CAP in the post-method pedagogy which implies the following:

1. This research adopts a behavioural-languacultural view for proposing an assessment framework of CAP. Corresponding with the UKHE context, the framework has followed the CEFR levels of attainments for rating categories and linguistic functions as discussed in chapter 9. Starting from my belief that all communication in Arabic, as in any other language, is languacultural, my research has suggested the languacultural competence as part of the language, and promoted its assessment through the language. Languacultural interactional functions were identified in relation to Arabic cultural aspects, and foregrounded in the linguistic functions of the CEFR levels.
2. My study calls for an interactional construct that measures the learner's abilities to use the language appropriately in its social setting. It argues for positioning the learner as a user of the language in its cultural/intercultural social setting rather than as a tourist as the earliest versions of the CLT's functional approach suggest (Ushioda, 2009).

3. It calls for an L2 user (DC2) as a norm of assessment to replace the model of ENS. This choice requires a change in Arabic teaching and testing practices in the different TAFL contexts. Using an L2 user as a norm of assessment entails creating an L2 user through the whole journey of learning Arabic. That is to say, the syllabi, and teaching materials and activities should take into account what is special about the L2 user's grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation (Cook, 2012). Arabic (MSA) needs to be taught as a foreign language, not as it is taught to the NSs.

Secondly, the research calls for test's tasks that resonate with the actual use of Arabic language in different settings. Therefore, it identifies criteria of assessment that correspond to that purpose but also maintain the content and construct validity of assessment instruments, as follows:

1. To maintain content validity, my proposed framework identifies the content of the language to be assessed in each skill in general, and the Arabic varieties to be used for oral production in particular. It calls for a situated assessment approach; that is, the assessment of MSA or the colloquial can be based on the task's situation and setting. It does imply the learner's ability to use mixed forms of MSA and the colloquial as they are both taught from the A2 level. The framework does not require assessing these mixed varieties to keep the measurement criteria and scores consistent; however, it accepts if a learner has used them appropriately, as discussed in chapter 9.
2. To maintain construct validity, my proposed framework seeks to gather information about the learner's ability to interact through establishing an inter-relationship among the competences of the framework; e.g., successful interaction can be observed through a particular oral task. This task would require the learner's ability to choose an appropriate Arabic variety for the setting, the interlocutor, and the situation at hand; the learner's ability to empathise and negotiate meaning with an interlocutor; and the learner's ability to produce an appropriate unified discourse, and to understand and to be understood.

Thirdly, my study offers clear evidence for the importance of the diglossic and languacultural competences in shaping the learner's level of proficiency. It also indicates that these particular competences alongside interactional, discourse and strategic competences need to be considered when designing a communicative framework, scale or test of Arabic proficiency. Thus, the study supports the argument for a change not only in the UKHE context but also in school contexts where Arabic is being taught for GCSE examinations. The main purpose of this change is to correspond to the learners' communicative needs and to reflect the actual use of Arabic language. My study also suggests that languacultural competence must be an integral part of the TAFL curriculum and syllabi to create an intercultural identity of Arabic users. Themes like active listening<sup>14</sup>, information gathering, identity transformation and valuing experiences among others (Camerer, 2014) should be reflected in an Arabic intercultural classroom.

If the conclusions of my research were confirmed by the policy makers in the UKHE context as a start, then there will be a case for having an Arabic CEFR that can act as a unified umbrella for Arabic pedagogy and research in this context. It would be a point of departure for evolving the practices of the current dedicated teachers and encouraging them to examine their teaching beliefs and testing methods. Also, it would create the basis for developing a field of testing Arabic as a foreign language, and for designing proper scales, proficiency and placement tests in the contexts where the CEFR categories are in use.

#### **10.4. Theoretical and methodological contributions of the study**

Firstly, my investigation of the concept of proficiency in relation to diglossia and testing increases the originality of my research in the UKHE context. The resulting proposed framework of CAP that is based on the CEFR levels paves the way for further development of actual communicative assessment instruments that can be applicable in the UKHE context, and possibly across Europe where CEFR levels are used.

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<sup>14</sup> Active listening: a strategy identified by some intercultural studies (e.g., Ting-Toomey, 1999, Spencer-Oatey and Stadler, 2009) to be used in the intercultural interactions for achieving mutual understanding. It includes summarising of prior information, and asking for clarification.



Secondly, my study has made a methodological contribution to the research of language testing. It has used a qualitative method to investigate testing Arabic proficiency and based the implications and the proposed framework mainly on the participants' opinions. My study has enhanced the new direction of adopting qualitative approaches to language testing; a field that has been grounded in different quantitative approaches for most of its history.

### **10.5. Research limitations**

- I. The research method uses only semi-structured interviews to gain access to the participants' perceptions about the issues under scrutiny. The exploratory nature of this research made it difficult to access these perceptions in any other way. The validity of semi-structured interviews was though established at the pilot stage through the rich emerging data and its evident relevance to the topics under scrutiny. Findings' interpretations were always checked with another qualified teacher researcher.
- II. Dividing my participants into ATs and Ts in particular was based on an initial assumption of the distinctive data that would emerge from the two categories. Yet, there were no significant differences in the responses provided by the ATs and Ts. Instead, there were some areas of similarity in the opinions regarding the competences of CAP and its norm particularly. This could be attributed to the fact that the responses were mainly classroom-oriented.
- III. The core aspects of the framework are data-driven such as its bi-dialectical content, the interactional construct and the components of proficiency diagram. Yet, it was not the aim of my research to conduct an empirical further investigation on how the framework can be reflected in Test Specification. The guidelines provided on that are inspired by the emerging data, but are also general first thought suggestions that require a validation study.

### **10.6. Directions for future research**

On completion of this research, I realised that my work raises important questions regarding each topic it dealt with (Arabic diglossia, communicative proficiency and

assessment). It can be the point of departure for several possible areas for future research:

1. How could the languacultural objectives be used to improve the learner's level of proficiency in Arabic?

There seems to be very limited research in this area regarding Arabic language, although it has a great deal to do with successful communication, as my research findings showed. Possible ways for grounding these objectives in Arabic teaching practices need further exploration.

2. What could specific assessment descriptors of proficiency be, based on the proposed framework?

One avenue for further study would be research into detailed assessment criteria based on the descriptors and specifications provided in this study.

3. How could communication in Arabic at any level of proficiency be developed through the non-native rules? What would replace the artificial native speaker norms that feature Arabic pedagogy in TAFL contexts?

This could be achieved through investigating the possible ways for creating an intercultural identity of the Arabic users, or enhancing their multi-competent abilities (Norton and Toohey, 2011; Cook, 2014).

4. What are the features of intermediate varieties between MSA and the colloquial that can be reflective of the actual use of Arabic? What are the variables that locate each of these mixed forms along the continuum of Arabic language use? Models that adopt teaching and testing ESA or LESA do not describe the specifications of these varieties in terms of their discourse, style or syntax. Further exploration of these varieties needs to be carried out before considering their inclusion in the TAFL curriculum or testing them in oral production.

5. How can the learners' ability to understand production in inter-dialectal settings be developed in the novice and intermediate levels, if at all? Or if that can be, what are the interactional and languacultural functions that learners need to be aware of to develop this ability in their novice and intermediate levels?

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## **APPENDIX 1: ASSESSOR TEACHERS AND TEACHERS' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? Where were you trained as an Arabic teacher? Where you have worked? Years of experience, field of expertise? Who are your students? What are the main purposes of teaching Arabic in the institution you work for? Tell me a bit about the process, the objectives and the expectations.
2. Do you require your students to sit a proficiency/entry test before they start their course?
3. What do you understand by language proficiency? What do you understand by Arabic language proficiency? What does come to your mind when you're asked about the meaning of language proficiency?
4. Describe one of your students who you thought he/she was proficient in Arabic. And another one who you thought he/she was not. What sort of skills has the proficient one developed as opposed to the less proficient one?
5. Could you please define what you understand by language proficiency and communication? How do you understand the relationship between the meaning you've given to the concept of proficiency and the concept of communication? To what extent you think the learner's ability to communicate determines their level of proficiency? Does it do that at all?
6. What do you understand by communicative proficiency test? Do you think a proficiency test should be communicative? Why? What is the importance? Why not?
7. Describe one of the tests (preferably a proficiency test) that you've designed or come across that you think it was successful and useful or it was not. Why do you think so? What were the strengths/weaknesses? Was the cultural aspect assessed? How? Describe the test's tasks, what type of tasks was used? What kind of test tasks do you think the most useful? (The participant will be shown different tasks in relation to each skill; provided within ACTFL scale).
8. Would you expect a proficiency test to be a single test or a multi-level test that measures learner's performance in different levels of proficiency?
9. In an oral proficiency test, what is the best way to measure the learner's communicative ability? Would you do a one to one interview? or would you do it within a group? If so, who is in the group? Or, what are they currently doing? And what they would keep and what they would change?
10. What conditions do you think help students best perform in a speaking test? What would you do to make it a comfortable testing environment? What do they do to make it a comfortable testing environment and how they would improve it?
11. What do you understand by native speaker of Arabic? Who is the native speaker of Arabic that should be taken as a norm?
12. On which criteria do you think a test should specify the level of proficiency of a non-native speaker of Arabic? What are the competences that should be measured in order to successfully reflect learners' communicative skills?
13. Do you think that a proficiency test should be based on assessing how learners perform in an authentic real life situation? Or how they interact and respond in a particular social context?. Why? Which one of these do you think it best measures learners' communicative skills? Why?
14. Given the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic, do you think the knowledge of the dialect influences your understanding of Arabic proficiency? If yes, do you have any particular dialect in mind? From your experience, have you taught/assessed any of the dialects? Which one(s)? Why did you choose to teach/assess them? How did it go? Any problems you encountered?
15. Which dialect/dialects should be assessed? How sufficient is the knowledge of one spoken form of Arabic for successful communication?

16. Some recent research has indicated that the knowledge of the Levantine variety of Arabic can guarantee a successful communication with different native speakers speaking different spoken forms of Arabic. What do you think? Any personal experiences?
17. In your perspective, what characteristics best describe the communicative Arabic proficiency test? Have you used such a test? What were its characteristics?
18. Is the cultural element essential in determining the learner's level of proficiency? Do you think it should be assessed or just learnt? Why, why not? How should it be assessed if you think it should be measured?
19. What kind of test activities do you think/ use that can show the learner's appreciation to the culture of the target language?

## **APPENDIX 2: LEARNERS' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

1. What was your purpose of learning Arabic? What did you need that for?
2. In the Arab country where you learnt Arabic, which category of Arabic did you learn? For example, Quranic, MSA, dialect.
3. Which type did you use for communication with native speakers?
4. From a self-assessment perspective, how do you identify your level of Arabic?
5. Do you consider yourself proficient in Arabic? Why? Why not?
6. Which kind of knowledge do you think you lack? For example; strategic, cultural. Etc.
7. What do you expect a proficiency test in Arabic to measure? Briefly describe what kind of questions do you expect in each skill.
8. Do you think the cultural aspect of the language should be assessed? Why? Why not?
9. Do you consider the knowledge of a spoken form of Arabic is essential? If so, should this knowledge be tested? Which dialect?
10. Do you consider the knowledge of one dialect is sufficient for successful communication in a setting when more than one spoken form of Arabic is used?
11. Have you ever been assessed in Arabic? Which assessment tool has been used? What was it measuring? What are the advantages or disadvantages that you identified? Arabic? Which assessment tool has been used? What was it measuring?
12. Have you seen an Arabic proficiency test? What tasks do you expect a proficiency test in Arabic to include?
13. Do you aspire to any criteria, or any kind of model when learning Arabic?
14. If yes, what kind of model, specifications or abilities that you would like to achieve aiming for a high level of proficiency in Arabic?
15. what do you understand by the native speaker of Arabic?

## APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FORM

### CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH STUDIES

Please complete this form after you have read the information sheet and/or listened to an explanation about the research.

**Title of Study: An assessment framework of communicative Arabic proficiency in the light of diglossia.**

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. This research is interested in a major question that arises in the discussion of the term “communication” and its relevance to “Arabic language proficiency testing”; that is, how would the “communicative Arabic language proficiency” concept be perceived from the perspective of language use in the light of the diglossic nature of Arabic?

**I confirm that I understand that by ticking/initialling each box I am consenting to this element of the study. I understand that it will be assumed that unticked/initialled boxes mean that I DO NOT consent to that part of the study. I understand that by not giving consent for any one element I may be deemed ineligible for the study.**

1. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

2. I understand that my information may be subject to review by responsible individuals from the College for monitoring and audit purposes.

3. I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications.

4. I understand that the information I have submitted will be published as part of the PhD thesis entitled ... and may be used in academic and professional development publications and presentations.

5. I consent to my interview being audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## **APPENDIX 4: BREIFING PAPER**

This paper is meant to provide a summary of the research context and aims, and to give definition to some technical terms that might be used within the interview schedule. Links to test tasks the interviewees are going to be asked about will also be provided at the end.

In my research, I am interested in a major question that arises in the discussion of the term “communication” and its relevance to “Arabic language proficiency testing”; that is, how would the “communicative Arabic language proficiency” concept be perceived from the perspective of language use in the light of the diglossic nature of Arabic?

The main purpose of my research is to propose a framework of Arabic language proficiency that resonates with the concepts of communication and language use; a framework that takes into account diglossia as a natural feature of Arabic and interactional competence as a construct of its scale of proficiency. For this purpose, exploratory and then analytical methods are followed to define Arabic communicative proficiency from the perspectives of teachers, assessors and learners of Arabic as a foreign language.

### **Definition of some technical terms**

Communicative skills: this concept refers not only to the linguistic knowledge of the target language that the learners have, but also to their knowledge of how the language is used by members of a speech community to accomplish their purposes. This implies that learners should be aware of when and how to use the language in actual communication and daily life situations. The learners are expected to give and receive information and to respond appropriately within a particular social context.

Communicative competence: knowledge of not only if something is formally possible in a language, but also the knowledge of whether it is feasible, appropriate or done in a particular speech community

Construct: a concept (or underlying principle) that is not observed directly but is inferred on the basis of observable phenomena and that can help in the analysis and understanding of events and phenomena. Examples of constructs used in the study of language are ROLE and STATUS.

Language functions: Savignon describes a language function as “the use to which language is put, the purpose of an utterance rather than the particular grammatical form an utterance takes” (Savignon, 1983). Language functions can be describing, arguing for, arguing against, giving opinion, comparing and negotiating a meaning.

Functional competence: is concerned with the functional use of linguistic resources (Production of language functions, speech acts) See (CEFR, 2001: 13-14)

Interactional competence, according to Kramsch (1996), implies the ability to dynamically negotiate intended meanings, clarify one's and the other's intentions, and predict what understanding and misunderstanding would occur between the interlocutors. This kind of competence is needed especially for teaching and testing the speaking and listening skills.

### **Prior interview tasks**

Prior to the interview date, participants are kindly required to do the following:

1. Read the briefing letter and keep notes on their first impression, understanding and expectations.
2. Read the interview questions provided and formulate their ideas and opinions explicitly or ask for clarification.

I am deeply thankful for your time and for sharing your rich experience that will definitely make a great contribution to my research.

Rahaf Alabar

## APPENDIX 5: ASSESSOR TEACHERS' SCRIPTS

### Luna

Rahaf: can you tell me a little bit about your background, years of experience and at which context have you been teaching Arabic?

Luna: I have been teaching Arabic now for almost 34 years.

Rahaf: Wow

Luna: very long time. I was not trained as a language teacher. I did BA in Arabic and French at this university and during that I had a year abroad, I spent a year in Egypt, then I did an MA at SOAS, then I did a teaching English qualification, and on the basis of the teaching English, it was like the CELTA but it had a different name at that time, I got the job here. and I started as a very junior member of staff, just after getting the MA. So I had no language teacher training, but remember this was 34 years ago.. It's different now.. So that's how I started. Then after that I did another qualification, I did another MA, I also did postgraduate diploma in linguistics which was very helpful, once I was in the job. So these are the things I did after having got the job. I always do continue professional development but they're very short courses, so two weeks on this, and one month on that. I have done a couple of short ones we had in London the British council organized on teaching Arabic as a foreign language. So I have done lots of little things but no formal pedagogical or assessment kind of training. So the training I've had in things like assessment were like on the job, and the people I was teaching with when I got the job, and few months before I got the job were my teachers so I just followed how they were doing things, and learned that way.

Rahaf: how many years did it take you to learn Arabic?

Luna: I would say it took me four, I did a 4 -year degree, and it took the four years. But I did the one-month intensive English TEFL course and that was very helpful for teaching, it was just about one month but very intense and I relied a lot in the beginning on my own experience because I learnt Arabic at university from complete beginning, I had nothing when I joined the university, so I used my own experience which is not always a good idea but I had no other training so I never got stuck I was a teacher very quickly after being a student, so my experience was fresh on my mind about what I found useful and what I didn't, and I have to say none of my teachers who were fantastic and they founded the Arabic department in this university, none of them had teacher training course

Rahaf: I see and this is the problem with Arabic actually. We haven't got proper Arabic teacher training.

Luna: well that was then, now yes. That was a long time ago

Rahaf: and who are your students now?

Luna: our students now, we, my students I only teach in two courses; one is an MA course for Arabic native speakers which is translation; which is one of my expertise and I teach undergraduate so-called non-native speakers of Arabic. Now the majority of our students are; a small percentage are complete beginners like I was, that's a very small percentage, about 70% say are Muslims who are not Arabs, and usually come with some Arabic, they can read the Quran but can't write, and we're also getting vary number of heritage learners who speak the dialect at home, it could be any dialect, could be Darija from Morocco but never learned fusha. So, now unlike when I first got my job, the profile of the typical class is very very mixed. When I first got my job, it was much easier because everyone knew nothing at all. So it is much easier

to do if no one has no clue about anything because you start from zero. Now it's much more complicated because people come with different knowledge; different levels.

Rahaf: and why are they learning Arabic? What are their purposes?

Luna: now, one of our challenges is that they often have different reasons and often, the different reasons don't fit together well. Some of them want it professionally, which is what our course is designed for. Our courses are designed for someone who wants to do languages, Arabic or French or any other language, if someone like to work in the foreign office, or working in an international organization, working in an NGO, working in business, that's the kind of syllabus we've designed. Now that's not always what the students want. Quite a lot of them; the non-Arab Muslims are very interested in teaching Arabic in Islamic schools in London, promoting Islamic studies, and using Arabic as a tool for that. So these two types of students don't always fit very well into the syllabus we've designed, but we can't say well we won't take that kind of students because, you know we need students to.. because a lot of them are of that background, so we need to balance what we've designed with what the market wants. So, if the market wants this kind of tools, yeah up to a point, we're not solely influenced by the market, if that's what the students want, so it's better for us to offer them what they want which is not always what I'd like to be teaching.

Rahaf: what do you expect from them after they finish the course? I mean at which level they would learn Arabic?

Luna: now we have two different courses; one is three years with no year abroad, and one is four years with a year abroad. We now only take beginner students, and what we call "false beginners", so that's anything up to GCSE, if they've got A level, they know too much, we can't take them anymore. We used to, because that means you have different levels of entry so, you have different classes, and we no longer have the resources, very unfortunately for that because the number with A levels was not that big. So It is very sad when we had to .. so, we only take beginners and false beginners. Those who do only three years, they have a good knowledge, they can follow some of the news, watching the news, reading newspapers but I consider it very incomplete training in Arabic, we always tell them also if you're only doing three years, you know you reach this kind of level. It is not the level suitable yet to be using Arabic as the core of a job ....

Quite a lot of them do go to an Arab country after graduating because we make it very clear from the beginning of them, if you want to use Arabic as a part of the job rather than just an extra, then three years is not enough, that you have to go abroad in your own time and some of them do, where they have partners, they get jobs in Arab countries. they get a very good knowledge .. they can access, they've got a very good basis to learn more .. they can then become even more independent learners .. we want to encourage them to be independent learners after three years they know exactly what's involved, what they need, what they're good at , what they need to improve which is mainly spoken .. but the four year students is completely different .. they normally have a year abroad and most of them do very well and come back with obviously it's how much work they put in there, and they come back, and we're very happy with those students who do the four years, most of them.

Rahaf: but the variety that you teach here is only MSA, right? Fusha?

Luna: yes, we have been through many experiences because I've been here for so long we've tried everything; we have tried teaching fusha and the dialect, we've tried teaching the two together, it didn't quite work very well. And at the end, mainly for resource reasons; that's the main reason, we only teach MSA because on a degree you don't know what they're going to use the Arabic for so if we say we'll offer you dialect, let's say Iraqi or Lebanese, well maybe that student wants to live in Morocco, maybe that's why they came to do Arabic, and then you can't split the class into five classes which is a pity. It is a real pity.



Rahaf: so do you set a proficiency test or any placement test when the students come to you?

Luna: we used to when we had different levels of entry. We used to have three level of entry; one is complete beginners or false beginners, one was intermediate and then one was advanced entry. And when we had three levels, we did have tests to see which group they fit in best. But now we're only allowed to take one level.

Rahaf: what kind of test did you use?

Luna: we design our own. It's normally based on our own assessments. We test different skills; we use a little bit interview to see how much speaking they have, and they have a written test where they have to write in Arabic and something comprehension

Rahaf: now speaking about. you know the topic is about proficiency and testing Arabic proficiency. how do you understand firstly the concept of proficiency and then this concept when it comes to Arabic language.

Luna: that's a very difficult question! I find it hard using the very word proficiency for two reasons; one in my mind I had the English proficiency exam, I used to be there so I always associate it with that. Secondly, whenever I meet the word proficiency, it normally represents the level the student has reached, so you have beginners, intermediate, advanced proficient. So it's very hard for me to think of like a grade-one proficiency

Rahaf: so when you say this learner is proficient at a language, what does that mean to you then?

Luna: then I would say they can live and work successfully in an Arabic speaking environment, at the personal level and at the work/job level. And I would be aimed to make our four-year students proficient

Rahaf: in which variety

Luna: then it depends on which country they went to when they did their year abroad

Rahaf: lets say they went to Syria

Luna: then they'd be proficient in Standard Arabic and spoken, because we expect them to be proficient in the different areas of life, and that's what dictate which variety they use. So if you've got to be proficient in Arabic in your work situation, you need to be able to read particularly and sometimes write in Arabic and speak but also proficient in personal relations/**friendships** then they would speak one of the varieties from the dialects

Rahaf: so both? MSA and the dialect

Luna: yes definitely. **I'd find it hard to imagine a proficient student who didn't know the dialect.** I just want to add to that, say they can speak the dialect that also there is a difference between passive and active knowledge of skills, I think they need to be actively competent using a dialect but also to have receptive of understanding of some other dialects

Rahaf: can you explain more?

Luna: yes yes, so if let's say; I can give my experience, like I went, because I wet to Egypt so I learned the Egyptian dialect, but it's no good me only speaking Egyptian, I need to be able to understand an Iraqi, even though I might reply in Egyptian, and in my inter-Arab relations, this is the most successful way of communicating., It is never speaking fusha, if I speak with an Arab who is not Egyptian ; first of all, most of them are very good at adapting their dialect to Egyptian because it's well-known, and when **they don't** adapt their dialect, they level off their dialect so that I can understand it even though I reply in Egyptian So if I have an Iraqi speaking

Iraqi to me, I reply in Egyptian, and they are very aware that I'm a non-native speaker so they don't use the most strongly local aspects, and I think for me, I think that's the desirable situation one of our graduates should be in. they should be very comfortable in one dialect, and they'll be able to respond to someone speaking another one.

Rahaf: I see, that's very interesting by the way

Luna: unfortunately, what I teach is not always a reflection of what I would like to teach

Rahaf: well, sometimes that's the case! Well, some say that a proficient user of Arabic should not only understand more than one dialect as you are implying but also speaking more than one dialect. What do you think?

Luna: I think it's a **non-realistic** requirement, and **therefore** I would not agree with it at all. I just read the last few days, because I was thinking about this, someone on the Internet, they said advice to non-natives learning Arabic; that's once you learn one dialect, it's much easier to learn other dialects. That's not been my experience; maybe I'm not very gifted with languages. My experience is that if I stop to learn another dialect, the Egyptian comes out immediately, and then I start worry that I'm going to lose my Egyptian (14:45). Unless someone is very gifted with languages, I would not expect them to learn more than one.

Rahaf: a similar question to that, have you had any student of yours whom you thought he/she is a proficient user of Arabic?

Luna: yes, I'll give you two examples of two proficient students because they're not similar. One was, we had a couple of years ago, and she has an Austrian background, very gifted at languages, very good at English although it was not her first language, and she was doing business in Arabic and she did a year abroad and she went to two different Arab countries. She went to Jordan and Yemen, and she was determined not to learn a dialect, because she said she'd get too confused and hasn't got enough time, and she wants to be accurate in what she's learning. So in spite of going to two different Arab countries, she didn't learn dialect and she was very proficient in fusha but spoken fusha when she came back; really fluent. I mean **many Arabs** wouldn't be able to speak the accuracy and fluency that she did, but it was not a dialect. Now, I have another student this year who is extremely good. She started, I think she's got one parent who is Algerian I think, but she started Arabic with us, fusha, she went to Jordan, and now she's fluent in fusha and Jordanian dialect, and she's proficient. So these are two different examples.

Rahaf: so the first one only spoke MSA very fluently and very accurately?

Luna: yes, but this was an educated, you know the terms we use, it was an educated, it wasn't a book kind of MSA (methl Alle'rab) or every single word, it wasn't like that, it was a very spoken MSA the language in use, like the language an educated person would be using in an interview in television for example. It was not.. Because I've had another student who was very fluent in MSA, but it was very old-fashioned MSA. People would laugh if they found him speaking precisely in ali'rab at the end of the word. This is just not how the life is.

Rahaf: but you earlier said that you couldn't imagine a proficient user of Arabic not speaking a dialect...

Luna: yeah you are right! I have contradicted myself. I just realized. I think she's an exception, because also she had the cultural knowledge having lived in two different countries. So speaking to her, you didn't feel actually that you're speaking fusha.

Rahaf: would she understand if someone spoke to her in dialect?

Luna: yes yes

Rahaf: so she couldn't speak but she could understand? And she would respond in fusha?

Luna: yes that's right.

Rahaf: have you got another example of a student you thought she/he was not a proficient user of Arabic?

Luna: that was a very difficult question because that means all of our students haven't got that level of proficiency.

Rahaf: well, in other words, just pick one of them and tell me what you think he/she lacked? Or which kind of knowledge they still lack so that you think they're not yet proficient?

Luna: I've got in mind a student, who speaks Moroccan at home, but she came here and she knew Arabic already, she herself has admitted that Arabic just hasn't clicked with her, fusha because she speaks dialect at home. She doesn't say it's the interference; she isn't saying because of the interference of Moroccan. She just hasn't got into fusha enough. Now it's to do with the, in spoken when we speak fusha, then it's her way of delivery that's not proficient. When I say fluent, I don't mean necessarily very fast; I mean fluent with no pauses, but if you speak to her you can feel that her setting, her working out, how do I conjugate this verb because she's not fluent; you can see the hesitance when she speaks, and a lot of grammatical inaccuracies and also lack of awareness; she's made some grammatical mistakes; we all make mistakes when we speak whether it's our first language or not our first language, but most speakers who are proficient are aware that they made a mistake, whereas for a non-proficient usually doesn't think it's important to not to concentrate on but she's definitely communicative; she'd be able to make herself understood if you spoke to her in Arabic in a particular context, or the topics that we've been studying; she would be able to understand and get across what she wants to say.

Rahaf: so, fluency for you doesn't relate to communication?

Luna: yes it does, but they're not the same thing because you can communicate without being fluent, definitely. Because people could use body language a lot, and also it depends on the patience of the person you are talking to, but you can have a lot of communication that's not fluent and that's not proficient. I'll just give you an example; my mother is Greek, so I'm a heritage learner of Greek; my Greek is very bad but I'm very communicative, yeah I can live in Greece and get **around** and communicate but I'm full of mistakes

Rahaf: so you can deliver messages but you ...

Luna: I can deliver messages; I can get by in everyday life, I can go shopping, I can do whatever I need to do in Greece, I have no problems, I can travel around

Rahaf: so why do you think you're not?

Luna: because it's full of grammatical errors, and I can't speak at the educated level, but very communicative, and many of our students are like that. They come to us like that. Those are the heritage learners

Rahaf: now a relevant question to fluency and proficiency. Do you think there is a relationship between the level of proficiency of a proficient user of Arabic and his communicative skills, the level of communicative skills he has?

Luna: I think that's still the same question. I don't see, like in our courses, I'd be very disappointed if our three-year students are not very communicative, but they're nowhere near proficient so I think you can go a long way in being communicative without being proficient

Rahaf: again how do you understand communication please?

Luna: so communicative, or communication; I can say the all aspects how to interact with others; if we're talking about speaking skills; how you interact with the other person, use everything from how to address them, the cultural side as well as whether there are long gaps between taking the turn in conversation, also grammatical accuracy as well.

Rahaf: do you think the one who does not have these things that you described can't be described as proficient?

Luna: if they got the message across but made errors, that's not proficient. They are always to be very minor and non-significant; like getting the verb saying you when you meant to say she; that kind of major mistakes.

Rahaf: so you think proficiency does relate to communication?

Luna: yes I think *proficiency is communicative plus*; communicative is one stage on the way to proficient but you're not there yet. But you've got; put it this way; *you could be communicative without being proficient, but you can't be proficient without being communicative, that's how I see it.*

Rahaf: and as you said communicative in Arabic might imply speaking both the dialect and fusha?

Luna: yes it might, it depends a lot on the context.

Rahaf: what do you understand by a communicative proficiency test? Have you ever seen or designed a proficiency test?

Luna: well, we've had lots of tests, I think most of ours are communicative proficiency tests; most of the exams we set whether written or.. I think most of them are, because we focus particularly on, and even it shows in our making criteria, did they get the message across. So most of our tests are of the communicative sort.

Rahaf: do you think a proficiency test should be communicative?

Luna: yes of course. But not only

Rahaf: and why is that?

Luna: because of this issue that you can communicate but still make lots of mistakes, whereas I don't think a proficient speaker should be making lots of mistakes if they're proficient.

Rahaf: how would a task, say a reading task for a communicative proficiency test would be?

Luna: you'll be focusing a lot on- it's a good question- on gist if it's a reading test you said, did they get the general sense of the text, did they understand the attitude of the writer of the text; whether it is a sarcastic text, a funny text. Whereas in proficiency you would expect a lot more, like how do they **develop** the argument of the text or

Rahaf: what if it was a communicative proficiency test? So both are involved; what would the task look like?

Luna: It will be lots of questions on the different levels of the text; I think an understanding of text level is essential for a proficient. Well, actually partly for communicative too but the proficient should be able to understand everything from specific meanings of words to the over

attitude of the text and the gist and how the argument is developing, not just factual information about it, you will be able to read between the lines as we say. A proficient person should be able to say: well, this is how the writer argues that position, and he's actually in favour or against something even though he might not be able to specifically state it. That's what I'd expect a proficient.. The difference is that, for a proficient I'd look for more attitude things, whereas communicative only, I'd look for only factual message things/information. So if it's a normal, say the three-year students, if they're doing a communicative reading task, there will be more to do with the information while at the higher-level proficient, I'd like more than information... attitudes, particularly tracing how an argument is formed in a text.

Rahaf: culture?

Luna: yes, the culture too! But I would separate that from.. Like, if you're tracing how someone is developing an argument that is culture because the way you do it in Arabic is not the same as how you do it in English. In English you state this and you say you did use this, while in Arabic you might say the same thing five times; so that is cultural, and that would be part of it.

Rahaf: earlier you said that you had a test that you used to give to the students.. Could you describe this test please?

Luna: normally, they'd have to write something and translate something. Reading comprehension because we want to have what domains of vocabulary they have learned. Because if they learned Arabic in an Islamic school is different to if they did the GCSE because they know different vocabulary, and then we ask them to write something in Arabic as a short essay like life experiences. We don't want them to fail our entrance test because they didn't know that kind of vocabulary, because they might be very good at Arabic, but they just didn't so that subject and vocabulary because this is a big issue in Arabic, the vocabulary. So we design a test to make sure it doesn't matter what vocabulary they learned. Do they have the language script that we expect and so on..

Rahaf: so is it a vocabulary test?

Luna: no no reading comprehension from Arabic into English and then they write something in Arabic and then short speaking.

Rahaf: how about listening?

Luna: listening comes into the speaking

Rahaf: so it's an integrated test?

Luna: yes yes because they have to understand the person who is talking to them. We have to do this in 10 minutes

Rahaf: in 10 minutes?

Luna: 10 minutes speaking because we normally do it when we screen them at the beginning of the year.

Rahaf: do you think it is a proficiency test?

Luna: no it is just to gage what level they're at.

Rahaf: so it's a placement test

Luna: yea placement thanks

Rahaf: so have you seen any proficiency test?

Luna: I'm not sure what you mean about proficiency

Rahaf: it's like the IELTS or TOEFL?

Luna: one for Arabic?

Rahaf: yes

Luna: no no

Rahaf: in this university you haven't designed a proficiency test in Arabic, the one like the IELTS or TOEFL?

Luna: not a generalized one. You see, I think overall, a typical graduate after three years or four years, overall we test them in a range of different ways, but how we test them depends on what modules they're doing, we've got two kinds or three kinds of modules and this affects. We don't have one test that covers everything but we do have different modules and each assessment within the module added together makes a good way of assessing them. We have something called language development which is a module going from grade 1, 2, 3, 4; where 4 is the final year, which is learning the language from text books, the normal learning the language kind of module. Then we have another one called a language in action, which is context and topic based language teaching. So there students might have to give a presentation to a real life context a simulated situation. So by the time you assess them in that, and then assess them in different kind of module, if you add together the range of assessment tasks they've had for Arabic language, together they make a package I think of a proficient. But there is no one module where we test all these skills because they have all the different skills spread out in the different kind of modules so we do have reading comprehension, listening comprehension. Particularly I think I'm very keen on the context and topic based assessment, and that's kind of one of the things that struck me when I was reading your questions. Even the common European framework they claim that it is supposed to be in different domains; educational, occupational, personal. Well, I've noticed that different domains means different areas of life, work, vocabulary, and it's also the criteria, when we match our criteria into the Common European framework, none of them is related to the domain itself, it's just general criteria, I mean I tried to look again at their documents, they keep saying well it depends on, like because they talk a lot about teaching immigrants the language of the host country, the language they need for job is different to the language they need to socialize with friends; English friends. So those different domains they're not brought out in the assessment criteria, and I think it's very hard to have a generalized test if you're not specifying the domain. For example, if I meant to train someone wants to join the foreign office, what kind of work they're going to be doing; economic, social ... so proficient for that person is different from someone who is going to teach Arabic in a school. I think the context is really important. The difficulty with BA is that we need to give students generalized Arabic because we don't know what kind of job they could get with it, and that could be quite difficult because you're trying to give them a range of everything, and it might not quite be enough. It's one of the challenges of teaching general Arabic which in a way BA is, more or less to be able to put them in different situations.

Rahaf: so do you think a generalised test of Arabic would not be successful?

Luna: I think you need to know who wants this generalized test, who you're doing it for I think this is the key question, not what the test looks like. Are you doing it for example, are you doing it say for students come.. Let's say you designed a generalized test, and we adopted it in this university. Is it that so the students know what level they're going to get if they come to us, or is it so that if someone employs one of our students they will know what level they've got and who is it for is a big issue that would affect, I think, how do you design a generalized test. There need to be some generalized things but then there need to be some proficiency specific tests. It

is a bit the same, you know the institute of linguists, they do translation, they are many translation exam organizations, and there are professional ones that people get jobs and basis of having their qualifications. Now, if you want to be a professional translator, you normally you can choose what areas you want to specialize in; the technical, literary, social sciences, medical, business or law. I think we need something along these lines with language generally not only for translation, because you know training the students who could work for the NGO is different to someone who is going to be teaching grammar in a school. I think, this is my view., and someone who is going to be living in the Arab world is different. They need to communicate with people whether in their jobs or ..

Rahaf: so for people who want to live in an Arab country maybe to study or work, do you think a generalized test would be ok?

Luna: if it included, if it had some sections, yes. You know one section on reading documents they might use in their work, and then sections on interacting in every day life. sub-sections is the main thing.

Rahaf: would you expect a proficiency test to be a single test or a multi-level test that measures learners' performance in different levels of proficiency?

Luna: well that's the question that made me think who wants this test. Now if the educational institutions want them or employers want them, then we need multi-level because an employer needs to know is this graduate I have just employed intermediate or advanced, you know what kind of work can I give them? And also students can see if they've got to one stage, and they want to go to university to reach another stage. It depends who wants this test.

Rahaf: why would we need a single test then?

Luna: I'm still not sure if I quite understand your question.

Rahaf: I'll give you two examples. Cambridge exams, they've got the beginner, intermediate, advanced proficiency tests and that's multi-level. While the IELTS for example is a single test.

Luna: yeah I see what you mean, the scoring thing ... I think both are useful

Rahaf: and in the case of our students in the context of Arabic, having a generalized test, or maybe a test to be used in the context of the UK, UK universities, which type is more useful? a multi-level test or a single test?

Luna: I think if I had to choose between the two, I think multi-level could suite Arabic better because of all these issues of standard, not standard, colloquial.

Rahaf: do you think at the UK context, a test should consider both; fusha and dialect?

Luna: I think they should perhaps have the option, you can either take option A which is fusha only and then you can do very well, and then have option B where you can do it with the dialect.

Rahaf: now in an oral proficiency test, when you want to interview a student. For example, in Syria when we finished the advanced level, we used to have our students and ask them to speak in Arabic either in a presentation way or in a way that we speak to them and they speak to each other and then we assess them. In an oral proficiency test; a test like this after they finish everything and they want to get a certificate, what's the best way to measure their communicative ability? Would it be through one to one interview? or within a group of people? or in another form like a role play?

Luna: well the resources are an issue, a lot of what we do is determined by limited resources. I would say a combination of group and role-play and one to one because you need to see how whether they're acting in scenarios that replicate what happens in the outside world. So you need to see how perhaps in the role-play, they might have someone speaking different dialects but manageable; something that's a mixture of fusha and the colloquial. But also you need one to one because not every situation can test that overall competence in the language. I mean one scenario could test particular certain functions let's say which you might not be testing, you need to find out about in one to one as well. I think definitely both.

Rahaf: how practical would this be?

Luna: that's why I say about resources

Rahaf: how would you do it here then?

Luna: I mean we could do it, it could be practical because you could do the group one; it just takes a lot of planning because this is what people do in job interviews now as well. That's why I think in a way, it would be good to replicate the world rather than to go and you have one to one, and then you watch, I think even for teacher training courses, you have to go back slides and you observe what you're interacting with them.. I think this would be the ideal.. it is very resource intensive.

Rahaf: imagine you're doing an oral test within a group of people, students, what kind of people would you have? Would you have a native speaker of Arabic within them?

Luna: yes definitely. Because my problem is that teachers of Arabic suffer from this might happen in other languages certainly I have it, and that is because I have been teaching for so long, I'm so familiar with the kind of mistakes students make that's whatever they say I find it communicative and I know what they're trying to say, and I've had lots of situations where a native speaker was in the same listening, let's say a joint oral exam where I understood the student perfectly well, and the Arabic native speaker didn't. I think it is because when you're so used to students' mistakes, you know they made that mistakes when they tried to say x, y,z , so I think it's essential to have Arabic native speaker testing because that's the purpose of learning a language.

Rahaf: is it only because to know how accurate they might be?

Luna: no it is the whole, it's also because of the cultural interaction as well. If they interact with me, they might have that degree of informality that would be unacceptable if they're interacting with an Arab professor for example.

Rahaf: What conditions do you think they best help students perform in a speaking test? What would you do to make a comfortable testing environment?

Luna: that's a very difficult question. Certainly groups and things make it less threatening, but I have no clear answer, after 33 years of teaching I have no clear answer because I'm not a believer of making everything comfortable because in the real world you get difficult situations, you can't make everything so relaxed to the students, because they'd be very relaxed with you because they might be very relaxed with you because they've known you for a long time, and then they meet an Arabic native speaker and they get totally nervous ( .. ) but on the other hand, I want them to be able to show their best. Comfortable for my students I think relates a lot to what the vocabulary is. Vocabulary is a big issue in Arabic. if they know the topics then they are more confident in the oral exam (....) if they don't know what the question could be on, of course they would be less comfortable.

Rahaf: now speaking about the native speaker, what do you understand by the native speaker of Arabic? And who is the native speaker that should be taken as a norm?



Luna: good question. I think, yes and the native speaker that should be taken as a norm, if I want my students to get jobs which I do and enjoy their jobs, is an educated fusha comfortable speaker and user at least even if they make mistakes in fusha, and can read comfortably whatever the documents brought the internet site is needed (47:18) also is fluent in a colloquial.

Rahaf: any colloquial?

Luna: yes. to be as a norm, no. To be as a norm would.. Well, it's been up to now; you see the world is changing. My career with Egyptian has served me very well, because from my career in Egypt, was the most commonly understood colloquial, but things are changing now (.....) so now, would I recommend students to learn Egyptian? Probably not!

Rahaf: why wouldn't you?

Luna: because maybe it's better to learn one of "Al-lahajat Alshameiyah" (the Levantines)

Rahaf: why do you think so?

Luna: because our students after studying fusha find Egyptian very difficult to learn. They find it less difficult learning Syrian, Palestinian, Lebanese.

Rahaf: now, there is research about this saying that Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian, are the closest to fush. Do you think the native speaker of Arabic, you said educated, what do you mean by educated?

Luna: I mean literate, fully literate. I mean educated up to at least university level.

Rahaf: not more than that?

Luna: no, up to it, it could be first year, second year, they don't need to be very advanced but beyond secondary school. Because otherwise they don't have the registers, you know the linguistics meaning registers. They don't have the registers of language. You need formal language, you need written language, you need different kinds of discourse if you've got to operate successfully.

Rahaf: (.....) what are the competences (types of knowledge) that should be included/embedded within the test of proficiency and they reflect the learners' communicative skills? You talked earlier about the linguistic, you know the grammatical knowledge.etc.. What kind of other knowledge that you think a proficiency test should contain to reflect the learners' communicative competence?

Luna: I think in addition to the linguistic side, the ability to interact **with** different range of people so that's cultural, those cultural aspects. And yes different social classes, as we used to call them, and also interacting in addition with different age groups, because that's very significant in our world, if you're interacting with someone younger than you, older than you should affect how you speak.

Rahaf: should this be tested?

Luna: yes that's what I meant by different social groups, different people, different kind of relationships. Whether you're speaking to your pairs who are similar to you either in age or background or whether you're talking to someone in more senior position. I think the social groups or social class issue is a very important part of learning Arabic, and students tend to use the way they speak in English and just convert it into Arabic which is not socially appropriate. So this is the cultural knowledge. Social appropriateness is important

Rahaf: do you think a proficiency test should be based on how the learners perform in an authentic real life situation?

Luna: yes definitely.

Rahaf: why is that?

Luna: I think some of the modules that we've been teaching; these modules are called "language in action". They're very much context and vocabulary specific like the topics we have here; like the students study Arabic in these topics. For example, I'm teaching the second year using Arabic; I'm not teaching them grammar anymore because this is a different kind of module; it's on the health context. So it could be giving advice to a pregnant mother speaking in a role-play. It could be reading a medical report, it could be reading findings from a newspaper about what's going on in health, it could be designing a poster about a health awareness campaign against smoking. So these are what we call the language in action modules, and these I have to say what I prefer teaching because they're close like we're trying like realistic scenarios but also the context is clearer, whereas when we teach the generalized Arabic, it is very difficult to help prepare the students because you're not sure what's the context, who are the people who you're talking to, whereas these context-based ones are much better, also it sorts the problem of vocabulary. So with all these we've just done one on demographic issue actually; which is "Alqadaya Alsukkaniyya" and there are lots of them. That was very good; we talked about family clinic, why people are against it. Also, learning in English too, about what are the issues of "Allnfijjar Alsukkani" in our world. So, it's not only how to perform in that situation, it's what's going on in the Arab world, I think that's part of the language education and we should get it, not only the vocabulary for "Almashakil Alsukkaniyya" it is also what are they so that they know in English what are these issues. I have to say that these are the modules that I teach best because they're the most realistic and they're multi-skilled; reading, writing, listening, speaking (.....)

Rahaf: do you assess this?

Luna: yes that's assessed definitely.

Rahaf: in the four skills, yeah?

Luna: more or less yeah (..)

Rahaf: what kind of tasks? Just briefly

Luna: like the writing skill might be they've got a text in English about the latest issue about over-population in Cairo or something, and then they're given a brief like an Indio in Egypt wants to find out this and that, you need to summarize it into Arabic or the other way around, different kinds, but we always give a brief; the context (.....) and by the time they've done all this in each of their years, they've had the whole range of different ways of being assessed on these, where there is listening, reading, summarizing, role-play, and that's how I would like to teach languages actually. I think that's for me the heart of learning a language.

Rahaf: given the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic, do you think the knowledge of dialect influences your understanding of Arabic proficiency? Have you assessed any dialect? Do you have any dialect in mind?

Luna: yes definitely. We used to assess Egyptian, because this department was founded by Egyptians many years ago. For a long time, the only teaching staff were Egyptians, and I used to teach Egyptian dialect as well. But at the end, it became different, we now have one member of the staff who is Egyptian, we have different dialects; we have different native speakers, also we used to send our students abroad to Egypt, so it was logical to be tested when they come back on Egyptian. But now, they go to different places, the staff here are not native speakers and because of the resource problem, we can't open tiny classes with.. Say if we have a final year of 20 students we can't open 4 different dialect classes.

Rahaf: so you send all your students to a one country each year?

Luna: no they can choose now, things have changed because of the political situation. We used to send them to Syria; we obviously had to change, so now they can choose at the moment Egypt, Jordan or morocco although students could make a special case if they want to go somewhere different; like we got one student who is in Oman at the moment because she is a heritage learner, she's got some distant relatives who are Omani. So we allowed her to go there to learn Arabic.

Rahaf: and when they come back, what do they do?

Luna: now we do not test their spoken dialect. We actually give them an information sheet saying we think for your career, it's hugely important to learn the dialect but we're not going to force you to do. You need to learn some, so that you can carry on in every day life in the country you're in. but your final exam is going to be in MSA. And we did for a couple of years offer students in their final oral exam a choice, not a choice but we'd say to them the exam is in fusha but now if you want to talk dialect please do, and most of them to my astonishment who are very good at spoken Egyptian, they all said no we don't speak Egyptian. I wanted them to be able to show off what they'd learnt and so many opted out because we have had students saying I learned Egyptian then you never tested me, so why did I bother. So we did and then we gave up, and then I was so surprised I gave them the choice and I knew the students, and they were very good at spoken Egyptian. And in the exam we've said would you like to spend 5 minutes of the exam talking Egyptian? They all said no, I was so surprised of that .. you see we've tried lots of things.

Rahaf: do you think it is possible in a test or it is valid that you assess students, so you do what you did; you give them the choice for a hybrid version of Arabic or you prefer that you separate them if you were to test them both; the dialect and MSA?

Luna: I don't think it matters if there is some hybridness at all as long as it is grammatically sound hybridness not just a mess of both ... and that's also to do with the inter-language and what stage they're learning, because I remember after all these years, it was very very difficult after 2 years of fusha learning Egyptian (...) you try to unlearn rules that you spent all that time trying to learn. And then you know it is hard to, but then once you get over that it gets much easier and better.

Rahaf: how sufficient is the knowledge of one spoken form of Arabic for successful communication?

Luna: yes I think its essential. I think speaking one is essential, because otherwise why should an Arabic native speaker take you seriously if you don't speak a dialect? But having receptive understanding of one other or two others would be desirable, as I say, not essential but desirable.

If I could design the courses here, I would insist on a dialect. I just don't see how you could really understand Arabic and the Arab world without any dialect

Rahaf: which dialect would you choose?

Luna: I don't really mind, I think I only have a problem with the North African dialects. If the students know they want a career in North Africa, I think they should do that (...) what matters is really speaking the language of the people

Rahaf: to what extent do you think the cultural knowledge element is essential to determine the learners' level of proficiency?

Luna: I think it's totally essential, and I think culture in both aspects; both how to interact with someone or if you're writing how to write to them; how to address them; what register language do you use, (...) and also you need to know what's going on in the Arab world; that is so important to know (...)

Rahaf: but you know when we talk about culture in Arabic, it's very wide and deep concept. Do you think there should be some specific norms, which should be taught and tested? What are they?

Luna: like *social cultural; like interacting with different people from different backgrounds, and as I said students should know how to talk differently in different registers, that's what I think students should learn how to use. you talk differently to a professor than you talk to someone you're buying things from and I think that should be taught, yes.*

Rahaf: *should it be assessed?*

Luna: yes, it should come out in the scenarios you give, if we had an oral exam, it is one to one as well as a scenario based would show that you have two; you could have the formal job interview scenario lets say, and then another informal one to see whether the students can switch their level from formal to informal.

Rahaf: please give me one example of a test activity that you use that shows he learners' appreciation to the culture of Arabic.

Luna: the last semester we did one on health and was on organization campaigns. So students had to design posters for the campaign and then they had to have role play with parents to persuade the parents to take their children to be vaccinated, so and we've done all preparation, vocabulary, reading, they'd read texts about it, they'd read newspapers and articles, we did role plays.. so I think something like that, that you have to design something written, you know this is where the next free service is available, for people to practice writing then they had to do a role play persuading reluctant parents .. And that's the cultural knowledge as well. And for these topics why I like them is that you can find so much authentic materials, you have to adapt them but they're all there. You didn't invent the topics, the topics are there. That's why I like teaching them.

Rahaf: do you think the functional construct measures the communicative skills if the students?

Luna: you mean if they have to then apply for houses through that office or something?

Rahaf: does this listening task help them later if they have a housing problem on Egypt for example?

Luna; this I think should be task based; I think task completion. Did they succeed in that task?

Rahaf: how about the other kind of constructs? For example, some people advocate the interactional construct not only the functional one. Interactional means not only being able to perform something but also to interact...

Luna: my view of functional (...) I don't mean just learning a phrase you say; I mean the whole scenario, for me that's a function; extended.. not just saying a phrase and this is the function you use for this; it's the whole conversation

Rahaf: so it's the interactional functional

Rahaf: in a speaking and listening task, if you're doing a proficiency test. In listening or speaking, would you do dialect and MSA together or would you separate them? Yani a task that has both of them or you measure them in listening in MSA and then listening in the dialect?

Luna: well, we used to teach them separately because Arabs speak them separately , but the impact of the media and more inter-Arab associations whether through migration or through television programs means that I in my view; I have not researched but I'm very interested in Arabic sociolinguistics and seems very common now for Arabs to be mixing fusha and colloquial. Therefore, I don't think we have a strong argument for separating them. I think we need to begin perhaps have some distinction between the two but then again it depends on the topic, if we are talking politics for example, it doesn't matter if it's a mixture. I think the test should be contextualized, so that this would be odd to speak fusha in this context. Therefore, automatically they should be speaking colloquial, and there should be a test where it'd be odd to speak colloquial, and then if they mix that's.. I think the test should decide for the student what they should use. Do you see what I mean? So if you're testing them how do you give advice to your friend whose husband has divorced them, I mean that should make the person speak colloquial.. you see what I mean? Rather than saying now talk to us in colloquial.. the context should really guide what variety they speak. So you choose the context and then you have a formal employer/employee situation.

Rahaf: I see, would you like to add anything?

Luna: it is just a very interesting conversation

Students should have a module of Arabic socio linguistics

## **John**

Rahaf: can you tell me a little bit about yourself, where have you been trained as an Arabic teacher, when have you started to teach Arabic, your years of experience and field of expertise?

John: yes, ok! I studied Arabic in the university of London and I graduated in 1982 and I have, then I did a master's degree between 1983 and 1984, and then I don't have a PhD so I'm just educated to Master's level and then I also have a teaching qualification, teaching English to adults, so I'm trained as an English teacher but to be honest I never taught English, I ever taught Arabic. So, I started teaching Arabic in 1984 so that means that I have now been teaching Arabic for 30 years, nonstop without a break. Now, which means I'm one of the most experienced Arabic teachers in the United Kingdom. So, basically that's my background. I'm currently teaching Arabic at the university of Edinburgh, where I have been teaching for the past seven years. Before that I taught Arabic at the foreign office, that I was teaching diplomats, and before that I taught at the ministry of defence, school of languages where I was teaching the military whether they were soldiers or officers and some of them had to know Arabic to a very high level as well. So, I did also teach different levels.

Rahaf: so you haven't been specialised in Arabic language in particular? The qualification you got was not about Arabic pedagogy or testing Arabic?

John: no no my pedagogy comes from teaching English as a foreign language but I have through teaching Arabic and apply the English pedagogy I have begun to see, to try to analyse myself what are the issues. And now you know, I now have a very clear idea about that and I do a lot of teaching training for Arab teachers.

Rahaf: who are your students now? What are their main purposes of learning Arabic?

John: right. Most of my students are, of course, they're university students. we have students coming to --- from all over the world including to do Arabic so I have a lot of Americans, normally 50% are from America, I have 1 or 2 from China, Japan. I have many from Europe, a

lot from Italy, a few from the UK as well but the minority from the UK, the majority from abroad. They are nearly all non-Muslims, and they're not doing Arabic for any other reason than they would learn any other language, whether it is French or Russian or it is a modern language they want it because they think, and they're right, that it will help them get a good job, and that's why they're doing it.

Rahaf: right! And what do you expect from them after they finish the degree with you?

John: I don't teach only the undergraduate degree. So basically, I teach on a master's program, it is an intensive program. The good students, those that are very good, some of them are you know, those that are good and learn Arabic and work hard, they end up getting fantastic jobs. I have someone working as an interpreter for the United Nations; he's working in Naples. He's visiting Palestinian prisons. It is wonderful he has to speak to the head of the prison and in Arabic because they can't speak English, or not very well, and I have one working for the European police, so the top students end up getting wonderful jobs with their Arabic, but I teach them, we teach them fusha and Ammiyyah because they need the Ammiyyah. The guy now in the Palestinian prison, he needs Palestinian Arabic because .. to communicate you know

Rahaf: and do you set any proficiency test or any entry test before they..

John: no, before they come here, no we don't.. And this is a problem because. Well, what we have is we have some students that have done Arabic before and we normally give them an online just a discussion in Arabic like we're having now just to assess where they are. But for the beginners they come, they're beginners. Now, I don't know whether some of them are people that have never done a language before, they don't know what a verb is, they don't know what an adjective is, and they've not studied French, they haven't done any foreign language and now they're having to do Arabic which is you know difficult and some of them find it very very very hard, but particularly those who don't have language aptitude, many of them don't, they have to work even harder and I tell them that, and believe me they do work hard. They learn it

Rahaf: that's good! I'm sure they do. So, tell me a little bit about the bi-dialectical approach that you're following. You said you teach fusha and Ammiyyah.

John: yes I teach that.. There are not many universities, Rahaf that teach this method but the method is known as the integrated approach which is in Arabic "Almanhaj almutakamel" and it is used in the university of Cornell in America and a very good friend and colleagues of mine, his name is Munther Younes uses it and I was with him last year in Cornell doing a workshop on this. Basically, this system means that; I'll give you an example, we teach both Ammiyyah and Fusha together so for example you know we might read something, let's say we might read a small passage about Dimashq (Damascus) for example in MSA, but then what we do is we start to discuss this article we ask (wen madinat dimashq) [=where is Damascus city? In Ammiyah] And stuff like that... so we blend the two, so they learn the fusha, I'm not saying they don't learn it, they learn the grammar but we also teach them in parallel the ammiyyah equivalent

Rahaf: right, and when you come to testing, how do you test them in that? How can the integrated approach be tested?

John: right, when you test them in the written paper, written paper is in Fusha so they have to read and let's say again it might be a passage of a city they have to translate that into English. So, they have to read it in fusha because let's face it when you read in Arabic mainly, I know now you can find Ammiyyah in email and stuff but you know you read Aljazeera or BBC Arabic or a novel, most of this is in Fusha, so they need to know that or they wouldn't read, they're university students they have to read. So, the exam is in fusha, they have to translate

something into Fusha. Now, the oral exam however no, the oral exam is in Ammiyyah. Now depending on the level, of course we have different levels of Ammiyyah; we have ammiyat almuthaqqafeen (educated spoken form) you know and so on. So, the high level they have to do a presentation in Arabic but they can use Ammiyat almuthaqqafeen. They don't have to be totally in fusha, because we want this to reflect reality. So, the oral exam is done in ammiyyah and the written exam is done in fusha.

Rahaf: I see, how about the listening then?

John: the listening, again they have the listening, they do both. At the low levels it is just ammiyyah they might listen to a dialogue or something in Ammiyah. They have questions in English. Again, the higher level then they sometimes, will, might be required to watch an interview. For example, we have a very nice clip of Nawal Alsaadawi, she's answering questions. But again, she's using a mixture of questions generally in fusha from the journalist but she's answering and then they have to answer questions. So, the listening is mainly at the low level just Ammiyyah but there is some fusha at the higher level. And they're maybe asked also maybe to listen to a clip; a news clip

Rahaf: which is mainly fusha

John: it is in fusha of course. And they will have to maybe summarise it in English. Well, what's this about? Oh there is a bomb in Kabul, and how many people were killed? You know, 2 people and there were 20 injured.. I don't know whatever .. and they have to do that.

Rahaf: you said, at the lower level of testing an oral exam, the students might be asked to reply in Ammiyyah which means you start teaching Ammiyyah first before fusha?

John: well, we start teaching Ammiyyah from the first day and fusha from the first day

Rahaf: so together but you give both same time, same dedication to both of them?

John: yes we start from day one because from the first day we start we say (ana ismi... , Shu ismak) within the first day they have to say (ana ismi..... , ana britani, ana sakin fi ---) and the girl have to say (ana ismi fulana, wa ana sakna fi) they have to be able to work out the rule and also to know (howa sakin, heya sakna) and practice this and then slowly, we start doing the fusha version (askunu- taskunu)

Rahaf: ok, so if they learn both in parallel, why do you expect the lower level students to produce Ammiyyah only

John: no, we expect them to produce fusha in their writing and their reading, because what we do is we tell them; you do not write "ana shuftak mbareh"[...] they know that because we tell them and we train them at early, this word (elkelma di tenaal, elkelma di tenkiteb= this word is to be said and this is to be written), they know because it is only a few words that are different,, there is only a few verbs that are different. The rest of all are the same; (Aktub, Asmaa, Aakul, Ashrab) most of them are the same. At the first level, there are only four verbs where there is a difference. In terms of speaking though at the early level, no they mustn't speak in fusha, never speak in fusha at the early level because at the early level, we're talking about daily life, so when I say to somebody, alright, you know, in Arabic nobody, if I'm talking to, I don't know, an Arab friend of mine, what did you do? Where did you go (matha faalta anta?) (fusha), we never say that, never, never, so instead I say (wen ruht mbareh, shu amalt mbareh/ Ammiyah) so that level of speaking has to be in Ammiyyah, the written of course, because they will have to start getting used to knowing things like that about the grammar and ams, Alyoum and Gadan and all this, yeah.

Rahaf: and in an oral test, do you, you said you do presentations, that's for the advanced level, yea?

John: no even at the lower, presentation yes, presentation at the intermediate and advanced. At the intermediate, we start doing that.

Rahaf: what's the form of testing orally in the lower levels?

John: the lower level is a conversation and a role-play. So the role-play they're normally given in advance that you might be in a restaurant, and you want to order a meal and it gives you the instructions, or you want to buy a train ticket from Cairo to Alexandria, and you know something like that.

Rahaf: so is it in the form of one to one interview?

John: yes one to one exactly

Rahaf: this is very useful by the way. Now what do you understand by language proficiency? And what do you understand by this concept when it comes to Arabic language?

John: well, proficiency, well look proficiency is like in any language, you know, proficiency is, you know, are you able to carry out certain tasks and so again you know with Arabic, this diglossia, we have been talking about diglossia, you know I mean to be proficient in Arabic you have to be proficient in fusha and Ammiyyah. If you're proficient in fusha, that's not enough. I mean I was in Jordan and I was in a class where they only teach fusha and I turned to speak to one of the students and I said "oh, shu ismak", he looked at me "mn wen inta" he looked at me as if I was speaking another language. Now I then afterwards, spoke to the teacher and I said; listen, imagine you now go to London and you apply for a job in London and somebody says to you, can you speak English? And you said: no but I can read.; they will throw you out of the office, get out, get out, you can't work here. So, you know, this is, so we have to, of course, people have to be able to read, we don't want people to be illiterate, but they have to be able to speak. So proficiency here, full proficiency for a foreigner who is learning Arabic, they have to have a good command of fusha, and of course there are levels of that like in anything else. But they also have to have a good command and when I say Ammiyyah of one major dialect, I don't mind which but generally we talk about what we call Allahjat albayda; which is either alshami whether its Palestinian, Syrian, Jordanian or Lebanese or Egyptian. Those ones mainly. Then maybe to a less extent the gulf and the Iraqi but you know nowadays even though the African Arabic is beginning to be considered perfectly acceptable, but what we have to make sure is that the teachers of Arabic, they have to use what we call allahja alshamiyyah almukhaffafah, allahja almasriyya almukhaffafah, allahja almagribiyyah almukhaffafah; which is just we remove some of the very local things if you know what I mean. Something like the standard Syrian Damascus Arabic.

Rahaf: yes, exactly. And on which criteria do you think this student of yours is a proficient user of Arabic, and that student is not a proficient user of Arabic? What sort of knowledge and skills the proficient has..

John: I mean what's interesting is we do, because it is a very intensive course, we have a lot of diagnostic tests every two or three weeks. all that they will be tested on their listening, or on their speaking or .. so they know where, and we give them feedback all the time. Now, you know, one of the things that we look at, I mean we look at pronunciation, we look at grammar, we look at vocabulary, centred structure for speaking, you know and of course it is the same when they're writing, if they're writing in Arabic. Now obviously with the fusha side, generally a foreigner will be better translating from Arabic to English than from English to Arabic which is normal. And the important for us, we want them to be able to read and write in Arabic of course, but the importance for us is that we want them to read Arabic and understand it properly you know.

Rahaf: and when do you say this student is not proficient?



John: well, look I mean we don't use a final exam. We assess students on a regular basis so the whole year is made up of a lot of components, now obviously we have some students that you can see from their performance in class, so we look at class performance and if a student is clearly not carrying out the tasks, I mean they can't do .. I mean at the end of each module a student, you know you have learning outcomes and a student must be able to do this, do that, do that. If they can't do those things, then they're obviously failing. Now it's clear that they're failing without even testing them, because you can see from their performance in class that they can't do the things that at the end of week 1 they're supposed to be able to do. Whereas the others can so for example you have 10 students, 9 of them can do it, one can't, he's failing, now we let them continue, because maybe they will improve.

Rahaf: and that's after they finish the 4 years, yeah?

John: we do masters of two years, intensive two years

Rahaf: after they do the masters, what can they do in Arabic, which level do they reach?

John: with the intensive masters which is the same as a degree level, they reach I would say, you know the European framework, they reach C1

Rahaf: ok, that's the advanced?

John: lower advanced, the good students reach C1, the weaker ones reach B2 in speaking but not in one, in Ammiyyah and in fusha, both. So, which is good, C1 in both is very good.

Rahaf: and does this difference depend on the student's ability, or any other reasons for this, rather than the students' ability?

John: it is complicated Rahaf, you know it is, I'll give you an example, I mean look, at the moment I'm sure you need to be aware of this. All of these Arabic courses now whether they're a full degree or 2 year masters include a period in an Arab country, now, we used to send our students to Syria, and they used to love going to Syria because tell me why would they love going to Damascus, you tell me.

Rahaf: I don't know maybe because it has the two sides, the old city and the other modern part, and people would not speak English maybe.

John: ahaa yes, they're forced to speak in Arabic, they have to speak in Arabic, and that is very good. So, it was wonderful for them, but unfortunately, we can't do that anymore, it is terrible. So yeah so that was where we used to send our students. we now send our students to different places. It is up to the student to really make use of this time. Some of them do and some of them don't. so, that is something that I have no control over. When they come back, at the moment we send students to Cairo, we send them to the university of Beir zeit, which is in the west bank and we send some to Jordan, and they come back after the summer, they come for an exam, we have an exam to see how they did. And some of them will go woow amazing improvement, others yeah ok and then others they have actually gone down, they're worse than they were before their level.

Rahaf: do you invest their new knowledge after they come back from the year abroad?

John: yes we test, what I'm saying is we test their knowledge to see whether they got a new one, and they know that. And despite the fact that they know they will be tested and if they fail they won't go to the next year, they still, they usually pass, but what I'm saying is that some of them just pass and some others do very very well. Now the fact that, now you asked me about why, it is hard to know, you know, look look it is, you as a person, you're in an Arab country, for example, I had one boy who went to Ramallah, he went to a flat in Albirah which is near Ramallah, he went out every night to meet people and speak Arabic and he made a real .. and he

came back beautiful speaking.. beautiful and then there was somebody else, who was an American girl, two American girls, they stayed in the flat and babababa in English all the time

Rahaf: right, so it is mainly the student's effort and attitude towards the language.

John: yeah and there was another girl, and also luck sometimes luck, another one of my students, a female student, wonderful girl she happened to meet by chance a Palestinian girl from Bethlehem (beit lahm) she invited her to her house and she was spending all the time in her house

Rahaf: with her, woow, so lucky

John: yes she was lucky, she was lucky! So, it was fantastic. Can you imagine? So, you know there are a lot of factors, Rahaf but in terms of, but the other thing is important, is that Arabic, look, Arabic is, what's the most difficult aspect, which aspect of Arabic so you think it is the most difficult for a foreigner?

Rahaf: the structure is different and maybe a lot of vocabulary.

John: yes, every single word is new. So, this takes hours to memorise. What it does tell you though, Rahaf is that providing that they're willing to work hard and work hard and learn the words, then it is not so difficult, it is because this is the most difficult thing, the words. If you could learn those words, then it is a language like any other language. French has pronunciation problems, all languages do, in Arabic no more than in any other, and the grammar, ok Arabic has a very logical grammar,

Rahaf: that's right

John: very logical, compared to English, my goodness. So, the vocabulary is the task, and what I say to the students when they say to me ; I'm finding this hard because I'm not good at languages, I said no you work out the vocabulary and believe me you will do well.

Rahaf: now a more technical question, how do you understand the relationship between the meaning that you have given to proficiency and the term of communication? I mean does the learner's ability to communicate determine their level of proficiency, or reflect their level of proficiency? Does it do that at all?

John: well I think of course there is a relationship. I understand, personally, if you ask me what do I define this proficiency, proficiency is the ability to communicate. Now, ok but obviously, that's oral proficiency, you know. Now what we're talking about, say the oral proficiency is the ability to communicate and I would say in Ammiyyah because that's ultimately what they need. Without ammiyyah they can't communicate in Arabic with Arabs, you can't, you can't do anything, it is impossible, but then of course we have other, you know, if we're talking about, you know reading and .. it depends on which aspect of the language we're talking about. So if it is reading and writing, then it is fusha, if it is speaking it is ammiyyah, if It is listening then it is Ammiyyah and fusha. Because you know you might say yes I can understand that film which is in Ammiyyah but I can't understand the news, then you're not completely proficient

Rahaf: because we've got a lot of heritage students who speak Ammiyyah very fluently but they don't know fusha at all

John: don't remind me, I have one now and he is terrible, and I told him listen you know you've got to work on your fusha, you've got to. But even his Ammiyyah because when we start talking about more difficult things, yes we're using Ammiyyah but we need the fusha and expressions and stuff, we need it,. When we were talking about teaching we were using some fusha, we need it, yeah of course.

Rahaf: is every proficient a communicative user?

John: how do you mean exactly?

Rahaf: I mean can every proficient user of Arabic be necessarily communicative?

John: well, it depends on what we mean by this, I mean look, Yes, I would say yes. You know you can't be proficient, you can't say you're proficient if you cannot communicate, I'm sorry.

Rahaf: now, what do you understand by a communicative proficiency test. If I were to design a test in Arabic similar to those in IELTS and TOEFL, and I want it to be communicative, how would you define a communicative proficiency test?

John: well, as I said to you before, the communicative test of proficiency has to be has to reflect reality. Now, the reality here is that they have to be able to read in fusha and obviously at different levels. They have to be able to speak in a dialect and it doesn't matter, I mean if I for example, let's say I did Egyptian Arabic and you said to me, Shu ismak in Syrian, it's not a problem, we all manage you know. So, I think that in order to be communicative, there has to be some Ammiyyah in there. As I said to you before, I'm not saying that there hasn't got to be some fusha because, you know if we want to test, you've got to ask, can this person understand a news bulletin on the radio or on the television or on the internet? Then of course at that level it has to be, not at the lower level because as I said to you at A1, at A2 it is not necessary at all because they will never. it is not necessary. I think from B1 upwards then I think we need to start introducing some things. But I think in the communicative approach, look I mean the communicative approach for assessment is mainly in the oral, I mean in the written where is the communicative approach goanna be in the paper? Ultimately to prove somebody can read something they are going to have either translate or do comprehension some kind of reading comprehension; a piece of Arabic with some questions; either in English or in Arabic. You can't get away from that. Well, there is one thing you can do which is another thing you might be interested in, which is what we do to bring the fusha and Ammiyyah together at the reading level. This is what we do when they come back from the Middle East. We say ok, here is an article in Arabic; you go away for 15 minutes or 10 minutes, read it, tell us in Ammiyyah what it is about, and they summarize it. They can use some fusha, of course they will, it might be to do with the teaching of Arabic, and we start asking questions, what do you think of teaching Arabic in Britain, does it have a future? So this is a nice way of blending Ammiyyat almuthaqqafeen with fusha. So, you can even make the reading communicative.

Rahaf: yea, right. And do you expect a proficiency test to be a multi-level test or a single test?

John: when you say multiple what do you mean?

Rahaf: I mean like the Cambridge examinations, each level has its own proficiency test, so they say beginner proficiency test, intermediate, advanced proficiency test.

John: oh yes, of course. In Arabic it has to be the same and really it would be wonderful for that to be an Arabic IELTS, that's what we need and it would be very good if we have this. It mustn't be all in fusha, there has to be some.. You know.

Rahaf: and in an oral test, as you said. I'm now talking about an imaginary Arabic proficiency test like the IELTS or the TOEFL. In an oral proficiency test what do you think the best way is to measure the learner's ability to communicate? Would you do one to one interview? Or would you do it within a group? Why would you choose either way?

John: well that's very interesting question, Rahaf. I mean generally now we tend to do one to one, I have never tried doing it in a group. My worry about that is you wouldn't really have a lot of control over it and it may, I think there are too many problems. I think the advantages of it maybe one or two but the disadvantages are greater. So, I think ultimately it has to be a one to

one interview. I mean you could have two examiners either one to one or one to two. We actually do two examiners

Rahaf: is one of them an interlocutor or he's just an examiner?

John: no, usually sometimes it is like an assistant, but usually they may help, we may switch over, I don't know it just helps to assess the process, and then we say what do you think? Afterwards we discuss it, but no I would say they're both examiners, the way we do it with two, but and certainly at our university, at the honours level whether it is a master's degree or undergraduate, there is always two examiners together with the student. But in terms of deciding how good they are, as I said we're looking at grammatical accuracy, we're looking at fluency, we're looking at pronunciation, we're looking at vocabulary range, structures, self-correction, you can make a mistake, you know we all make mistakes but if you're aware you can self-correct.

Rahaf: if I were to do a scale of language proficiency before I do a test, in Arabic should we take the native speaker as a norm or not? If yes, who is the native speaker of Arabic that should be taken as a norm?

John: yeah I think we should take the native speaker as a norm, I don't know we're not allowed to use the word native speaker, it is very old fashioned, but I think well let's use it. I think we really need to look at, it is a very good question, I mean not every Arab has got a university degree, and there are plenty of children they're very fluent in Arabic but [...] obviously one would aim to be like a native speaker, and everybody's aim as a learner to be as close as possible to the native speaker, you know in any language. we all want to do that but who is that native speaker. Well, I would say.. Somebody who.. It is actually unfair to say somebody who's been to school because in the Arab world you could be illiterate; you could have beautiful Arabic as you know, I'm sure you've met people, because you know illiterates. Are not so much in Syria but you know in some Arab countries where the illiteracy rate is 50%, does that mean that they can't speak their own language? no..

Rahaf: they do speak the language, but would they be able to understand the other registers of the language?

John: well the uneducated?

Rahaf: yes

John: well I don't know, what do you think we should say? Somebody who is educated to secondary school level maybe. I don't think you need to .. I don't think as a foreigner when we're talking to people, to Arabs, you know, if an English person could speak like an Arab, in their fourth year of secondary school, it would be good [...] If we do an Arabic IELTS, I think it needs to be general and I think we want to aim it to be at a good level, it doesn't have to be you know somebody at university level. Personally, I don't think so.

Rahaf: I see. Earlier when I described the aim of my research, I told you that if we were to design a scale of language proficiency, what are the competences that we should include in that scale so that they are embedded later in a proficiency test? What kind of competences apart from the linguistic competence? For example, some people say we shouldn't only test the learner's ability to read and write and speak even in fusha and Ammiyyah, we need to test their cultural knowledge and their ability to interact with people not only to perform something. So do you agree with this or not .

John: again, with Arabic, again I think it is a very interesting question. I think that look you know Arabic particularly Arabic, *Arabic is an interesting language because it is not just like English, it is not just a language of communication, it is a religious language, it is the language of the Quran, and that is very important to bear in mind and students should bear this in mind*

and give Arabic the respect that it should have it should be respected as a language because Muslims believe that God, you know spoke to man in Arabic, obviously other religions believe other things, it doesn't matter, we're talking now about Arabic and about its being a holy language as well as an every-day language so I think it is very important that learners are aware of that. And often I say to my students look take Arabic seriously, try to speak it properly because people will respect you more. If you do that because Arabic for Arabs you know, it is very close to their hearts so you know. And I think that's a very important aspect the cultural side, we're not talking about converting people to Islam or to any religion, we're not allowed to do that in universities or schools but we have to make students aware of the culture which is not always Islamic, of course there are other minorities and we teach them about that, it is very important the Jews and particularly in Syria the Jews and the Christians, and they have to do that as well. *So they need to understand the culture of the Middle East, the Islamic culture, all the minorities and also Arabic has a lot of cultural expressions*, I don't know you have all that greetings, sabah Elkher and Sabah Elnoor , I don't know wIhamdillha 3l salama has allah ysallimak and you have to know these things, and all that culture and I think when you assess the students it is good to see if they 're good at that and this. Because it is very important. An actually students like it than in any other language, it makes language much richer,

Rahaf: and the construct of a scale of proficiency? Do you think it should be functional or interactional? Yani do you think we should what language functions a student can perform or we see of he can go further?

John: I agree with both, I think at the lower level it is functional, you know A1 and A2 it is functional, and it is when you even teach it you have to be able to do these functions you know, but once you get to say maybe B2, up to maybe B1 it is more or less functional but from B2 onwards, then of course it becomes interactional as well. Well, it is great, start with functional and functional continues and then the interactional starts to come in and maybe at the higher level the interactional becomes more than the functional.

Rahaf: I'm trying to let you imagine with me how would a proficiency test of Arabic be, do you think the task of the test should be based on authentic real-life situations?

John: yes definitely.

Rahaf: why is that?

John: well because as I said to you before, we have to. Well of course it has to be because we want our students to perform the language in a way that is natural and so it has to be based on real life and when I mean real life that's a very wide you know framework but as I said to you asking them to listen to a news broadcast that is a real life situation because in real life you switch on the television and you see that but also real life situation I don't know to be able to interact with somebody and again a real life situation it depends on what the situation is, I mean if you're asking them to talk about themselves or their family, so if you ask me tell me a bit about your family , you know I think it is better that I would do that in Ammiyyah this is what a normal Arab would do if you ask about their family. And do I think it ha to reflect reality as much as possible., you know sometimes some things are contrived in an exam but as much as possible it has to reflect reality.

Rahaf: in some oral test a student is put in an imaginary situation where he has to respond to a something or a problem happened to him. What do you think of such tests?

John: well we do role-play; I mean it is a kind of a role-play; I have nothing wrong with anything like that as long as it is realistic and as long as it is something that somebody will be able to do. But we give, I mean obviously, look we have a syllabus, so they know that at the end of the syllabus you have to be able to do this this this and this. Of course the role-play or the

situation that you told me about is designed to see if the person can do that. At the end of this module, you will be able to telephone a hotel and book a room in a hotel so how are you going to test that or assess it? So you have to put them in a role-play or you know, I don't know you're robbed; you're in Cairo and all of the sudden, you left your laptop in your room or something that you forget to take it with you and you came back to the room and after it is cleaned you found out that the laptop is gone, and you're now reporting this to the police in Cairo. That's real because these things happen.

But what's important here Rahaf is, and I'm very strict about this, if this scenario.. if a student has learned fusha and Ammiyyah but let's say they were not very good at Ammiyyah, and they didn't spend a lot of time on Ammiyyah and they just concentrated on their fusha, in the scenario at the police station, they're going to the police station and they go, you know (ta3arradtu lisaruqatin qabla) you know, this will be marked down because in Cairo in a police station you cannot talk like that, it is inappropriate and nobody will understand you and then the answers (da hasal feen, imta, kunti feen) and you know this will be completely, this will be marked down so the language also has to be appropriate to the situation

Rahaf: is this the only way you understand appropriacy? Do you have any other examples?

John: yeah appropriacy in terms of fusha and Ammiyyah. It has to match what goes on in the Arab world. So, I don't know as I said if the task is to you know give a summary of a news item you know you hear, then it is appropriate for that to be in fusha and you may want the student to summarise it into fusha, I don't see this inappropriate, I think that's ok because you may want to see if they're able to give a lecture in fusha. We don't normally demand that but I don't think that's wrong necessarily. So again, it has to match what is in reality what's clear is that fusha will never be used in a police station unless you are reading something that they had written down.

Rahaf: you know, now given the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic, maybe you answered this question before but just to emphasise that, do you think the knowledge of a dialect influences your understanding of Arabic proficiency?

John: yeah of course

Rahaf: do you have any dialect in mind?

John: well, as I said to you before, I don't think it matters that much and I'll tell you why because what we need to understand Rahaf is that.. ok we have to.. Well, I compare it to apple computers and Microsoft, apple is fusha; it is one system, ammiyyah is Microsoft. Each Ammiyyah uses that but the difference is one is Toshiba, one is dell, one is this but if you think of it all of these dialects use mish not laysa, they all use shuft not raaytu [..]

Rahaf: woow, I love the example, so realistic

John: Generally speaking, it is probably better to learn one of the central white dialects probably.

Rahaf: have you taught or assessed any of the dialects?

John: yeah we teach here Egyptian and Levant so we do assess them of course

Rahaf: how does it go in general, teaching and assessing? Which one would you enjoy teaching? And any problems?

John: well, I studied Egyptian Arabic so I tend to teach the Egyptian dialect and I have a colleague who is Palestinian and she teaches the Levant Arabic. I mean I'm ok with Levant I can use it, it is not a problem

Rahaf: yeah I realised that

John: but I teach Egyptian because I studied with a lot of [...]

An Arabic teacher has to think about their language, think

Rahaf: looking at the language outside the box and not taking it for granted

John: exactly, outside the box, and take it apart and put it back again

Rahaf: I think all native speakers have the same problem

[...] Almasdar ..

Rahaf: how sufficient is the knowledge of one spoken form of Arabic for successful communication and for saying that this learner is a proficient user of Arabic?

John: yes it is sufficient and I always say this to people because as I said once you've got one of the Microsoft computers, you've got that system, ok the style of the dell might be different from Toshiba, but you know for example if you go to, well I was learning Arabic, I was living in a student hostel in London and I was very lucky because I was living, it was men on one floor, women on another floor, mine obviously was man, and all the men in my floor they were all Arabs, I remember there was one Yemeni, let me see there was the Yemeni and there was the Egyptian then there was the Sudanese and there was the Syrian. We would cook together and I was learning Arabic of course they were all speaking in their own Iraqi, Yemeni, Sudani and Suri and Masri, but they all were understanding each other, you know they won't be changing maybe "kanu bikhaffifu" a little bit their dialect but generally they were speaking in their own way and we talked about lots of different things you know which is great. Sometimes I would help.. One of them used to have problems with English he had to read something in English but couldn't understand it, you know so it doesn't matter because Arabs themselves only know one dialect, you know how many Arabs know more than one dialect? But that doesn't mean that they can't understand maybe Moroccan is a bit difficult but generally they understand each other you know.

Rahaf: does this apply necessarily to non-natives as well?

John: yeah no problem no difference at all, imagine you have to go to Morocco; at first you have to get used to it. I've been in Morocco, after one week you get it

Rahaf: you just need some exposure you mean

John: yes I'm not an Arab and I can do it so you know it's not a problem with exposure and always, look I speak Egyptian and I went to Morocco, I didn't change it to Moroccan... and a foreigner student of Arabic should not have a problem if they have been taught properly then they shouldn't have a problem and my students don't have problem with that

Rahaf: back to the cultural element, we talked about the importance of teaching the culture within the language, but now when it comes to assessment and assessing culture in a generalised proficiency test. Do you think we should assess culture?

John: well I think we should assess it through the language as we were talking about before. I think yes I mean you know I think we should assess it you can do it,, I remember I was attending an oral exam actually in Denmark where they put somebody in a situation and they really thought it was true, the person had said that his mother had died, can you imagine but it was terrible and they thought it was true, it wasn't true and they had to know what to say in Arabic so they put them in a very tough situation, I wouldn't personally do it I didn't like that but you could contrive some scenarios where you know to see how they would manage, what type of Arabic they would use in such a situation or I don't know just to see if they have the

sensitivity of speaking to an Arab using some culture. You can also, the other thing you can do, I mean what we do is we do a picture presentation so for example I might show them a picture of Jerusalem they have to talk about Jerusalem, why is it important to different religions? To see if they know about it and of course it is impotent they need to know the name of the places, they do need to know qubbat alsakhra, haet almabka, kaniset alqiyamah, all this they need to know all of these in falastine particularly the ones who were going there. And you know of course I think it is very important, very very important because the Middle East, you think how important these things are in the Middle East. Unfortunately, they're causing a lot of problems but of course you cannot avoid it.

Rahaf: my very last question, if you were to design a proficiency test for Edinburgh, or for the UK universities in this context can you describe the type of tasks that you would include in this test and what kind of communicative features that you would include and that best describe it as communicative

John: as I said before, I'm repeating this, but you have to assess the four skills, you have to have reading and writing, speaking and listening. You have to have you know in terms of communicative you would have to have some role-plays, using the appropriate register depending on the situation. Listening again would have to be at the appropriate level, listening of course would have to have some fusha and some Ammiyyah depending on the level and even they could be both at the high level. I would want to make sure that, you know, the student perhaps, I think a presentation would be very nice to do to ask the student to do an oral presentation. Normally we would ask a student maybe to write something or translate, maybe write an essay or a letter depending on the level. We normally want them to write an essay about something to see how their writing in Arabic of course his is in fusha.. Reading comprehension, again we can either do it, some kind of reading tasks whether it is reading comprehension or translation. I'm not against translation by the way some people think it is not .. I'm not against it, I can see nothing wrong with asking somebody to translate something from Arabic into English, but if somebody said no we mustn't do that, then you can do reading comprehension with Arabic questions.

Rahaf: would you focus more on accuracy or fluency? With which one you would tolerate more?

John: I'm very very concerned about accuracy. I have an Arab colleague who doesn't care. We were two examiners, he said they were fluent I said yeah but their accuracy is bad you know. Look in an ideal world you need to be fluent and accurate, you need both. Look they both are important; I would say they both are important, I wouldn't say one is enough, I wouldn't say fluency is enough I'm sorry, I want some accuracy.

Rahaf: in both fusha and ammiyyah?

John: in everything.. I would say that in English. I can give you an example Rahaf, I have a French friend of mine, he is very fluent in English, but he always gives yesterday I go, yesterday I see, yesterday I do. I said what! Is there no past tense in English? Give the language some respect. There is a bottom line for this. And we mustn't forget this, this is wrong and we mustn't be afraid to tell the student I'm sorry .. That is wrong you can't say that. I'm sorry I'm very modern in my approach of communicative but there are certain red lines.

Rahaf: what do you think of a written form of Ammiyyah and fusha?

John: well, look this is very interesting, I mean I think at the early stages I don't I think, look , this is for advanced students. I think what I want my students to do is to be able to speak Ammiyyah nicely and to read, mainly to read fusha properly and to be able to write fusha properly. Now of course when we write emails in Arabic I'm sure we write shu sawet mathalan and u think at the higher level, this exists and as a foreigner you need to know how to do it, and



you may want to be able to read I don't know there is a few novels now, a new novel in Egypt called taxi which is written in the dialect, and it is not easy, it is hard but this is for the highest level. Would I include it in the IELTS? I don't have an opinion about it, yeah maybe but not in the lower level I think this is .. look when I say integrated approach, I'm not talking about destroying the Ammiyyah or destroying the fusha. Those have to stay; it is a question of how to use them correctly but I'm not talking about changing them no we can't do that because they have to use what I real now of course people are beginning to write in Ammiyyah on the internet as advanced students they started to see it and once they're comfortable with fusha it doesn't affect it, you know what I mean, they can handle it, but at the higher levels. I don't know whether I would include it, I would say probably not, but I don't know, I don't have a very strong opinion but probably not.

## **Fida**

Rahaf: can you tell me a little bit about, your experience, your background, years of experience, where have you worked and have you been trained as an Arabic teacher.

Fida: myself, I was graduated as an architecture engineer in Lebanon, and when I came to this country I've had to get children after children so the only thing that I could do in this country is teaching Arabic in Saturday schools. So I started teaching Arabic in the Syrian community school and other schools in Saturdays for about 10 to 15 years and also teaching adults Quranic, Quran and tajweed. I had like adult students and children students. I didn't have that middle age; I had 10 to years old students at primary schools but later on, but before that for 10 years I was only teaching 5/6 years old and adults. And I became responsible for the year 1 reception class in the Syrian community school for another 5 years and I made a curriculum for students for children 5 to 6 years. After that I started like my work in a primary school for 10 to 11 years for non-speakers, that's for 2 or 3 years and then I started teaching in SOAS. It was 6 years ago and I started with upper intermediate courses, which is straight before advanced. And after that I started to get beginners and proficiency after that and later on last year, 2 years ago I started with native speakers, teaching native speakers in SOAS and at the same time teaching Quranic Arabic but in another place. All our courses in SOAS, the one I teach, are not credit courses, evening classes. Sometimes I have one to one classes, I had Quranic Arabic as well one to one and I had proficiency two people, they came for one week intensive course for proficiency and then I worked in London metropolitan where I'm teaching a credited course, the credited course is for beginners now but it will grow every year, it is 15 weeks' course and of course it is part of their markings and exams and things like that. I teach as well in Al birr foundation; I teach Quranic Arabic which is for non-native speakers as well but it is only Arabic dedicated for understanding the Quran and the Grammar of the Quran.

Rahaf: interesting, can you tell me about the students of each university that you teach at, the students of SOAS and students of London metropolitan. How are they different and what are their purposes of learning Arabic?

Fida: there is a big difference actually and if you ask me which one I enjoy, I enjoy the ones I teach, they are learning a credited course. The reason is yes it is more to do with behaviour, you have to like, you can see some behaviour problems because they are still young, like 20, 22, 23 years old but they are more enthusiastic and they are ready for learning, they are already learning and because they know they have an exam later on, and it is a part of the credited so they pay more attention and as well it is 3 hours, in 3 hours you can give a lot more than in 2 hours.

Rahaf: 3 hours per week?

Fida: yeah, per class as well, like the class is 3 hours like from 6 to 9 in the evening. In SOAS they come, most of them like they come after their work, and they come very very tired, so you have to be careful, you have to be slow enough, you have to be not asking them for homework,

you know they say I'm tired you have to tolerate that. So yes they are nice and they are very calm but sometimes you feel like I need some more.. I need them to talk more, I need them.. They're very slow, not all of them, but most of the time this is what you can see. And they miss classes a lot, and because it is not a credited class, last week they run away because they didn't want to do the test because it is not credited course.

Rahaf: and the students of metropolitan, they take Arabic as a module, right?

Fida: yes it is a module.

Rahaf what are their purposes of learning Arabic?

Fida: some of them are studying politics; some of them are studying international relations like it is somehow related to their subject. And as well because it is called the open language program so some of them they just take the Arabic because they think languages is an easy subject so they think they could get marks with that. So there are different reasons for them to choose that actually.

Rahaf and after they finish, well do they have a year abroad or no?

Fida: no I don't think so; they are like 3 years students

Rahaf probably the 4-year students have a year abroad.

Fida: yeah yeah

Rahaf and those students after they graduate, what kind of level of Arabic they can reach?

Fida: from what I can see now, like after I did the full module with them, they're equivalent to beginner 2 here, so if they 're goanna do the 4-year course I would say they would be not reaching proficiency but maybe advanced.

Rahaf: advanced, after taking the 3 years course?

Fida: yes, with my teaching, I don't know other people's teaching because you know each, to be honest; I didn't see very much structure in the course so it is up to the teacher how much they can give, like if I want to stick to the book or to the syllabus itself, I would give half of what I've been giving to them. So I know even students say we learnt a lot more than we even expected. So I know that I can reach with them the advanced course but I don't know about other teachers to be honest with you.

Rahaf: I see, and you mentioned the intermediate and proficiency here is SOAS, how are they different?

Fida: in SOAS the structure is different, we have one year for beginners, 3 terms, so 3 terms, it is 20 hours per term, which is 10 weeks. So that's beginner 1, same for beginner 2, same for beginner 3 so a year, and after they finish beginner 3 they have the lower intermediate level which is another year, 20 hours, 20 hours, 20 hours for the year, and another year is upper intermediate level as well, 20, 20, 20 which is now you say after 180 hours of lower intermediate, beginners, and upper intermediate they reach the advanced level.

Rahaf that's 3 years

Fida that's after 3 years because they just come for evening, it is not like.. This is for the evening classes. We have as well diploma, the diploma maybe Ilham is going to talk to you about it but I can give you a little bit information about it. They do a full time course; nearly you can say because it is 3 hours every day, 5 days a week, but in the end of the year I can see they can reach the advanced course, even for proficiency or not proficient but they can start

proficiency after that, even they pass the advanced level after they learn it because it is really really good structured course and the students are only working for Arabic because they are full time so in the end of the year you can see a very good improvement, you can see their writing, you can see their communication and they do as well communicative Arabic and they do Egyptian colloquial so you see that they can join between speaking and listening, also other skills.

Rahaf: so diploma is different from the proficiency course, yeah?

Fida: yes that's, now they're doing proficiency diploma like they call it proficiency diploma, they do the level after diploma in Evening. But for the evening classes, after as I told you the three years they finish the upper intermediate course, they start the advanced course for another year, and then start the proficiency. So after 4 years they start the proficiency.

Rahaf do you teach fusha only?

Fida: we have different like, we have the colloquial by itself, you want to choose the Levantine or you want to choose Egyptian, or you want to choose other.. but as well when we teach in the classes we teach modern standard Arabic, I choose myself, it is not a must for us but I choose sometimes to give them some listening and some speaking, not speaking to be honest, some listening with Levantine sometimes with my classes, because this is my proficiency which is a Levantine so I choose some texts sometimes, some listening texts sometimes, but it is not really deep, if you know what I mean. But in the native speaker course, I allow them to speak like Ammiyyah because I know it is the only way where they can start, take them from Ammiyyah to fusha.

Rahaf: before they start any course, do they take any test? Any entry test?

Fida: yes I'm responsible for testing, like I have been here like testing all courses from beginner to proficiency and I put the students in the right level. Recently we have like online registration, students can assess themselves, not assess themselves, they can come themselves like for beginners only. But for higher level they need to be assessed and one of the teachers, the coordinator assesses them and put them in the right level.

Rahaf: so you assess them orally only?

Fida: depending like, if the students come with the same books, you know some institutions are teaching the same book, like we're teaching Alkitab for example. If they're coming to the intermediate level and in the intermediate we teach Alkitab, just they tell us which part of the book they arrived and then we start asking questions to make sure they really reached this level. So if they're speaking properly and they're reading properly, sometimes we ask them to write, it depends on their aim themselves of the course themselves like some of them say like we don't because we are not a credited course. So for example they say I don't care about writing, I just need to improve in my speaking and listening so we don't really push so much on that. But sometimes especially in the beginners' level like beginner 2 or lower intermediate 1, we insist on seeing how the student can write as well because it is very important for us, but if they're anyway in the advanced, writing is not ... no need to practice..

Rahaf: so there is not an official proficiency test or an entry test?

Fida: we've never done an official one but for the diploma they do. For the diploma when they want to assess say a student wants to join from the second term, they can't join for the third term but they can join from the second term. They don't assess them in the beginning because they're fresh they don't know anything about Arabic, but from the second term, it is according to the, what they call it?

Rahaf: the common European framework of reference you mean?

Fida: yeah that's it. Yes but we do the assessment, when I was a coordinator before like I used to do like multiple choice questions and it worked a lot but I find it, it is easier for me, because I look at the whole information they learned in grammar and speaking and listening and I put it under multiple questions, multiple answers, and later on I'm using it in my classes but it is not for the uni, you know they were planning to do that and put it in their website so they can have an online assessment but it is not yet set, not yet.

Rahaf: coming to the more technical thing, what do you understand by language proficiency in general and when it comes to Arabic?

Fida: my understanding of proficiency is that a student can speak, listen, and read like they can say I won't say quickly but confidently, without a need to refer back to the dictionary and without need to tell you to repeat the listening again, like whatever the listening text is coming from and whatever the topic you're talking about. And with speaking, they should be able to communicate confidently and answer any questions and try themselves to ask questions themselves without any like hesitance or anything. This is for all languages I think, for Arabic there is one more thing I **have to** add which is the colloquial itself, which is the communicative language. You know in other languages there is no much difference between the language they speak and their professional language, but for Arabic they should know, in my opinion, at least two types of colloquial language like say Egyptian and Levantine, Levantine and magribi. They should be aware of two of the other languages, not necessarily to be proficient, but to reach at least an intermediate level in speaking and listening in the colloquial so that they know how this, and to be able as well to understand how it is related to fusha somehow.

Rahaf: very interesting. What do you understand by communication and what's the relationship between proficiency and communication from your perspective?

Fida: communication is the ability to speak to someone or to a group of people or to be in a place where you can deliver a lecture or whatever and to be able to communicate with people in the language you're targeting. For Arabic, like the communicative Arabic is like really what we do in SOAS here, our aim here is to enable the student to communicate well with others and that's why speaking is very very important in all the courses. Yes, it is not really important for them to learn the colloquial in the modern standard, but from my point of view, most of the teachers or maybe all the teachers are hinting for some colloquial inside the classes and they give them some listening inside the classes. But in the speaking itself in the classes is really enhanced through lots of different ways; to enable the students to communicate well. Once maybe you give a text, like contextual they will read the text and you ask questions to see what they understand from the text, not only they read and look for new words for translation. One other way is like they just like find a topic and try to ask students to communicate with each other in groups of two or three especially sometimes you give them questions and you tell them to talk more in details. Sometimes we tell them like I'm going for a trip to turkey and I want to choose the best way to advertise for the trip so they go and prepare for that so we try to get all source of topics they may cover and in Arabic. if they're going to work we tell them to do an interview for the work as well, so we tell them to prepare and come and they will be the interviewers so these sort of things. And also politics, we do also politics, and sometimes we make some problems. When I taught the native speakers, I used to do like what do you call it, I say there is a program, we do a TV program and in this program, there is like two people arguing and we're going to discuss their argument and which one you support, and why you support this point of view not the other pint of view. So these are the things that o can think about.

Rahaf yeah, that's very interesting that's like a role-play

Fida: yeah we do role-plays as well. We do it only for proficiency, like we start from the beginners to do role-plays and do those sort of things until they reach the proficiency.

Rahaf do you think that the one who can do those communicative activities can be classified as a proficient user of Arabic?

Fida: it depends on the language they're using, like if they're using the simple language I can't say they're proficient, even our intermediate students can do these activities but they can do it in the vocabulary they know, so I can't say that communicative (ability) itself can make the proficiency yes to be communicative it is essential to be proficient but to be proficient you need to know most of the vocabs, all structures of the sentences, you need to know all sort of topics, like political like even poems, poetry, all types of materials they can be around; anything that can be like all sort of .. and this is what I was trying to do .. design a syllabus which is a topic based for proficiency about I stopped after a few months of starting,

Rahaf: can you describe one of your students that you thought he/she is a proficient user of Arabic, and another one who you thought they're not after finishing maybe the three years and why?

Fida: one of the students I had from one to one, she came from far away, I think she came from Scotland, she is proficient, and she wants to learn more. What I can see straight away when she's dealing with a text or when she looks at the word she says, pattern 2, pattern 9, pattern 7, so she doesn't need to work out the patterns, she knows and she just like opens the dictionary straightway to the place where the word is, so I think it is a hint that's telling me she's proficient now, she knows how to refer to the information very quickly, she knows the relation between all sort of patterns **in Arabic like pattern 6, pattern 9, the patterns** and the meaning in Arabic, and another thing that she can do like she wouldn't allow me to help her, so she will take the text by herself and she will say stop don't tell me, so I think it is as well a sign for proficiency when someone is an individual learner without like seeking help from others. yes the help would be just for support not for teaching I think. They don't need teaching at this level they just need support.

Rahaf some guidance

Fida: yes some guidance

Rahaf: and did she speak any dialect? How many dialects did she speak?

Fida: yes she understands, because she's got some friends, she knows colloquial from one of her Syrian friends she has, she speaks with her in colloquial and she travelled a lot, she travelled to lots of countries; she knows how to speak Tunisian, almost she understands Tunisian. One of the reasons she wanted to do the course because she wants to improve her speaking, her listening and understanding is excellent but she's not really very confident in speaking and maybe this is what is lacking that she needed to ..

Rahaf: do you mean speaking Tunisian?

Fida no no speaking the modern standard Arabic or any type of Arabic

Rahaf: speaking as a skill you mean

Fida yes as a skill, speaking without hesitating because you know when you are all the time with books you don't have the chance to speak a lot with someone that's the time when you don't have this balance between all sort of the skills that you have. So yes, this is what she and in the end she will be interested in everything, in the media, she buys journals, she listens to Aljazeera a lot, so she doesn't have any problem understanding any topic but when she came she wanted poetry, she wanted to go to more detailed things, she would like, she started to compare between Shakespeare and the other poets in Arabic, so she can do some tahlil= analysis for the subject, so this is proficiency for me..

Rahaf: that's a very advanced language function, analysis. How about the other student that you thought he or she is not proficient?

Fida: I have been not myself teaching but I was replacing a teacher who teaches proficiency in the class that I felt one of the student was not really very proficient in the class, the reason I'm saying is that every time when you're speaking in the class as a teacher in the class he has to stop you and ask you can you repeat the sentence so I don't think in terms of listening at least to be proficient you don't understand the fusha when it is spoken and you want it to be repeated. I think this is more like advanced level but not proficient level.

Rahaf: how about the varieties that he spoke? Could he understand for example another dialect but not fusha?

Fida: I can't tell really about that, but I know that the teacher really focused on fusha with them but I'm not sure if they .. but most of them or all of them they travelled to many countries so they understand it but speaking it, I'm not sure.

Rahaf I see, now, what do you understand by a communicative proficiency test?

Fida: I heard that before but I didn't really ask what does it mean. But I think that it could be like one to one meeting with someone, trying to ask him different varieties of topics and ask him questions, analysis of the text or different types of texts even listening or all type of skills together but you want him to communicate with you while he's doing the test. Is it what it means?

If someone applies, you need to have the need analysis in the beginning, so needs analysis will help you assess their initial level, if the initial level says that they're both together they're at the same level, why not? You can bring them both and you can do this test for them but if there is a very big gap in level I don't think this will be practical to do that.

Actually Alkitab the book we're teaching is a communicative book as well. So the listening tasks are, they're not only for proficiency; it is for all levels we do the communicative approach for listening, speaking. So when you do the listening task, before we give the task in advanced we give them some questions, we tell them that we want you to answer these questions after you listen; we want you to try to get some verbs, so we give them many tasks for listening and when they start to listen so we do this communicative approach for all levels, not for the beginners maybe for the intermediate and over, not necessarily for proficiency.

Rahaf: actually I know the communicative approach is a kind of a trend now; most of the institutions are following this approach now in teaching. Now when it comes to testing, I'm not sure and that's why I'm asking. Can we apply this communicative approach in testing?

Fida it depends on the type of the test you're telling me, is it the test that can decide if the student can fail or succeed or the test to allow you to know if this student can come to this class or not?

Rahaf: let's say actually I'm arguing for a test that's similar to the IELTS or TOEFL

Fida: so for the sake of certification?

Rahaf: of course you have to do that, you have to do that, because how would you know, you can't especially for proficiency if you don't do that it is not possible for you .. I don't know how you can do it for listening, for listening you can yeah but I don't know how you can do it for speaking, because even in the IELTS it is just one to one it is not yet done within groups

Rahaf: yes that's right

Fida but it is possible, but you need to do the needs analysis, the needs analysis maybe you don't call it the need analysis you do it the level analysis maybe, they have to fill it in before, and you study all the levels you have and then you try to put every two or three levels together and you think these are ok, they are same level in speaking, same level in listening and maybe you then start to put them in groups and then you call them for groups of speaking

Rahaf: have you come across any proficiency test in Arabic?

Fida: in Arabic? the diploma one that we're doing in SOAS

Rahaf: what do you think of this test?

Fida I helped with it, I think it is very very good because the texts they are using they have like a lot of tasks inside them. They have something to do with grammar, something to do with analysis, something to do with understanding, some of them are to do with extended writing, they have even listening tasks, communicative listening, they have the colloquial, so all sort of testing

Rahaf they have the colloquial as well

Fida yes the Egyptian

Rahaf they test it in both? Speaking and listening

Fida yes speaking and listening

Rahaf do they test them separately or within a text that has a mixture of both?

Fida they do presentation, which is the most important thing they do in diploma, and the presentation takes time like each student has to prepare for a topic and they come for like a half an hour presentation, it is really very good and then there will be a discussion with other students, colleagues which is this way you call it communicative speaking while after his presentation, his colleagues start asking him questions about his presentation and what we say whether they agree with him or not. So that's the type of things they do which is very very successful.

Rahaf: within the listening tasks do they have colloquial as well?

Fida: they have colloquial and they have the modern standard Arabic

Rahaf: separately?

Fida: yeah

Rahaf: would you expect a proficiency test to be a single test or a multilevel test?

Fida: do you mean by a single test like a test for speaking, test for listening

Rahaf: no I mean for the highest level of proficiency you have only one single test and then the scoring refers you to the level of the student or the grade tells you how proficient the student is. The other ones you know like Cambridge tests, they do have tests for each level of proficiency; they call them beginner proficiency test, intermediate proficiency.. So would you expect an Arabic proficiency test to be a multi-level test or a single test?

Fida: I would agree with the multi level test, the multi level for Arabic would work better because.. But this needs a lot of work it needs work of group of people to decide which vocabulary to be for the beginners, which vocabulary to be for the intermediate level, and not

only vocabulary, the structure of the sentences and lots of things are gonna be included, so I think it is totally 4 years, 10 or 8 people.. It is a very very big ...

Rahaf: and an institutional work not an individual work.

Fida: yeah and I think they started something similar in the GCSE for Arabic and the A level. It is very similar but they do have a sort of like; they do only topic-based, they did a big job for that. If these people can come with other people coming from universities and they work together, they can give their experience to each other and they can do something..

Rahaf: yeah I agree it is a big task. Just to emphasise this question, if you want to measure a learner communicative ability in an oral proficiency test, would you do one to one interview or would you do it within a group or would you do both?

Fida: which level?

Rahaf proficient, let's say

Fida: myself no, if I have a class why would I do one to one. I think it is a waste of time, if I'm teaching a proficiency class, up to now I didn't teach a proficiency class, I taught one to one proficiency but I would think it is an oral thing, why should I benefit from only one person speaking? While when everyone speaking and communicating together, I have a paper next to me and start to level everyone at the same time because you give them more opportunity to speak more and to know exactly what they do because when you have one to one you have a lack of questions sometimes as a teacher, but they encourage each other and everyone will come with another question and with a new analysis of the question so I would prefer a group one.

Rahaf: what do you understand by the native speaker of Arabic and who is the native speaker of Arabic that should be taken as a norm for non-native speakers?

Fida: people say look at Aljazeera people who speak that, but I don't agree, I don't agree from one point of view because they do sometimes stick to something like what do I call it like you know the Soukun every word there is like soukun soukun soukun so I don't like this type of ... I think why do we need to choose people to put them as a norm, why don't we put some specifications instead of that?

Rahaf: yeah where do you take these specifications from?

Fida: we make them, we make it from .. I don't know

Rahaf: you know there is a huge argument in the literature about should we take the native speaker as a model or should we as you said set specifications. But even for other languages like English this has been researched a lot but they haven't got any research like these are the specifications that we should take ... so my question is should we take the native speaker as a norm or not? The native speakers who live in the Arab countries

Fida: no because as I told you, even in SOAS we have 7 different levels of native speakers; do you want them to speak well in Arabic and ignore about the writing, do you want to let them speak and listen properly and not read properly? So you know there is four skills; even if it's a native speaker, he needs to get the four skills to be called a good native speaker. Like if you can say someone who is speaking very very well in Arabic even in fusha ad he knows all of the..., but you give him a piece of paper, he doesn't know how to read and write. So how can I take him as a norm? I can't. and it is common in the native speaker, they know how to speak properly especially those who are brought abroad; they know exactly what it says in fusha, if they listen and if they speak, but when it comes to the reading, they're very very beginner in reading.



Rahaf: how about the native speakers who live in Arab countries?

Fida: as well you can't take them as a norm because there is a big difference between their levels, some of them are very rubbish in Grammar, some of our students in the intermediate levels are better than, their grammar is better than people who lived for 20 years in the Arab countries,

Rahaf: I agree, so if you were to choose one of these several levels that you said native speakers in Arab countries have, which one would you choose? Which level of native speaker would you choose?

Fida: the ones they come to me and I don't take them to the class. if you want them to be proficient there is some who come to us and we return them back. We tell them no you don't need our course, because they know how to speak, they know how to read, they know how to write, they know how to understand everything, and they want to know more so we tell them; either take one to one, or go and learn in an Arabic country. So this is the person that I choose.

Rahaf: when you set a proficiency test, what are the competences, yani the types of knowledge that you try to assess within the test apart from the linguistic knowledge. I know you use reading, listening, and writing and try to assess some language functions in each skill, I mean apart from that..

Fida: I try to assess if they know how to analyse a text, if they know how to do description of something, if they know how to extend their writing, if they know different topics, if they know both the colloquial language and the non-colloquial language so all of these things you need to assess for a proficiency test.

Rahaf *would you assess the cultural knowledge?*

*Fida yes and the cultural knowledge is very important as well because you're not learning the language itself you should be learning about where it comes from. And why this language and how this language be applied and where it can be applied.*

Rahaf given the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic, yani one formal written form and many dialects, do you think the knowledge of one-dialect influences your understanding of language proficiency?

Fida: we do have some students who come to us who lived in Arab countries, we know lots of people who work in Arab countries, so they come to us, they know how to speak say Dubai or whatever, gulf properly and when they come to us, we don't put them normally in beginners, we try to tell them to go and learn themselves how to read the letters and they start straight away with intermediate level because their understanding is very well and they really like can enhance their fusha, some of them they come to the native speaker class. Recently I had a Pakistani guy who knows Arabic because he watched lots of programs on TV, lots of operas and he's better than native speakers in speaking

Rahaf: interesting, woow

Fida: and when he came to us, I didn't feel sorry putting him with the native speakers class because he was really a native speaker

Rahaf: yeah near native speaker

Fida: yeah so yeah it happens and it will help them improve their language

Rahaf: can you say that the one who is very good at fusha but can't speak any dialect, do you consider him a proficient user of Arabic?

Fida: like you can say he is proficient in Modern standard but you can't say he is proficient in Arabic altogether, you have to define it. You can say he is proficient in MSA or in CA you can say that but you can't say he is proficient in the Arabic itself by all means

1; have you assessed any of the dialects?

Fida: yes I assessed Egyptian and I assessed the Levantine

Rahaf: which one would you choose if you were to choose for teaching and testing?

Fida: Levantine because I'm Levant

Rahaf: any problems, like the main problems you encountered when you assessed the dialects?

Fida: there is a nice story that we had, I was a bit late for my assessment and the coordinator was upstairs when the student came for assessment and then when I had her needs analysis but I didn't read it before there was a problem with the bus, so when I arrived I needed 5 minutes to read it or to ask her at least what her level is but when I arrived the coordinator was testing her, and then I completed the testing but she was asking her to write, and she was asking her to say and she was asking her fusha and all the time like for about 15 minutes and then after she left the student said she was assessing me all the time but I don't want to learn fusha, I'm coming her for Ammiyyah I want to learn Levantine. When she started speaking colloquial she was very good, before the coordinator was telling me you can't take her to the class to the intermediate class, but she was intermediate in the colloquial, so when she started speaking in the colloquial she understands colloquial but she doesn't understand fusha. But she did some words; she understood some words, that's why she thought she can be beginner 2. See the difference between upper intermediate in colloquial they can be beginner 2 in Arabic not beginner 1 especially because we teach the letters as well even if we teach the colloquial, still we still teach the letters and how to read and wrote

Rahaf: do you think the knowledge of one dialect is sufficient to say they're proficient users of Arabic?

Fida: no

Rahaf: how many dialects would you require?

Fida: I would say 2 dialects but not very close to each other like not Palestinian and Lebanese, like Lebanese and Moroccan, Lebanese and Egyptian like at least half of the Arab countries.

Rahaf why do you think one dialect is not enough?

Fida: because you know especially like I was looking at the Moroccan dialect, I can see there is lots of fusha inside the Moroccan dialect [...] so if the student knows two colloquial he will know the relation between fusha and colloquial as well.

Rahaf: speaking a bit about the cultural element of the language, do you think it is essential to determine the student's level of proficiency? If the student is not aware of the cultural competence, do you think he is still a proficient user, why? Why not?

Fida: he is not goanna be a proficient user, maybe he can be a proficient speaker or proficient reader, writer but not a proficient user, because *using the language is not only understanding it, using it means where he can get his political information, where he can get his poetry information for example, where he can get things to do with environmental things so he needs to*

*know all the sources of the language, to know how to refer to it, so this is a type of culture he needs to know. This is the type of culture he needs to be aware of*

Rahaf: *what type of cultural aspects do you require a learner of Arabic to be aware of, can you just give me a couple of examples?*

*Fida: I would advise, from the topics I was teaching there is Almal wa alaamal from the finance, he needs to know about Arabic finance, he needs to know about politics and he needs to know about the social life, social life, food and dresses and all kind of things, he needs to know about alaaayla like the family in the Arab countries, the traditions and how they live so these are the main aspects. And as well some of the poetry not necessarily the classical poetry, he needs to know a little bit about religion, and not only a little bit, he needs to know well about the religion and the sects of religions as well and the differences between them because he is going to get in troubles*

Rahaf: especially if he goes to Syria or Lebanon, they're sectarian countries

Fida: yes

Rahaf: would you assess this knowledge?

Fida: yeah we do it linguistically speaking

Rahaf: can you give me an example?

Fida: like when you have proficiency students and advanced students, we don't really ask them ma ismuka, ma umruka. Have you been to an Arab country? What did you do there? Have you been to the mosques? What did you see in this country? What do you know about Arabic food? So, this sort of things

Rahaf: can you tell me about the test characteristics that can best describe the communicative Arabic proficiency test in general? If you were to design a generalised proficiency test something like the TOEFL or IELTS to be used internationally? What kind of test tasks you would include?

Fida: I would say I have to I can't say like I want to separate them but I would like to concentrate like say in listening maybe in listening I would concentrate on the Media, maybe in speaking I would concentrate on the family and the culture and religion, maybe in the reading and writing I would concentrate on the finance and these sort of topics because I need to know the knowledge of the numbers as well and divisions and this sort of things because it is hard for the learners to listen and to answer the questions, it is better to read them. maybe for the writing I would say I will tell them to talk a little bit about the differences between Arab countries, if you want to go abroad what you would do? Have you been to an Arab country so see how much he knows about the culture itself through the piece of writing.

Rahaf: in listening and speaking, would you test dialect and fusha?

Fida: I would maybe not for the speaking, I would do like in the listening, I would include some choice base, to choose one dialect and answer the questions

Rahaf: and fusha

Fida: and fusha as well

Rahaf: would you test them separately or within one test?

Fida: no a list of different texts, otherwise he would translate them and answer the questions

Rahaf: yani you wouldn't have a text, which has someone speaking fusha and the other one speaking Ammiyyah?

Fida: no even when we teach in the diploma, we would like to separate them because we want the students to know that each of these languages are used in different contexts. When you write you never write in Ammiyyah, when you speak you can mix Ammiyyah, we allow them to mix but we don't give them a mix of Ammiyyah and fusha.

Rahaf: and some people say when you want to test students you expect them to perform some language functions, and you give them a grade according to the language functions they perform. Other people say it is not only the language functions which is important, it is going further for the interactional competence. Which one would you go with in a proficiency test?

Fida: of course the interactional

Rahaf: can you give me a reason?

Fida: because you know, you wouldn't be proficient if you don't do an interactional test, if you don't know how to analyse the ideas, it means you only tiring to understand the text but when you understand the text you will go a level higher to analyse and talk about your feelings otherwise all of your effort will be on understanding the text for example if it is a reading task, so you wouldn't know how to analyse and you wouldn't know how to maybe talk about your feelings or to give your opinion or to say why it is right and why it is wrong to say that and all sort of questions, you will not be able to do then if you don't really know the text properly and know how because sometimes in IELTS and TOEFL there are always tricky questions as well it is not really functional only, it is as well if you don't really know how to analyse the text and how to analyse the ideas you wouldn't really answer right anyway so this is really important for a proficiency test to be included.

## **APPENDIX 6: TEACHERS' SCRIPTS**

### **Walid**

Rahaf: can you tell me a bit about your teaching experience and whether or not you had any training.

Walid: I started my professional career in Damascus. I did my degree in media, and in 1999 I started teaching Arabic to my foreigner neighbor students. Then I taught Arabic at the French institute of the Middle East (IFPO Institut Français du Proche-Orient). Then I came to the UK and worked as a classical Arabic teacher at the university of Aga Khan. I mean the language of literature and the variety used for Islamic religious purposes. Then I ended up teaching at (...) University. I've been here for 2 years now.

I did my masters in Psycholinguistics of Second Language acquisition and bilingualism. The only training I had was at the university of Aga Khan and it was in-service development course related to teaching the international students in general. But I haven't had any training related to the language pedagogy.

Rahaf: who are your students now? What are their purposes of learning Arabic?

Walid: currently my students are various. I'm the convenor of a course called 'the introduction to standard modern Arabic and the intermediate standard Arabic'.

Rahaf: what's standard modern Arabic? Is it different from MSA?

Walid: it is just a technical term used to differentiate between the different types of students. We basically use MSA s for postgraduate students and SMA for the undergraduate.

I also teach intermediate classical Arabic in a different place, and introduction to classical Arabic as well. I also taught advanced students, and dialects sometimes.

Rahaf: for how long do your students study Arabic?

Walid: we have students who do 4 years Arabic degree. Others do masters and we also have Arabic 1, 2,3,4 for those also who study a degree in Arabic. They actually study Fusha.. To be honest I don't think there is a fine line between fusha and the classical Arabic so those who are doing the degree in Arabic study everything. As for the masters' students who I basically teach, we basically concentrate on fusha and more particularly on vocabulary that's mostly used in media. While other students focus on Arabic literature and those are different from those who do a degree in Arabic or the ones I teach. Some others take a course called "an introduction to the colloquial" for special purposes like things related to the Arabic culture or dialects. Some others do study the old classical dialects, and their origins.

Rahaf: at which course do you teach both? Fusha and the dialect?

Walid: in the classes I'm responsible for, I have 2 hours of grammar lectures and an hour of spoken Arabic after a one hour tutorial given to each group pf students. Those who take the introduction class, are not very committed to learning fusha, but we still rely on fusha. Some students take classes of damascene dialect or the Levantine and others study the Iraqi dialect and others do the Egyptian.

Rahaf: what do you expect from your students to be able to do after finishing studies with you?

Walid: for those who do 4 years, they are expected to be fluent. They spend their third year abroad in an Arab country of their own choice. It used to be Egypt, Syria in the past, Jordan or Morocco. In this year abroad, the student is supposed to learn fusha and improve his dialectal skills as well using the dialect of the country he is based at of course. I mean being able to read texts in fusha MSA I mean, not necessarily means being able to read the Quran or understand historical books, with which, you know, even us the natives need dictionaries to understand such registers. And he is also supposed to communicate in ...

at the end the student is expected to graduate with an ability to read texts and news and to be able to express himself/herself in any dialect he/she chooses to improve his linguistic skills.

Rahaf: how do you use the dialectal knowledge that the student acquired after his year abroad?

Walid: I'm not the right person to be asked such question. My students are those who do masters of one year. They either take the introduction or the intermediate course. For those who take the introduction course, after they graduate, they are expected to have a good knowledge of Arabic grammatical rules, at the syntactic level of the sentence given its different types be it nominative or verbal. They are supposed to be mastering negation, and different verb types and tenses. The student is taught 70% of Arabic grammar in addition to the weak verbs, different sounds, intonation and pronunciation.

In the intermediate course the student is being taught all Arabic grammatical rules.

Rahaf: does the masters' students study Arabic as a specialism or a module?

Walid: they study Arabic as a module. It might be a core or an elective module.

Rahaf: do they take any test before they start their masters' year?

Walid: they take a placement test in order to find out at which level they should be placed (introduction or intermediate). In case their level was higher than intermediate, they can be placed at a higher level than that.

Rahaf: who designed this test?

Walid: our institution. This test has been designed mainly because a lot of our students are native speakers of Arabic who are born in the UK and they mainly speak a dialect but they don't know how to read or write in fusha. There are also those who previously studied in different places and over a long period of time, in an informal way or in discontinuous periods.

Rahaf: can you describe this test please?

Walid: we test the learners' ability to understand the main Arabic grammatical rules. It starts with easy questions pertaining to the structure of the nominative and verbal sentences, then come some other questions to examine to what extent learners understand negation types and different structures. Based on their performance we can then determine the suitable level to place them at.

Rahaf: do you do an oral test as a part of this placement test?

Walid: no we don't. It is not very important for us. It is not one of our learning outcomes to improve the conversational ability of our master's students. That's why we tend not to test it.

Rahaf: what do you understand by the concept of "proficiency" and what does it mean to you when it is particularly related to Arabic language?

Walid: the problem of our profession of teaching Arabic, as a foreign language is that we don't have particular traditions that resonate with the features of Arabic language. Therefore, even the terminology that we use when we talk about Arabic pedagogy is taken from other languages and so we can't translate it accurately. Basically, all pedagogical concepts that we use are created in different research contexts that were conducted to improve the pedagogy and teaching methods of other languages. Arabic, unfortunately, has not been recently researched to determine such traditions or to conceptualise such terminologies. There isn't a precise definition for proficiency for example. As for the way I understand proficiency in Arabic, I'd say it is the learner's ability to read and understand, to listen and understand and to speak in any way he/she wants in Arabic but in a clear way that guarantees the listener's full understanding. Writing comes at a lower level of importance.

Rahaf: what do you mean by "in any way he/she wants"?

Walid: I'm referring here to the variation a learner chooses to speak with even if it was a combination between fusha and any dialect. What matters is his ability to deliver the message in a way that is understandable for the listener.

Rahaf: don't you think that this freedom in choosing the variation the learners want even if it was a combination of fusha and the dialect makes it hard for them to communicate, namely those who want to live in a particular Arab country?

Walid: I think you're referring here to another type of proficiency that a learner needs to be aware of, that is the cultural proficiency. In my perspective, this should not be a concern for the learner of Arabic. If I go to Whitechapel in London for example, it will be difficult for me to understand the English they use. Is this my fault?

I also think that you cannot limit proficiency, I think it's an infinite concept. I believe that some non-native learners of a language can be more proficient than some natives. For example, if I speak to an English person who is not specialist in applied linguistics, which is my expertise,

I'm sure he won't understand a lot of what I say for a simple reason, that's the register is different. The majority of non-native learners of Arabic are not amateurs. I mean their main purpose of learning Arabic is not confined to watching movies or understanding Turkish series that are now dubbed in the Syrian Arabic. Their main aim is to be active in the media, cultural and political domains. And the language of these domains is the variation that I mean and I demand when I speak about their level of proficiency.

In my opinion, the problem does not lie in the fact that Arabic has different variations, it is there in the way those variations are being taught. Generally speaking, none of Arabic teachers or institutions knows or wants to admit that the various dialects that Arabic has are all derived from fusha. I'm sure they don't tell their students either. I think those dialects should be included in Arabic syllabi so that learners don't feel or think they're learning different languages but rather they are getting exposed to different registers.

Has any teacher told his students that the phrase (*matha tureedu* = what do you want) in fusha is equivalent to (*shu biddak*) in the Syrian dialect and that the latter is derived from the former and even more eloquent?! The only difference is that some sounds have been omitted for the sake of speeding and softening speech. And this happens in all languages. Yet, in our different registers, we say *shu biddak* but we don't write it and this applies to *matha tureedu*, which we write it but we don't say it in our dialects.

Rahaf: Describe one of your students who you thought he/she was proficient in Arabic. And another one who you thought he/she was not. What sort of skills has the proficient one developed as opposed to the less proficient one?

Can you know the learner's level of proficiency if you speak to him/her?

Walid: speaking is not a sufficient indicator to the learner's level of proficiency. If a learner is fluent in a dialect only, I don't consider him/her as a proficient user of Arabic. He/she should demonstrate a good level of fusha knowledge as well. A lot of our students who speak a dialect tend not to be familiar with fusha at all. For instance, one of my students who fluently speaks the Egyptian dialect, started to learn fusha with me from the scratch. When I asked him (*kam u'mruka?* = how old are you?), which is a very basic question in fusha, he said I always knew that the word (*umr*) means 'never' rather than 'age'.

This student in my opinion is not proficient although he speaks the Egyptian dialect fluently. The native Egyptian who uses *umri* to mean never knows for sure that it means age or lifetime in fusha. therefore I call that learner's knowledge of Arabic as the knowledge for survival.

Rahaf: what are other types of knowledge that decrease the learner's level of proficiency, from your perspective, other than what you talked about?

Walid: the "robot" student who looks at the language the way he looks at math. This kind of learners follows a linguistic catalogue, so if one of the linguistic components don't exist, he gets lost. He is not proficient in my opinion because language is very dynamic and lively, so if the student does not know how to use it, I can't consider him proficient. The learner might not know a lot of a language but he knows how to use it. For me, the highest level of proficiency is having the pragmatic knowledge of the language; knowing how the language is to be used.

Rahaf: do you see any relationship between proficiency in a language and the learners' ability to communicate in that language?

Walid: there are some people who have a problem in communication in any language, even in their own language. Yet, definitely, the more the student is proficient the more he is willing to communicate.

Rahaf: how do you understand the learner's ability to communicate?

Walid: it is the learner's ability to engage in any communication process, in any socialising situation within any social network. It is the learner's readiness and willingness to meet with natives, contribute to the conversation, expressing his opinion, discussing, responding, taking the initiative, and showing disagreement. To agree or disagree on something with the interlocutors is an important indicator, although I see disagreement is much stronger given that it requires a greater level of self-confidence and linguistic confidence as well. He also needs to have courage to express his opinion in the target language. All of these are good indicators to a high level of proficiency.

Rahaf: does the learner's ability to communicate determine/reflect his/her level of proficiency?

Walid: I can't confirm that because some learners are shy or introvert. They might be psychologically not able to communicate. I can't determine the level of this type of person based on his level on interaction with others. it is not fair! The reason of his/her inability to communicate is unclear, is it his lack of proficiency or his introvert personality?

Rahaf: so you think a proficiency test should be communicative?

Walid: I think it depends on the learner's purposes of learning Arabic. And based on that we should determine what we mean by proficiency that we aim at measuring. The majority of Arabic learners are meant to understand the culture, politics or media of the middle East, and that's mainly what the proficiency test should measure.

Rahaf: what if the student wanted to live in an Arab country and work as a journalist for example. Do you think we should measure his communicative linguistic skills?

Walid: I don't think this journalist will be living in a cave nor only be seeing those people who "usually sit at the building roofs smoking and drinking tea"! He would be living and working as a journalist and therefore he should be able to read newspapers and follow news on social media and to be able to interact with the surrounding. At the same time, he should be speaking to people. However, I can't tell him to speak the damascene dialect even if he wants to live in Damascus. I want him to be able to speak to people and understand what people in streets are talking about.

Rahaf: well, this is what I mean by my question. Isn't that communication?

Walid: this is not enough. Arabic is different from English! There are different registers in Arabic. Even if the student spoke the dialect very fluently but wasn't able to read, I can't say he is a proficient user of Arabic.

Rahaf: do you think the concept of communication on Arabic is confined to the ability to communicate in the dialect? Did you understand that from my questions?

Walid: of course not. You and me now are speaking the dialect in a fusha structure. The dialect we're using now is only at two levels; verbs' conjugation and vocabulary selection. The 50 vocabulary that we usually speak in the dialect but we don't use in fusha.. So we're speaking the educated Arabic. we use the right vowels within each word, the case ending is missing but that's not a problem, it doesn't change the meaning. Also sounds of some letters at the end of the words change like the (ta') at the end of the word we pronounce it as an (a), and this exists in other languages. So basically the dialect that we're speaking now is actually fusha.

Rahaf: I'm not talking about looking at the non-native speaker as an incomplete naïve speaker.. I meant what he can do as a non-native and there where I say communication, I don't mean to ask the non-native speaker to communicate with natives as a native.

Walid: I agree, and in addition to that, I think there is another important thing should be taken into consideration which is not expecting or asking our students to look like native speakers. We



shouldn't either consider taking the native-like model as a criterion of determining the learner's level of proficiency. This is a mistake. Take as an example, the Kurdish Syrians who were born and raised in Syria, who speak a dialect, which is a combination of many Syrian dialects. I recognize any Kurdish from the very first sentence he/she pronounces, and that's for a very simple reason which is the inconsistency in the way he speaks the dialect. He/she would speak a word in the damascene accent and another one in another Syrian accent. He learned that from his friends who belong to different cities, and with whom he was always surrounded. So I can tell that he is not an Arab, but can I say he is not a native speaker of Arabic? of course not!.

Rahaf: how about the Armenians in Syria? Do you consider them natives as well?

Walid: no, the Armenians are different from the Kurds. They still have problems in sentence order as well as in distinguishing between masculine and feminine. The Kurds don't have that. One more thing I would like to add, nativeness is not confined to knowing a language but it is also connected to the social context of the language. So for me the Armenian who speaks the dialect but can't read fusha is not a native speaker.

Rahaf: it is obvious the extent to which you concentrate on the knowledge of fusha, when we're speaking about communication. When I ask about communication, people usually understand that I mean communication only in *A'amiyya*.

Walid: I don't even agree on calling it *A'amiyya*, it is just a different variety of the language. In morocco it is called *Aldarija* and I tend to prefer this terminology, because *A'amiyya* comes from the term *A'ammāt alnas* that means *the general public* and implies that some of the population don't speak it and this is not correct. While *Aldarija* means what people are used to speaking and this is more precise.

Rahaf: have you come across any Arabic proficiency test?

Walid: unfortunately no, and I don't think I'll be seeing one soon, at least after 2 or 3 years from now.

Rahaf: Actually ACTFL institution has designed one, have you heard of it?

Walid: yes. I think they're doing a good job now by adding the cultural proficiency to the criteria on which their scale of proficiency is based. However, ACTFL is originally affiliated to the ministry of foreign affairs, and I believe that their test has been designed only for specific reasons. I don't really think that they care about teaching Arabic language only for the sake of teaching it as an important language, nor they even care about to what extent their student can be linguistically proficient in that language. They rather ask their students for particular tasks to perform through mastering the language, mainly for their political aims and the intelligence service's benefits. So what they really want from their student is to go to this Arab country or that and get them the information they want.

Rahaf: you talked about cultural proficiency. What do you mean by that, and do you consider that the cultural aspect of the language should be assessed?

Walid: yes of course it should be assessed, yet as for Arabic we need a linguistic proficiency test at the first place and then we can think of adding the cultural element to it.

Rahaf: what do you understand by culture in Arabic?

Walid: when we study English, we tend not to recognize that we're actually studying the culture and we're just learning to express it through English. I think cultural proficiency is very essential. You can't separate the language from its cultural context. For instance, I don't insist on my students to listen to an Arab classical singer like (Sabah Fakhri) if they don't like this old traditional style of singing. But, I insist on them to listen to any kind of Arabic music they

prefer (Nancy Ajram) as a very famous modern pop star. The purpose is to share the experience of the native speaker when they listen to their music. I always add Arabic poem to my teaching materials because reading poems or listening to poems is a very cultural thing. All Arabs even the illiterate are interested in poems. Therefore, I think the student needs to live and feel the language, and to understand what Arabs like and why they use different structures to express themselves. They also should know what the things that we see beautiful are and how we reflect it in our language. Take the moon as an example. It might not mean anything to a British student when I talk about the moon. Therefore, I translate it to “sunshine” as an equivalent to the moon in the Arabic culture. I just want to deliver to the student how a native speaker of Arabic feels when he hears or talks about the moon, which is a pretty women/face.

Food is another example; I speak a lot about the Arabic food. I think the student should know what we eat, how we eat, the difference between restaurants’ food and the food we make at home. He should understand that the meals we usually eat at restaurants need long time for preparation, but are to be eaten quickly. So he becomes aware that if he wants to try the Syrian cuisine he shouldn’t be going to the restaurant. Also, it is rarely to find someone eating alone, that’s why we do care about our meals together and we don’t mind spending 6 hours to cook a meal for 15 people. so I deliver all of that in linguistic formula/forms so that the student understand how to use the language and why he is using it this way. Our daily expressions are a good example as well such as (*Ala ayni* and *Ala Rrasi* to positively respond to the one who is asking for a favor), why do we say such expressions, how we communicate with each other. I insist on teaching these particular examples at least, especially music. I always tell my students that you might not like this particular type of music but it’s an experience after all. Experiencing this kind of Aesthetic is important and can be improved. I even ask my students to develop a feeling towards that and to share it with me so that he can feel what I feel as a native when I listen to my favourite type of music. When students live this experience, they will be able to understand its components and so gaining awareness of what, how and why people speak about it. Experiencing the culture is essential in this regard.

Rahaf: do you expect the proficiency test to be a single test or a multi-level test?

Walid: of course a multi-level test

Rahaf: how about the oral proficiency test? Would you do it in a form of one to one or in a form of a group discussion?

Walid: in a group discussion I can’t control all the language variants produced. Also there might be a student who is not interacting because he is shy rather than he’s not proficient. It would be hard for me to evaluate his level in this case. I prefer the one to one form of testing. I think group discussions form is valid for measuring the communicative skills of learners rather than the individual linguistic oral proficiency.

You can do both if you want, if only you identify each student’s task.

Rahaf: from your perspective, who is the native speaker that should be taken as a norm?

Walid: he is the one who can understand what he reads and listened to without a dictionary. He might come across some vocabulary that he is not familiar without he can quickly understand it by the context. He is also the one who can express the ideas he knows in a clear and understandable language and who doesn’t make semantic mistakes.

Rahaf: how about his level of education?

Walid: he should be educated. And I mean the one who successfully passed his secondary school education.

Rahaf: why do you think so? ACTFL has taken the well-educated native speaker as a norm.

Walid: I think this is idealistic

Rahaf: On which criteria, do you think a test should specify the level of proficiency of a non-native speaker of Arabic? What are the competences that should be measured in order to successfully reflect learners' communicative skills?

Walid: what matters is actually the content and the cultural aspects it may contain.. it is not very important if the listening text was a speech of the prime minister. Well, it can be but there should be some other cultural content. So I would say there should be three listening texts, an academic one, a political or media one and the third can be a part of a series episode that expresses a real-life situation.

As for speaking, I think it should test the learners' ability to interact not only to communicate.

Rahaf: in the listening test, do you think the texts should be testing learners in one variation fusha or the dialect or they should be a combination of both?

Walid: at least one of them should be conducted in fusha, the other one is in the spoken dialect, and the third one should be in the educated spoken variation. The latter can be a TV program in which the presenter is speaking fush and the guest is speaking the educated spoken form of Arabic, as it is the case in most of our TV programs.

Rahaf: do you think that all the test's tasks should be taken from real life situations?

Walid: of course all the test's tasks should be authentic.

Rahaf: Given the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic, do you think the knowledge of the dialect influences your understanding of Arabic proficiency? If yes, do you have any particular dialect in mind? From your experience, have you taught/assessed any of the dialects? Which one(s)? Why did you choose to teach/assess them? How did it go? Any problems you encountered?

Walid: well this is so hard I think. Even we as Syrian native speakers can't understand all other dialects at the same level. We understand the Egyptian very well, the dialects of the gulf at a lower level, 50% of the Libyan Arabic, and less of 25% of the Moroccan. Therefore, I don't think we should expect from the learner of Arabic what we, as natives can't do. This is not realistic and should not be required either.

Rahaf: what do you expect from the learner of Arabic to know then?

Walid: I expect him to learn fusha and the dialect of the county he's planning to stay at. In case he changed the country, he would be already having the tools that will enable him to learn the dialect of the new country. This applies to me as well, in case I found a job in morocco, I'll need 2 or 3 months to master the Moroccan dialect.

Rahaf: so you think if the learner's ability to speak one dialect is enough for him to be a proficient user of Arabic?

Walid: very sufficient with fusha of course.

Rahaf: which dialect? Do you have any preferences? Why?

Walid: I prefer the Levantine to the Egyptian only because learning the Egyptian dialect limits the learner communication to Egypt only given that the Egyptians themselves tend not to understand the others' dialects. While Arabs of the Levantine area are more open-minded, they understand others and others understand their dialects to an extent. Now because of the media and due to what's going on in the Levantine area, it has become very understandable even in Morocco. And it is not logical to ask the student to learn all the dialects so that he can understand any spoken form of Arabic and wherever he goes.

49:46 speaking about the Levantine

Rahaf: In your perspective, what characteristics best describe the communicative Arabic proficiency test? Have you used such a test? What were its characteristics?

Walid: if I were to design a proficiency test that measures the highest level of learner's proficiency, I would consider it to be a four-skill test. I start with reading comprehension which should contain 3 reading texts one of them is a report or a piece of news; it can be political or economical, the other a short story or a small chapter of a novel in a form of dialogue that involves different characters. The third can be a literary text, it can be a piece of a contemporary poem like those written by Nizar Qabbani, Mahmoud Darwish or Naji Alali, The purpose is testing his cultural and linguistic competences.

Listening: the first text can be a piece of news, the second is a TV program as I said before and the third can be taken from real life such as a conversation conducted in a street, a restaurant or a market. It can also be an episode from a tv series or any authentic real thing.

Speaking should be divided into two sections;

The first should be a targeted and limited conversation: where you ask the student a specific question or you assign a particular task and start discussing it. The student should be familiar with the topic and is able to speak about it in his native language at the first place.

The second one is to put him in a situation: the examiner raises an issue, an idea or a problem he might face and ask the student to explain how he can deal with it or what is his opinion about it.

Writing: I think writing is an independent skill; the learner can be good or bad at it even in his native language. I mean the learner might be well educated but is not able to express himself in writing even when using his native language. Therefore, I would less focus on this skill than the others. What I really care about is the learner's ability to deliver his ideas and expressing his opinions smoothly.

Rahaf: how about accuracy in writing?

Walid: I can ignore the mistakes that the native himself can make. Namely some spelling mistakes that don't change the meaning, the ones related to how to draw some letters at the end of the word such as misspelling writing the letter (alif) and mistakes in identifying the case ending as well.

Rahaf: what are the mistakes that you cannot ignore?

Walid: mainly the mistakes made at the structural level; the sentence order, putting two subjects in one sentence when starting with the sentence with a verb, and generally speaking the grammatical mistakes that change or affect the meaning.

Rahaf: how do you see the relationship between proficiency and both accuracy and fluency?

Walid: the more the learner practices the language, the more fluent he becomes and the more proficient he is the more confident and willing to communicate he becomes, and this of course has its positive influence on his fluency.

Rahaf: which one is more comprehensive, proficiency or fluency?

Walid: proficiency of course.

## **Farah**

Rahaf: would you like to speak in English or in Arabic?

Farah: I think English is easier so you wouldn't have to translate.

Rahaf: ok appreciated. Thanks for having me and for giving me this chance to do an interview with you. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? Your background as a teacher of Arabic? have you got any training? Where did you teach? And how did you get to the field?

Farah: I'm Syrian, I was born and raised in Syria, and I did two years of university in Syria where I did English literature. After that, I transferred to the states and graduated with a degree in political science. When I came back to Syria, I was invited to teach English and that was my first teaching experience. I started to learn about teaching while practicing at the university, we had a lot of in house training and I did courses at the American cultural center in Damascus, after teaching two years of English, I got a scholarship to do independent studies and teach Arabic at Duke university in North Carolina So this program identified a need for more Arabic teachers in the US especially at Higher education institutes. The program offered teacher training, so my first teacher training in Arabic was in a conference in Cairo, we had people from American university in Cairo, we had also d. Al-Batal who wrote Al-kitab also giving training, also before we started teaching, we had another workshop. for teacher training and learning it is a continuous development, so as you teach you always attend workshops, conferences and stuff like this. I then did masters in English language teaching and a SALTA certificate. Even though these programs are mainly for English language teaching, due to the lack of proper Arabic language teaching programs. We usually do the English ones and apply the methods, skills, tools into Arabic language teaching with modifying them because Arabic has like specialties and different a bit from English.

Rahaf: and what about the training you got in Cairo, was it about Arabic pedagogy or was it about in English?

Farah: no was about Arabic, it was like a three-days conference

Rahaf: how long have you been teaching Arabic?

Farah: I would say almost 6 years

Rahaf: in the UK or in different contexts?

Farah: I taught in America, in Turkey and in the UK

Rahaf: and in the UK, how long have you been teaching?

Farah: teaching Arabic in the UK... it was like a few months and then a gap when I left to Turkey and then since two years and a half continuous Arabic teaching.

Rahaf: where are you now? Where are you teaching now? How are your students?

Farah: well, I teach a variety of courses; I teach young professionals and diplomats. I teach at a university in London and I teach young learners which is 3 to fifteen years old. It is a different context

Rahaf: and what are the main purposes of your students that you teach?

Farah: well, as I mentioned, I teach a variety of people

Rahaf: well, I'm interested in university students

Farah: university students they are doing it usually as part of their studies and aiming for better careers because the Arab world, the Arabic language is an advantage for people who want to work in Economics and in trade, for people who want to work for politics and research, also for cultural and religious studies. Some students learn Arabic because they have a personal connection with it like either relationships or family background, or they might speak some of it as a heritage language and it is part of their identity, other people are just interested in Arabic as a language

Rahaf: and what do you expect from a learner of Arabic to do after finishing studying Arabic? What do you expect them to be proficient at?

Farah: well, it depends on the context; it depends on the learners' needs and objectives. I don't think I would set what the student should be able to do, it depends on the student himself

Rahaf: what they need or what they're aiming at

Farah: yes

Rahaf: in the institution or university you work at, do you require your students to take an exam before they start a course?

Farah: generally, yes but if they're complete beginners, they're just complete beginners.

Rahaf: and what kind of test? Is it a placement test or a proficiency test?

Farah: the test I think has a few components, listening, reading and grammar and writing

Rahaf: any speaking?

Farah: yes and speaking, thank you

Rahaf: who did this test? Who designed the test? Is it the institution that provides you with the test?

Farah: yes the institution

Rahaf: now, more technical thing. What do you understand by proficiency in general and when it is related to Arabic?

Farah: I think the word 'language proficiency' means different things to different people, and usually the main two things about language proficiency are fluency and accuracy, like how fluent the student is in the language but there is usually a trade-off between fluency and accuracy in the grammar and the structure. In my work, especially the diplomats, we use the European framework so we divided like 6 main levels, and each level has like specific criteria about what the proficiency we expect from the students at this level.

Rahaf: and how would you identify a proficient user of Arabic?

Farah: I would hesitate to use this term, because I think proficiency has like levels, a person who learned Arabic for a few months and they can introduce themselves, and just order pizza or something in Arabic, they are proficient user of the language, but they're not very advanced; they have like some proficiency.

Rahaf: how about the highest level of proficiency?

Farah: well, with my students, we have people reaching the level of C1 and C2 so they can read the news, understand the news, they can give interviews in Arabic, discuss political, cultural and social issues, all in Arabic.

Rahaf: in Arabic, which variety?

Farah: again, depends on the context because what matters for me as a teacher is that the student is able to communicate. So, I would expect them to understand modern standard Arabic and the educated speakers' Arabic, but they might struggle with like regional dialects if it is the more extreme variety of the language. However, which variety they speak, the learners it is completely up to them. So, you can have proficiency in Standard Arabic, or a proficiency in a regional dialect but it is still proficiency.

Rahaf: so, you are trying to say that of the learner is familiar of one variety let's say MSA, you still consider him to have the highest level of proficiency?

Farah: yes, in speaking

Rahaf: in everything?

Farah: no that's why we differentiate, as comprehension as listening comprehension; a proficient learner needs to be able to understand both modern standard Arabic and some of the spoken Arabic, but what they speak is their choice to choose one and develop it

Rahaf: yeah now I'm interested in your understanding to the concept itself. So, what I'm trying to ask is that if the learner of Arabic understand MSA in the 4 skills, but he doesn't speak any dialect, or vice versa, he speaks a dialect fluently, he can listen, comprehend, produce the language; the spoken form of Arabic any spoken form but he cannot read a text in MSA?

Rahaf: how come he wouldn't be able to read?

Farah: he wouldn't because he learned the dialect by listening to it, by communicating with people. Family, relatives...

Rahaf: well, it depends; there are people who learn the language by immersion without knowledge and to grammar but usually in educational institutes we follow the integrated approach for the four skills, so we develop the four skills together.

Rahaf: I had an Iraqi student, who was raised in Canada, and he spoke Iraqi very well, but when it came to MSA we had to start from scratch from the alphabet. So, do you consider such a learner a proficient user?

Farah: would my opinion matter? It depends why he wants Arabic and how he use it, but personally I would consider him as a proficient speaker of Arabic but not as a writer but he still has the knowledge of the language, and that's I don't think it is the situation only for Arabic, most heritage students they have this, they can speak, they can communicate to a certain level, but they can't read that's where the role of formal education comes, where to read, write the language, the grammar, structure, everything.

Rahaf: how about the opposite side of it, how about if someone knows MSA but he can't speak any of the dialects?

Farah: that's completely fine! He has proficiency. That's why I told you the term proficient is sometimes used in a restrictive way because people have different proficiencies in the same language, whether speaking, understanding, communicating, or just reading and writing without proper pronunciation

Rahaf: tamam, so if you were to define Arabic language proficiency, how would you define it as a concept? If you were to train a student of yours to reach the highest level of proficiency, what do you do?

Farah: I'm against defining proficiency because it depends on the context, and the objectives, why the learner is learning. If we go back to the main context if it is the diplomats, the young professionals or university students, I would prioritize the ability to speak one variety whatever it is either formal or spoken or MSA and be able to read and write

Rahaf: interesting! Can you describe one of your students if you remember that you taught and thought he was proficient in Arabic and another one who was not? And why?

Farah: well, I've taught a lot of people, some of them reached A2, B1, B2 s all of them were proficient within the level they were at. For example, I was teaching a lady who had previously lived in Egypt so she used to speak Egyptian Arabic, but then she got a job to work in Kuwait, the focus of the program was, I taught her like for 3 months intensive, was to update her language knowledge about Arabic grammar, and standard Arabic. At some point, we had to prohibit her from speaking in Egyptian to be able to develop a different variety, just because it was her wish and it was a requirement of her job. Otherwise, I would be fine with her speaking whatever variety she's proficient at and we used mentality if I may call it that's the objective, the goal is to learn, speak standard Arabic, but any time she couldn't produce a statement in Standard Arabic, she could refer back to Egyptian Arabic and just say it and people will understand her. It is just about the contextualising of her learning because she wants to go to a different country and she wanted as a diplomat to relate more to the people in that country so it is more than just language proficiency, it had another objective which is like sounding like the people of the country she works in.

Rahaf: and one of your students you thought he is not proficient, even within his/ her level? And why do you think that?

Farah: well the only student that I consider not a proficient is the complete beginner because any learner they will learn some proficiency, they will acquire it.

Another student I would call her a weak student, she studied Arabic on and off for about a year, but she was always busy with her work commitment, so she wasn't able to dedicate a lot of time to Arabic. But then she reached the level of A2 but still sometimes she would forget the verbs, so mix the word to go with the verb to eat or something like this. According to her, she has been learning Arabic for a year. As a teacher, I thought she was not acquiring the proficiency that she wanted.

Rahaf: because she lacked which kind of knowledge?

Farah: she lacked vocabulary knowledge and she lacked sentence structure and listening comprehension so usually proficiency depends on communications and how much you can communicate your ideas or understand what people are trying to communicate to you, but because she was not familiar with the... She was not capable of remembering words, I think she was like not very proficient... she didn't establish good...

Rahaf: this leads to my next question actually, the relationship between proficiency and communication... Actually you started to highlight it, you said she want able to communicate that's why I can't consider her proficient... So can you tell me a little bit how do you understand proficiency in terms of communication? Linguistically speaking

Farah: we're talking about a language; language is not studied as a vacuum, language is a mean for communication, of course you have the body language and other ways of communication



but a student learning a language might need only a few vocab to be able to communicate, but even if he's communicating, he is not very proficient in the accuracy so they might be able to say what they want but like with 5 to 20 grammatical mistakes, they're still communicating but they're not very accurate in the language uses. But in that case, they don't have a very high proficiency level; their level is lower.

Rahaf: so, are you saying that the learners' level of communication identifies their level of proficiency or vice versa?

Farah: yeah there is a correlation between the two

Rahaf: what do you understand by a communicative proficiency test? In terms of testing do we say it should be communicative and what do you understand by communicative testing?

Farah: well, it is tricky with the naming, because proficiency and communicative proficiency more or less the same if you're taking a holistic approach to the language, if you're considering just the grammar based approach to the language, then like the way I started to learn English in Syria, we used to know how to like solve a grammar role exercise but we were not proficient in terms of speaking. But if we're talking about language as a moving thing, as a method of communication, the two things that are almost same.

Rahaf: speaking about a test, do you think the test should be communicative as well, or we should rely, I mean a proficiency test in Arabic should be based only on grammar or translation with some listening comprehension? How do you imagine a communicative test?

Farah: well, testing is a funny thing in language learning, because you learn a language to be able to use it, testing should be a way of ... part of the learning, but it is very hard to determine what do you test the learner on ... I would go with my previous answer; it depends on the context. So, for the diplomats, I would need to test them in specially in C1 and C2, in their listening, reading, their speaking, their ability to negotiate, ability to give interviews, ability to interpret

Rahaf: in which variety

Farah: well if there're in a very advance level, then it depends on the context. We have the most recent expression is the educated spoken Arabic, which is a simplified MSA and closer to regional variety so that would be the ideal thing. However, it again depends on the learner and the context

Rahaf: so, they can choose one of the varieties? Either MSA or a ...

Farah: exactly, or a spoken variety but it is usually the educated person... What I mean by the educated speaker, like if we take Syria for example, you have Damascus spoken Arabic, you have the villages, you have a variety of people who have never been to universities so we say the educated spoken Arabic is the people who like went to a university, they have a high level of knowledge of Arabic language but they still speak spoken Arabic,

Rahaf: do you think those people would use both varieties when they speak?

Farah: as a teacher, I'd prefer the students have one variety that they are confident in, better than being confused between the two because my philosophy about teaching Arabic is that you don't want to confuse the students that we have two different things. For me it is a spectrum, it is various levels so the learner should be confident in whichever variety he or she chooses. And then focus more on communicating the meaning they want and on the structure and on the language register; because you don't speak with an ambassador or a minister the same way you speak with a taxi driver, so these scopes of the language for me are more important than just confusing the student; is it standard or is it spoken Arabic

Rahaf: that's right! But when you ask the diplomat to speak, and he chooses to speak MSA for example, I can see there is a kind of contradiction. If he chooses MSA and he went to one of the Arab countries and he wanted to speak to the taxi driver for example, if he doesn't know the spoken form of Arabic, do you still think that he is a successful communicator?

Farah: of course, because the taxi driver would ... well, let me say this... an educated speaker of Arabic would still understand MSA, a taxi driver would be able to understand what the speaker needs. Like if my student who only speaks MSA and goes to the Arab world and tell the driver "khuthni ila mataam aldiwan" the driver would understand, they would find it different, there are some people, some researchers, some scholars who suggest that this is the foreign aspect of it actually has a positive impact on the person listening to it. So, a sympathizing Arabic speaker would love a foreigner speaking in Arabic regardless whether it is standard or spoken.

Rahaf: how about the other side of the linguistic situation? So, you're speaking about a taxi driver understanding the learner, how about negotiating? What if the taxi driver could not speak MSA? He could understand it but he could not speak it? And he replies in the spoken form. Would the learner here be able to understand in most cases?

Farah: that's a challenge in Arabic, because we have different varieties, that doesn't only apply to standard and spoken Arabic. You have also regional varieties so even if my student go to Syria and learn Syrian Arabic they might go to Morocco and not be able to negotiate in spoken Moroccan Arabic. so, this is a problem or a special feature of Arabic language. it depends on the location.

Rahaf: if he was in one location and then

Farah: then our program incorporates both, spoken and standard Arabic we usually start teaching-by-teaching MSA because it is more structured, it has the language rules and everything. Then we have a spoken variety but only one spoken variety.

Rahaf: are you involved in any of the testing processes at the institution you work for? Do you so tests?

Farah: yes, I was participating in designing the tests and I do conduct exams as well

Rahaf: what kind of tests? Achievement tests? After they finish...

Farah: we have progress tests and levels exams, so tests are done in house for A2 B1 B2 and we have exams for C1 and C2

Rahaf: what's the difference?

Farah: it affects the trainer level at their job and it has to do with the work they do- type of work

Rahaf: so, the in-house test as you call it and exams are different?

Farah: so usually the test is a progress test, it is considered a part of the learning process

Rahaf: formative assessment

Farah: yes, but the decisive exams for the C1 and C2 depends on the jobs they're going to perform later on in their career.

Rahaf: so, I understand the formative assessment or the progress tests, but the exam is it graded?

Farah: all of them are graded

Rahaf: what do you do with these grades?

Farah: it enables the diplomats to go for service in the media sector; giving interviews, talking about the UK opinion

Rahaf: so, if the diplomat didn't reach the pass grade, he won't be able to do the commission maybe?

Farah: it will affect their job, but we also offer a chance for resubmission like other institutes.

Rahaf: you've spoken about that but just to emphasize. Would you expect a proficiency test to be a single test or a multi-level test?

Farah: I like the different levels of proficiency

Rahaf: now back to the idea of the educated native speaker. Before I ask you what's the norm of proficiency that you take... I mean the type of native speaker that you take as a norm of proficiency, I just would like to hear a little bit about what do you understand by a native speaker of Arabic? Who is the native speaker of Arabic? And who is the native speaker of Arabic that should be taken as a norm?

Farah: well, a native speaker in any language is that the person who speaks this language as their first language, they have it at home, they think in that language.

Rahaf: can you talk a bit about the two varieties of the language? MSA and the spoken language?

Farah: I don't think the varieties of the language define who is a native speaker of Arabic. well, I did a lot of research about Arabic sociolinguistics and from my personal opinion, you might find people who never have formal education, they're Arab, they spend all their life communicating in Arabic but they never had the opportunity to learn Standard Arabic or to learn to write in standard Arabic

Rahaf: when you said, they spent their life communicating in Arabic, do you mean in their dialects?

Farah: yes, but also they are exposed to standard Arabic in the news and also in some Arab countries, all children TV programs and cartoons are in standard Arabic so they are exposed to standard Arabic. they sometimes don't ... like a native speaker of Arabic wouldn't differentiate between MSA and spoken Arabic, for them it is all Arabic. However, MSA has more prestige. But a person who cannot speak MSA is still a native speaker of Arabic. there are very very few examples about people, if you want to consider MSA and the spoken Arabic as two different varieties or languages. there are very few people who learn MSA as their native language because there are studies in Neurolinguistics which suggests that learning MSA and learning spoken Arabic is like learning two different languages in terms of the brain and the cognitive process so if we take this theory into consideration, people usually start learning Arabic by learning the spoken variety except a few examples of people who have mostly religious reasons to learn Standard Arabic from a very very young age. Apart from those, most native speakers of Arabic first speak spoken Arabic

Rahaf: that's right and we learn MSA through the dialect. So, which one of those types of native speakers that you talked about should be considered as a norm when we teach our learners?

Farah: it depends on the context and the student's needs. For my diplomats, we start with MSA and later the dialect. It has a pedagogy reason for that, but also other people suggest that Arabic should be learned spoken Arabic then Standard Arabic like the native speakers learn it. Other people suggest the two varieties should be learned simultaneously and if you follow like Al-kitab series of course they do introduce the two together. Personally, I prefer the approach of

teaching one variety and then after a few months introducing the other variety... Currently I teach standard Arabic for a few months and then I introduce spoken Arabic.

Rahaf: so, for you, who is the norm that we should take? In general

Farah: only if we need to take a norm.

Rahaf: but we teach our students to a norm, don't we?

Farah: it depends on the context and the student's needs. At a university level, we should not aim to be like a native speaker, we should aim to have communicative abilities because it is limiting the students by saying you need to speak Arabic like a native speaker, they don't have the experience, the exposure to the language, they don't have the million hours of teaching to learn like a native speaker, so I don't think we need a norm

Rahaf: you previously talked about the educated spoken Arabic

Farah: as a variety but not as a goal for the learners, I think the learners as long as they have a communicative ability, it doesn't matter which variety.

Rahaf: so, as a variety not as a norm.

Farah: yes, you don't need to set only one norm

Rahaf: if you want to design a proficiency scale, don't we need a norm?

Farah: well, it is all Arabic, in this context I'm a true believer that it is all Arabic. in a proficiency test, we can't stick to either or, either standard Arabic or either spoken Arabic... all varieties are appreciated, we need to have tolerance and acceptance and we do this in our exams.

Rahaf: so, you would say that the native ... maybe if you were to design a proficiency test or if you were to set a proficiency scale, you would say that you would take not as a norm because you don't support this idea but you would take the language of the educated native speaker as a goal for learner?

Farah: no, I would take it as a solution, as a middle, like in the middle between all Arabic varieties for the sake of teaching and pedagogy, I love the idea of the educated spoken Arabic because it is in the middle, you can link it to everything, it is a very useful teaching tool. However, when it comes to proficiency and what the students can say, that's a different story because I'm happy with the students speaking in Arabic whatever variety they can so I wouldn't punish them for the variety they chose

Rahaf: how about when you test them?

Farah: that's a different skill that's why in speaking, the student should be 100% free, to speak whatever variety as a production, we call it a productive skill. However, when it comes to comprehension, ideally they would be able to understand both, spoken and standard Arabic, ideally. However, they might have different levels of understanding so they might understand the news in full but then they go to a street and they have like ... people in a free chat, they're like mm they might not understand but that's not only in Arabic, in every language. in Arabic, the gap is bigger between the standard and spoken but it is a phenomenon in almost every language.

The word native speaker is a selling point; it is marketing in the field of language teaching. However, like if you ask me as an educator it doesn't really matter. There are a lot of studies

and research and articles about international English for example, and that's more awareness of language as a life thing, it is not as a restrictive ...

Rahaf: but this applies to English

Farah: also for Arabic

Rahaf: does it?

Farah: well sometimes I feel I do teach my students to be like an Arabic speaker because you need someone to imitate

Rahaf: exactly, that's what I'm talking about

Farah: so I teach my students how to hesitate in Arabic like a native speaker, like we use the word *yani*, *yani* so instead of the student ... like if they need a few seconds to colloquial ect their ideas in their brain I do teach them use the word *yani*, and then they will look like a native speaker of Arabic, but not because it is just ideal because it is just listener friendly, the listener to them will be like *aah* ... natural so in this field it is ok to consider the norm as a native speaker but it won't be like a learning goal to sound like a native speaker.

Rahaf: yeah, *tamam*. So, what are the competences that should be measured in order to successfully reflect learners' communicative skills? Let's say I want to design a proficiency test and I want to test my students on some different knowledge, *yani* linguistic knowledge for example, cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic knowledge, and strategic knowledge. So, what kind of competences do you think are essential to be considered in measuring students' communicative abilities?

Farah: I think this question is also very general, it depends on the context, you can't design a test .. which level?

Rahaf: just to clarify this, the context, we're talking about the UK university learners who want to study Arabic as a module, or for a career, and when I say a proficiency test I mean something similar to the IELTS or TOEFL in English

Farah: well, I'm not a big fan of those tests, I'm a linguist, and I don't think these tests do the learners justice. We do these tests just to have a form of certificate but as a learner of English myself, I don't think it is practical to measure the student's ability in the proficiency within a long extended exam when the students get very nervous and they have to write like a million words and to answer a thousand grammar examples. I'm personally not a big fan of testing and standardized exams

Rahaf: so, we don't need such tests in Arabic?

Farah: yeah but just I'm telling you where I come from.

Rahaf: it is fine; I'm just trying to get what I really want from you

Farah: I think exams and tests are essential part of teaching and learning. However, they're not ideal for the language at universities and I do assessment for university students. I would say Arabic is like any other language in terms of assessment I always have a tolerant approach to the varieties issues that we talked about but other than this it is like when I test people in English, there is no difference, we need to see reading for jest, reading for details, listening for

jest, listening for details, grammar and writing and if we were in a very modern institute we will also test speaking, some institutes don't test speaking,

Rahaf: let's say, you're designing a test for your diplomats and you want to test them on their ability to communicate within the context they're going to deal with, would you testing them on their communicative abilities or linguistic abilities, or interactional abilities yani the ability to deliver and negotiate?

Farah: both both, so when we do the exams and when we grade it we see if the student is aware of turn taking in a conversation, this aspect has nothing to do with spoken or standard Arabic. However, a proficient user of the language would know when to take turn in the conversation. They would be able to ask for repetition when they don't understand, they will ask for more details so those skills are not about the language knowledge or grammar knowledge. It is about communicative abilities.

Rahaf: that's what I'm asking about... back to the varieties I know you don't support the idea of separating them, you talk about the language as a spectrum but let's say I'm interested in knowing more about how do you look at a dialectical knowledge the ability to speak and understand the dialect and do you consider it like a part of a proficient user of Arabic, again

Farah: yes it is a plus, like I don't have prejudice or discrimination to whatever the learner choose to learn. However, the awareness of different varieties is a plus, it is an added thing so if the student knows that in Standard Arabic we say laysa and in spoken Arabic we say mish that's an additional thing, it is an extra knowledge of the language, I wouldn't judge like take points from their grade if they were not proficient in both. But a person who now when to say laysa and when to say mish they had a more advanced ability in the language.

Rahaf: tamam, I'll ask you more in the final question- in the most recent research early 2015 a writer indicated that the knowledge of the Levantine variety of Arabic can guarantee a successful communication with different native speakers speaking different spoken forms of Arabic, what do you think?

Farah: well, generalization about Arabic speakers! No matter which country the person comes from, if you ask them which language is the closest to fusha they would say ours. I think it is more a bias to the person's background and the Levantine has the advantage that it is less influenced by other languages so if you say like Moroccan Arabic it is always an example of the influence of French and Spanish and other regional varieties. However, in the Levant area this is less, but if you go to Lebanon, it is all English and French so I don't know about this. The other factor is that people sometimes like Egyptian Arabic because of the media they're dominant in the Arab world. However, recently the Syrian soap opera were very famous so it depends I wouldn't suggest one variety as a linguist, as a Syrian of course the Syrian variety is the best

Rahaf: have you ever seen a proficiency test in Arabic?

Farah: what do you mean by a proficiency test?

Rahaf: something like the IELTS and TOEFL

Farah: I have like the C1 and C2 that I talked about, the university examination that we do but I don't think we call it a proficiency test

Rahaf: how sufficient is the knowledge of one spoken Arabic for successful communication?

Farah: well, it depends on the method of communication, I think for written communication you need MSA for successful... For speaking either one it doesn't matter, for speaking it doesn't matter for writing you could communicate in spoken Arabic in written but it is harder for the non-native speaker because unfortunately the Arabic alphabet doesn't reflect all the sounds that

you have in the spoken varieties and then you have the Arabic language written in English alphabet and I'm sure you have seen this. We use two for hamza and so on. For me this is a successful communication, the people are able to communicate their ideas, however it is much harder for a learner of a language to master communicating in Arabic though English alphabet. I hope that one day we will have a written variety that reflects or represents spoken Arabic. When we come to this stage I will be one of the people who advocate more focus on spoken Arabic, but until we reach that stage I am more of learning MSA first and then spoken.

Rahaf: I just want to talk a little bit about the test's tasks. Do you think the test should be based on assessing how learners perform in authentic real-life situations? Yani all the tasks should be authentic?

Farah: of course, well not all of them. You see like tests have two main functions; one is assessing the student's learning, have they learned what we really want them to learn, the second one is the performance so in the exam we give the students they have to give a presentation which is a real-life task because sometimes you present. They have to ask questions; we call it social interaction. So yeah that's an essential part to incorporate in the exam. But also you need the traditional questions in the exam where they reflect how much knowledge they know about the language usage and about the grammar so both.

Rahaf: ok, yeah. And do you think the dialect should be assessed?

Farah: it depends on the purpose of the learning

Rahaf: in a general proficiency test

Farah: one variety is enough. If it is a dialect, it is a dialect, MSA then MSA. So, one of them

Rahaf: in the four skills?

Farah: you don't have enough material written in spoken Arabic in dialect. If the learner is aiming to perform all that tasks that he is going to use the language in in spoken Arabic, then this is a unique, less common case and you would need to if you're only evaluating a person's communicative ability in spoken Arabic, you will need to write an exam in spoken Arabic only. If you're talking about a very general exam, my idea would be speaking whatever variety; the rest of the exam would be standard Arabic. If you're talking about very specific context based exam, you will have all the questions depending on the language variety that the student is learning. So, if I am training a spy (I don't train spies) to go and perform in the Arab world I would need to give them all the examples, all the questions in spoken Arabic, because this is the only language I care about ... If I am teaching a humanitarian worker who is going to work with the deprived or with the refugees, why would I need to test them in their standard Arabic when their use of the language is going to be all spoken. If they have like the privilege of determining which context the learning is going to use it, then that would be ideal, or probably have two varieties of the test.

Rahaf: back to the context, UK context and the context of university students. would you set a proficiency test that measures MSA and a dialect? Or separately? Or together? Or one of them only?

Farah: that will go back to what I was talking about as a general test, when you give tolerance to whatever variety and the rest of the exam should be in standard Arabic.

Rahaf: how about the cultural element of the language? Would you assess it? Would you test it?

Farah: awareness of the culture is important to know if you're considering the language in a practical way of thinking, I don't think we're, our examination board in English, in Arabic or even in Turkish... It is hard to test the practical usage of the language and how it affects the

culture. However, for example if you're talking to your friend which statement would you use and then put options like your highness, your majesty, or hey you... That's an important aspect of the language. I am not sure how practical it is to include it in a proficiency exam.

Rahaf: so, you're saying it should be taught but not necessarily assessed?

Farah: it is tricky to which extent you can assess it. The basic ones yes, then you get trapped in the details,

Another example is a love story between two cousins, for people in the UK it is almost like impossible to have a marriage between one person and their immediate cousin, but in Arabic that's a very common thing. So, things like this like cultural social are like important aspects of learning the language but the challenging question is how to assess this which I don't have an answer for it. I'll leave it for you to find the answers.

Rahaf: speaking about you being in my position and you want to design a proficiency test, a general proficiency test. Say that you belong to an institution and this institution is operating in the UK and asking you to do a proficiency test in Arabic for people who finished their university studies and they want to start a career in Arabic, they want to go to one of the Arab countries live there for any reason, be a journalist for example, and you were asked to set a proficiency test for those people. What do you; just give me a little idea about the skills you would assess, which varieties and what kind of test tasks you would include?

Farah: if I may just add one thing to the previous question before we jump to this. One aspect for the culture and language is the use of terminology and idioms, so in Arabic everything is *ala rasi* on my head, or *mn ayni* from my eyes, which doesn't have the same meaning in English. If you, translate it literary translation. So, if I want to play like a tricky, I could include a few examples of idioms and terminologies and ask the students in which context do you use this? So, this is sort of incorporate the language as like meaning and as a context how it is used like not as a literary meaning of an expression.

So, using contextualized use of the language, so the word doesn't mean exactly this but when you put it in a context it means something else, but again that's not only in Arabic that's in all languages.

All right! To go back to the test question, I told you I have some issues with examinations in general, however to be practical we sometimes we need a one general assessment for all purposes; further studies for jobs, or for anything. Ideally I would love to have like two types of exams if we can, one is completely about like which variety you want, if the student is only... if the person has spent like 4 years learning spoken Arabic, I would love that they have an exam that only assesses them in their spoken Arabic whether written, grammar, usage, expressions, everything. But if we don't have the privilege to design more than one exam, then one exam will be as I mentioned earlier, speaking whatever variety the learner is confident in so I wouldn't penalize them according to what they speak. However, listening comprehension should be either MSA or educated spoken Arabic, and reading and writing would be in Standard Arabic, that's if I have to make a decision, to make a choice, what's the last.

Rahaf: do you agree with the vision of having a proficiency test within assessing or that assesses MSA in reading and writing and MSA in speaking and listening and then spoken form of Arabic in listening and speaking?

Farah: no, I don't because this is adding more restrictions on the concept of proficiency. We can't require all learners to have spoken and standard Arabic, that's the ideal level of learning Arabic, is to have both varieties. However, as a language learner people should have the choice, which one they want to speak and you have to be practical as a linguist and as an educator because even as a native speaker of Arabic it is so hard to speak in standard Arabic. like myself when I started to teach Arabic at a university, I am educated, I have a huge knowledge about



Arabic grammar from my background and my life in Syria. However, when I was required to speak standard Arabic, it was a nightmare, it was challenging, it was an artificial way of speaking, and I am the native speaker of Arabic, there is no way I would require a learner to be proficient in both spoken Arabic and standard Arabic. I think it should be sufficient if they have one or the other

Rahaf: in terms of speaking and listening you're saying yeah?

Farah: in everything .. that's why I told you it is ideal if you have two exams, if you have only one exam then it should be standard and a choice of speaking,

Rahaf: would you say that a proficient user of Arabic one variety, the one he chooses, but you still consider him a proficient user if he doesn't know MSA at all

Farah: there is a huge difference between knowing MSA when you see it written on paper and requiring someone to speak MSA.

Rahaf: that's why I am asking

Farah: I don't advocate requiring people to speak MSA whatever they want to speak that's fine. However, for the knowledge on paper it is great if we have the advantage to design two exams for two sets of learners. If not, MSA is the formal way of writing, so a student is taking an assessment in Arabic grammar it should be the grammar of standard Arabic.

Rahaf: would you assess the students in grammar? Yani would you have a section for a structure?

Farah: yes, you would. Again, ideally two exams would be perfect, if you have to do one exam you would need the standard Arabic because the point is any learner of Arabic is more likely to see Arabic written in standard Arabic so when you do an exam for written Arabic, you use standard, that's like I think this is like a middle ground between the reality of the Arabic usage in different countries and the language varieties. So, I would ask the students to choose or write the right tense of the verb for example ...

Rahaf: so, if you have like productive skills, and receptive .in the productive skills we have speaking and writing; so you're saying speaking would be in any variety, writing?

Farah: writing is a tricky one because most people they don't need to write in Arabic. I'd say depends again, I'd hate to be in a position to decide but it is standard with some tolerance to spoken variety

Rahaf: receptive is listening and reading

Farah: for listening MSA or the educated spoken Arabic, reading MSA because most Arabic texts are in MSA

Rahaf: the very last question. I heard that some people are advocating the idea of having, in a proficiency test, a reading text in both MSA and one spoken form

Farah: I'd say I'm open minded to have either or, but in both it's a ridiculous idea. Again, it goes back to who we are testing, and why we are testing and why this person is learning the language. So, reading it is not very common to see written texts in spoken Arabic, so you can't penalize a learner for not being able to learn how to read spoken Arabic, it is not written so that's why an exam should reflect the reality. However, if you have an exam for a student who only knows spoken Arabic, then it is fair enough to test him in an exam that's all based on Spoken Arabic. so, the situation of Arabic requires more than one standard exam. Are we in a situation where we have more than one proficiency exam or is it one exam? It depends.

Rahaf: you talked about the real situation of reading in Arabic. is it real that we find the spoken form written apart from social media?

Farah: no but social media is a part of our life as well. There is some literary work, like there is this book called “banat alriyad” and I loved it. One of the reasons I loved the book, it was written in spoken Arabic and spoken Arabic for people who have influence of English in there. So, that was as a literary production I enjoyed it. However, it was spoken Arabic in a written form.

Rahaf: there is a poet in Egypt, I don't remember his name

Farah: I told you, ideally you would have more than one exam, but if not the evaluation... I mean you can't say that this person has 70% out of a hundred without saying which one. So, in Arabic, you can't say both MSA and dialect to use the same terminology that you use, you can't do it both as a requirement. It should be more flexible in testing so one is enough.

Rahaf: would you like to add anything?

Farah: I spoke a lot. It is a tricky situation when it comes to exams, and all the best

Rahaf: thanks so much, I appreciate that.

## **Iman**

Rahaf: can you tell me a bit about yourself, your background? Where have you been trained as an Arabic teacher? And since when you have been working here?

Iman: me as a teacher started with having no ambition of being a teacher at all, at the beginning. But I studied science and I started teaching when I was doing my degree, teaching French and then my first job was actually at a primary school, teaching Arabic and Islamic studies and then I moved, from, when I was at that school I thought at other institutes because I had a qualification in Tajweed of the Quran and then moved and started looking for a qualification, I liked to have a qualification in teaching Arabic and then someone recommended the course here at SOAS so I came and did the course in 2008 and then got a job the year after here so I started working here as a teacher.

Rahaf: cool! So, it has been since 2008, which is 7 years, and you started as a teacher right?

Iman: yes, I started as a teacher

Rahaf: how many years have you taught?

Iman: I started as a teacher till 2012 when a job of a coordinator was advertised and I applied for it and got it

Rahaf: who are your students now at the language centre?

Iman: there are varieties of students in the centre, there are students who are doing MAs or PhDs, sometimes Arabic is a requirement for their study or research and sometimes people who are doing different things but they would like to work in the Middle East seeking other job opportunities. There are also students who learn the language for personal interest and some people learn Arabic for completely different reasons, like we have native speakers of Arabic, so the native speakers of Arabic which means students of Arabic backgrounds and have not studied Arabic officially or deeply and don't have, or they learned but they didn't reach the level they require.

Rahaf: so those students speak a dialect but they're not able to read and write?

Iman: yes, there are so different, some people's dialect is ok, some people's dialect is also broken, some people only have a little bit, we also have the heritage learners of written Arabic, they just can read the script, so we're talking about the Asians and Muslims, so those are a big selection of people who study Arabic

Rahaf: which ones do you teach if you're teaching now?

Iman: I'm teaching the diploma in communicative Arabic, which is an intensive whole yearlong course, and this course brings high calibre students, students who can cooperate their study of Arabic for one year in an intensive way. They, we select them by interviews; so we make sure that they are high in linguistics you can say, because not all students are good in grammar for example, which makes it very difficult and I mean grammar in their own language, in English language so if you have a student who doesn't differentiate between a noun and a verb simply because he didn't study, he doesn't know the active participle and .. so he will find it very difficult to .. Much more difficult, I'm not saying it is very difficult but it takes longer time to explain the grammar, so I'm very happy to pick up somebody who studied Latin for example, makes it very easy but some people pick up language from listening which is quite easy as well.

Rahaf: and what do you expect from those students after they finish the diploma?

Iman: some students reach the level of upper intermediate, like for example, they are able to speak a variety of topics, and they're able to write also about different topics, expressing their opinion, researching as well in those topics so they're able, they have more access to language which is newspaper, or books or internet so their language expands quite, it is able to expanding, so they are able to go to the level where they're able to continue the listening; self-learn or do class learning. So, one year is not enough but it gives them that very solid base.

Rahaf: and then do you teach them MSA only? Fusha?

Iman: no we teach them fusha and the colloquial

Rahaf: which one?

Iman: we chose to teach Egyptian colloquial simply because it is understood by my most Arab countries so it gives them a little bit more of confidence of using it and people would understand it and other people, and you know when other people when they want to, at meeting point with other Arabs they use Egyptian colloquial.

Rahaf: yeah and when they, I mean the focus is given more to fusha or to the colloquial?

Iman: to fusha

Rahaf: can you tell me how many hours?

Iman: they do study fusha, 15 hours a week, that's the course, so they do 15 hours contact hours and 15 hours self-study

Rahaf: woow that's very nice

Iman: so, 30 hours a week that's what they do. So out of the 15 contact hours, they are, they have to study Arabic, they do 12 hours of modern standard and only 3 hours a week of the colloquial.

Rahaf: and after they finish, they can speak the Egyptian colloquial fluently?

Iman: because what happens they get to the level of conversation, of alhiwar, if you can see alhiwar that happens with intellectual people, they will have a hiwar using modern standard language in Ammiyyah , so the vocabulary is usually taken from Ammiyyah, from fusha sorry so everything is used, so that integration helps them expand the colloquial that they studied 3 hours a week quite well. So, I will tell you an example, last week we were doing a colloquial scenario about going to a hafla, party and that's something where you use a colloquial, so they will have a discussion about the elections trying to pretend to be those important people who are asking each other what are you going to do, who are you going to elect? Because of the election that was happening.. yeah ... so, they were using and because in the term, 3 days they study media Arabic so everything is borrowed and back warded

Rahaf: this is very interesting to be honest because a lot of people argue now which one do we have to teach and should we go to the highest level of teaching the colloquial or not? But this is very interesting, you're saying when you come to the highest level even if you were speaking colloquial, you don't need the colloquial 100% you borrow from fusha

Iman: yes, you borrow and you know when to switch between the two

Rahaf: that's interesting, now to the more technical question, no before the technical question, you said you set a test for them. Can you tell me about this test?

Iman: ok, the test, first of all, when to choose the students we choose them they are totally beginners, so they have never seen Arabic don't know what the letters look like so when they're coming you tell them we start from the right and this is.. so we have total beginners completely and those come for the interview specifically we emphasize the intensity, you know how intensive the course is, we explain to them the structure of the course so they know they will have to be in a full time education fully immerse them to the course so that's the main reason we do interview them , what are they working, how did you study before how did you cope, you know like when as if you're gonna interview somebody for a job, and then we sort of see, we ask them to write a personal statement, from the personal statement we get a rough idea of how they were they involved with the language, have they had any contact with the language, whether it is just spoken or they heard it, the culture, so lots of things you put together to be able when you see them, you understand whether they will be a good candidate for your course. The second thing we do and then also you test their knowledge of the course, the subject they will be doing, so the topics you will be covering for example, I had an example with a student, he is a good student, he is an intelligent student but he hates media, he couldn't cope with doing media Arabic, he had no historical knowledge or no media knowledge so his involvement in using that media knowledge of Arabic was very poor was very difficult, he hated the topic so I am interested in people who are able to communicate and discuss any topic, a lot of topics you can read in a book, they love reading, they like to, they know a lot of authors, they know what's happening in here in the middle east so that kind of thing is very important.

If we have students who have done Arabic before, those again sometimes they don't feel, we can take people from term 2 for example, they join us half way, so those are very difficult those have to go do a test, number one because we start teaching the colloquial from term 1 so if they have no colloquial from the beginning it will be so difficult to bring them back in, so that's a key. Most of them come with fusha or you have, I had everything I think. I had people who came with fusha and they didn't have ammiyyah and then I will direct them to go study ammiyyah separately then come to term 2 after passing the test. Then there are people who are native speakers they know ammiyyah but fusha is very weak, and again if they don't pass the fusha test they can't continue.

Rahaf: how about the exam, is it a written or ...?

Iman:so you test all the skills, the exam would have the written part the grammar part, reading comprehension part and listening part, listening comprehension questions involving Ammiyyah

and fusha, so they listen to a scenario in Ammiyyah and answer questions and then they listen to a scenario or a news audio and then answer the questions, and there is an oral test, exam. The oral exam involves again a presentation, general questions and involves a colloquial scenario, discussion, they will be given, usually given the topic just 15 minutes before the exam, they sit and prepare what they can come up with

Rahaf: brain storming yeah

Iman: and then they will also come up with, so yes I will give them the scenario that they will be discussing in the colloquial. So, that's usually the style of the exam which is they're used to, they've been doing tests with similar style so it is not a new style in writing the exam, that's for students who already have been with us. But students who will be coming in, you sort of more flexible, you need to make sure which scenarios they are used to, so you sort of choose the topics quite carefully.

Rahaf: now, to the technical question, what do you understand by language proficiency and when it comes to Arabic? you do have a course called proficiency right?

Iman: proficiency Arabic yeah

Rahaf: maybe you can just reflect on that course and tell me about your understanding of language proficiency.

Iman: for example, we assess students so join proficiency Arabic, now here we have now, this proficiency we have now that people who have been here for 12 years almost

Rahaf: students?

Iman: yes, they have been here, they're babies. So, they have been here for a long time but obviously the people keep going in and out of the course for different reasons, and then we assess people to go and enter that course. The course started from beginners and then continued until the proficiency class. We finished the advanced, advanced 2, advanced 3, proficiency 1, proficiency 2 and then what did we do; proficiency continuous. So, there was no limit. Now when I assess somebody to go there, they have to be like you're speaking to an Arab person; speaking to an Arab muthaqqaf (educated); someone who is able to speak to you about different topics, understand if you're listening to music and discuss it. Or if you ask them about the current situation, about their family; anything, really, you can open any kind of topics, discussion and discuss it. They might not know the details of grammar; that's not the issue, and that is what the proficiency does.

Rahaf: when do you say this learner of Arabic, regardless of their background is a proficient user of Arabic?

Iman: when there is, now we said proficiency, when say for example, when somebody, I'll give you an example, maybe makes it more easy. I have a friend who is who can probably translate a text, a very difficult text, classical text better than me you know she is from an Indian background

Rahaf: from Arabic to English you mean?

Iman: from Arabic to English, but she cannot speak, so there is no speaking, if someone reads her translation they would say very competent, yeah

Rahaf: she can't speak fusha or a dialect you mean?

Iman: neither, she can't, she has no confidence in speaking so the minute, she has never had that practice and for me, competency comes (Alkafaaa altawasuliyya), alkafaa alkitabiyah, tamam? So alkafaaa is different, competency is in what? So, for me the competency has to be in tawasul, it is more important than in reading or writing.

Rahaf: and when you say tawasul is it the ability to speak? Communication? the ability to speak in one variety or in both varieties?

Iman: in fusha and Ammiyyah, because that's the reality

Rahaf: I see.

Iman: we don't want to be blind looking at the language

Rahaf: so you don't consider her a proficient user of Arabic?

Iman: no

Rahaf: and do you have an example of a proficient user of Arabic

Iman: a proficient user of Arabic is any Arab, indama natakalim an almuthaqqafees; I think that is a proficient user of Arabic. Why? like the educated Arab so I maybe pick up a text that I don't understand because Allugha is different, mumken tkoon feeha falsafa, yani I recognise the style is different so I know if I want to understand it I need to go to a different stage to get to that level or I am able to search or I am able to acquire more knowledge in that thing so in that level in that language, in that first language, so the language itself is not a barrier for me to learn to continue learning in that language. This is how I see it because if I go for example, I do speak French as a second language but or if I go if you tell me I'll send you to France to study I will say I will think again because I'm not a proficient speaker of French because I probably will need to have some academic French and probably study French a little bit more until I think yeah woow I can understand and recognize a scientific word and put things in place

Rahaf: now you talked a bit about this, what do you understand by communication, and what's the relationship between proficiency and communication? Linguistically speaking

Iman: linguistic communication is as we were saying, people study now everybody is looking for communicative language learning so they want to learn the language for communicative uses which is actually what they were trying to do all these years. Everybody was learning the language because they want to communicate in the language and then the latest **communicative** approach was successful approach because it manages to get people to do two things, to achieve accuracy and fluency at the same time so I'm accurate and I'm fluent, so I can balance between the two while I'm learning, so I'm learning to communicate I make mistakes, I check why, I communicate and I'm doing both at the same time. While when you study for accuracy only which is most of the universities do now, a lot of students learn Arabic for accuracy mainly for accuracy, speaking as a communication is very small part of the course. And obviously they reach a high level, like this fried that I'm talking about, a high level of Arabic language in reading and writing but not in speaking at all. So they're not communicating, if they listen to somebody they sort of understand what they said but it depends on the speed, they don't understand the colloquial at all, so those are difficult for me I think the communicative approach or learning Arabic for communicative reasons is what everybody is looking for, it is what working force is missing so the teaching is missing, the training in teaching communicatively is also missing so I can understand it but how I can do it? It is a very big challenge because I can't teach grammar communicatively, how do you teach grammar communicatively? It is very difficult and because we all learned grammar on the board, we still do it on the board, maybe that's the way if understanding it but I can't see the function of the language, the use of the language is more important than breaking it down, we never learned it as native speakers to use it.

Rahaf: and how do you understand the relationship between communication and proficiency?

Iman: can you break the question down

Rahaf: yes sure! The friend you talked about, you said she's able to analyse a reading text very well and to do even translation but she's not able to communicate within the language, that's why you said I don't consider her a proficient user of Arabic. so, that's what I'm talking about. So do you think a proficient user of Arabic is a successful communicator? Or vice versa?

Iman: no, neither. A proficient person is not necessarily,, I don't think it is defined well yet,. If someone can communicate, it is not necessarily proficient in other skills, so the skills go together and this is where we go back to the communicative approach of teaching, we try to put all skills together, the four skills together, you can't let students to be very good, when you see a piece of writing from a student and then you give him 70 out of a 100 in there and then when you give him a listening test he gets 30, this doesn't make sense.

Rahaf: speaking about the speaking skill in Arabic, what if someone speaks fusha very well but doesn't speak ammiyyah, do you think he is still a proficient user of Arabic?

Iman: no

Rahaf: any reason for that

Rahaf: yes because once you put a person in the real world where Arabic is spoken, there is a fact that they come back unhappy, they say ok what I was speaking people didn't understand, what I was hearing I didn't understand so where is the communication? There is no tawasul

Rahaf: now what do you understand by a communicative proficiency test? Do you think a proficiency test should be communicative? yani containing communicative tasks? If yes why and why not and how so you see it?

Iman: for the same reasons, a proficiency test must have all the skills and all skills must have particular percentage to get you to the proficiency level. So you're going from testing speaking, speaking should involve the dialect, depending which dialect the students are comfortable with, it doesn't matter, make people select the dialect they want to be tested on and then you test fusha as well, listening and speaking, listening also does the same thing, and then the variety of Arabic as well, the context, the topics you're talking about, there is media Arabic, there is the Arabic fusha that we hear in different conversations, and there is fusha that we don't hear at all, there is fusha that's not actually there are lots of scenarios we hear, like we hear the cartoons for example. The language of the cartons the way they speak is not realistic like that's not how people speak in streets, it I away of teaching children I understand but that's a kind of fusha that's not spoken, that's not used. So, this kind of conversation, this test that you're going to have must follow, have all the skills tested separately and you're testing almost the, a variety of topics across the skills. When we do the diploma, that's based on what we do, however when I test, I make sure that I test then in listening to this and test them in writing this but I test them in speaking this and I test them in comprehending this, so I try to have loads of things that show across how many things they can do , they're able to do in different topics, I dot test them speaking about a writer and let them read about the writer and let them listen about the writer, I'm not testing variety

Rahaf: and the task, should it be communicative?

Iman: yeah the task should be communicative. So the test must be communicative and like the speaking should not be only saying something, should be communicative

Rahaf: would you have a listening task where you have fusha and Ammiyyah together?

Iman: yes fusha and Ammiyyah together, as we said as you're raising the level you start mixing, it naturally happens

Rahaf: would you expect a proficiency test to be a single test or a multilevel test?

Iman: I think we have to go for a multilevel test

Rahaf: in an oral proficiency test, what 's the best way to measure the learners' communicative ability? Would you do it in one to one interview? or would you do it within a group or would you do both?

Iman: ok, I'll give it to you from an example of the teaching that we have. When you test students on their ability, there is a one to one test in conversation and then there is a test in front of the students, on his own so that the student present in front of the students and receive questions, and that in a way you give him chance to prepare and research and everything, and then you put him in the spot. This test is not to the student only it is for the rest as well, it is how much they understood so you're actually pushing him to make himself eloquent and understood in terms of how he speaks, the word he chose, you want to make sure he is not recycling language he's been learning and he is aware of how much vocabulary he is giving to the class and then he receives questions from the peers, that's for me a test. First he is confident to speak in front of everybody and then I test his understanding of the questions and then test other students how much they understood from his presentation and then test his reply. So, that is one thing, and also within the class they also have a group conversation...

Rahaf: you know when we teach our students we aim for a level of nativeness, so we want them to be like a native speaker or to reach a level of let's say a variety that we use might be the educated or the well-educated form of Arabic. now speaking about the native speaker as a model as a norm that we aim at when we teach our non-native students. whom do you think to be taken as a norm of proficiency?

Iman: I have never seen a learner who when they speak you don't pick up pronunciation problems, so I think the pronunciation is an issue, where I can say that is it; you're a native speaker, you're really just like I can't tell you're a learner of Arabic. I haven't seen this, never. I always, I could pick somebody who is a learner of Arabic. Yes, it might be perfect, but the accent. You know like when you speak English, but you might find a learner of English who manages to cope completely. In Arabic, not yet, it didn't happen yet. I don't know to my knowledge, I'm not sure if it is, but to my knowledge I've never seen somebody who manages to get the dialect right. I might move speaking Egyptian or speaking another dialect and I see if someone who is from the country, you can tell I'm not his region speaker. But the language we aim our students to learn is *lugat ?lmuṭaqqafīn* (=language of the educated). I don't think the highly educated works; it depends on their level of education. The highly educated might have a lot of knowledge, but you should see this, you see this when people try to write, they push their writing to a high level but they haven't got the language to use it yet. They try to use the sophisticated language while you would try to teach them like a baby, write like short sentences then make them long. How do I say this? Not yet, we can't give you that kind of sentence, that structure yet. We've got to build it slowly. Because their intellectual level or their high education level doesn't let them start from step 1, it is quite difficult, but they do get there, but you can tell, their creativity in writing shows their education background. It shows who is creative, who can think about different styles; put the styles together as he is going, who is thinking you know about, making up ideas or expressing their opinions in their writing, as well in spoken language. I think if we're looking at any educated person, it is not the level you're trying to push them to.

Rahaf: can you describe this educated native speaker?



Iman: the educated native speaker is like the teacher that teaches the people who are studying anywhere, so whoever gets to a degree level, that's an educated native speaker in my opinion, I probably find people who never been to university but they're still educated native speaker, it is not necessarily, it depends on what they have been doing in life".

Rahaf: do you think a proficiency test should be based on assessing how learners perform in authentic real-life situations? Or you can make up tasks?

Iman: when we teach students here in London we don't have the opportunity to make them you know see the real world but we do create the tasks to make them feel that way, we start to make them watching films, real films and we put the TV on. We also took them once we took them to a mosque to listen to khutbat aljuma, so this is also, they felt happy listening to the khutba, because they heard the khutba in Arabic and then they heard it in English so that made them feel very satisfied with their understanding even though it was a different context, we never give them khutba in class but it was a test it was nice to see them trying to understand.

Rahaf: if you were to set a proficiency test, what are the competences that you would measure, I mean not only the linguistic competences in the four skills, yani not only the linguistic knowledge of the student, maybe how much knowledge does he have about culture for example, how much knowledge does he have about the way he interacts with native speakers, the way he uses the language with native speakers. Would you consider these competences essential in a generalized proficiency test?

Iman: the culture maybe through topics but not necessarily through a cultural test separately. But I won't judge competency for ... I lost the point you said

Rahaf: I said the cultural, or the way they interact with people or what they can do rather than how they do it

Iman: yeah what they do and how they do it, like the communicative skills it is important to understand the tone for example you need to make sure that the tone is understood. And that's part, one of the criteria of your speaking test, they should actually interact well with you, they should show they're happy or they're not happy, they should make you this is one of the social skills as well for example we have an issue here in the language centre you see how people interact with the Chinese or Japanese they're different, culturally there might be some cultural clashes because of the way they say thank you and how we say thank you and how the others say thank you, do you understand? So those things are important and they pick them up from a good teacher, so one of the criteria of your test should be this kind of things.

Rahaf: given the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic, many dialects and one written form, do you think the knowledge of the dialect influences your understanding of Arabic proficiency?

Iman: yes of course it does, knowing a dialect helps even **understanding** the cultural background of the country or the language itself, how it was influenced historically by different issues.

Rahaf: do you have any experience of assessing a dialect?

Iman: yes, I have assessed a dialect before

Rahaf: which one?

Iman: I've assessed Egyptian, I have assessed Levantine, I'm not experienced in Levantine but I have assessed it so I assessed many people in different dialects but I also assessed a Tunisian,

and it is so tough and I assessed her to go to the native speaker class and the dialect was very different for her to see the relationship with fusha

Rahaf: do you think the knowledge of one dialect is enough for successful communication  
Iman: well, this comes back to why I chose to teach our students the Egyptian colloquial because I thought it is helpful, it is useful however it is not enough. I think I give it for someone who speaks one dialect to listen to another dialect. It doesn't take so long to adapt; you don't have to learn the whole dialect from scratch. It takes you s=only some time to adapt to the new dialect and what code they use to for example hasafeer biddi asafer, bgeet asafer, this doesn't take very long to switch and adapt the ear really to the new dialect

Rahaf: is it enough for you to say this learner is proficient if he speaks fusha and one dialect?

Iman:I think so yeas

Rahaf: do you have any bias towards any dialect to be taught or assessed as a teacher

Iman: no

Rahaf: do you think all dialects are at the same ease?

Iman:no I don't think they're at the same ease, not because of the teaching itself it is because if the available resources, materials because if we look at the Egyptian colloquial it has been taught for years, so there has been so much happening with Egyptian. people have been teaching Egyptian colloquial, creating materials, there is a variety of films

Rahaf: in your perspective, what characteristics that best describe a communicative proficiency test? On which criteria, do you say this test is communicative and this is not?

Iman: based on the criteria of testing all skills, the criteria of being graduate in the test itself it gives you to say which level the student is then it gets hard and then it gets hard, challenging enough to know who can push the level but I think mainly which covers all the skills and a variety of topics

Rahaf: you said the cultural element is essential, right? Is it essential in determining the level of proficiency as well?

Iman: it can be an important element and that goes back to the topics maybe one can have the knowledge of the topic culturally and then it is failing somewhere within the proficiency test itself so when I say a variety of topics, that can be a variety of topics including the culture, so I can be giving a reading comprehension about eid aladha so that will tell you whether the student are aware of the cultural aspect of that. Ill give you an example, very nice example when I gave a student a piece to translate from Arabic to English and I said and it was talking about Ramadan, and in that test it say "wa bad alnas tamam bad aleftar yusalluna almagrib" imagine what translation they had. A good translator who is aware of the culture says they do magrib prayer, and some people say they pray the west, so for me they don't know what magrib is so I tested the culture as understanding the prayers of muslims

Rahaf: good example. My very last question, if you ilham with your experience want to do a proficiency test for the institute. Tell me how do you do it and what do you do?

Iman: I would love to do it but I need so much time and dedication to the project I just want to do some online assessment, this is quite easy and straightforward for me. But what I would love to do is a test that first of all I look and I lay down the whole syllabus, where do we start and where do we move from one level to another so I'm testing which part, am I testing the end of the level, or am I testing throughout the level. When we do an assessment to put somebody in a particular level, we test, we start by testing the end of the level, and then we break it down

slowly or we go up, so we have a place where we start. And in that test, you start by conversation first, see how much the student, I am expecting the student to this level to be able to do reading, to be able to introduce themselves, talk about what they do, talk about the family. So, you start asking them several questions, they don't feel I'm actually testing them yet, but I'm testing. I'd say you know kif halak, kif aljaw alyum something like that, to be able to... as soon as they say ahh, I slow down, I go back to ma ismak, and then I slowly break it down. When you have someone, who is proficient, you may ask them do you have any interest? Ma ihtimamatak fee al-Hayat? What do you do and then you go a little bit deep in the conversation and see how much they can tell you about their interest, what they love to do in their spare time, if they have more time what would they do so I'm testing the use of the conditional for example, law kana endaka waqt akthar matha tafaal, tab law kana endaka fulus? What would you do? Would you buy this university? I'm testing through the conversation the grammatical aspects that I would like them to know before I go to this test. So, that's the speaking. The listening is the same thing, I want the student to be able to understand small conversations, similar to the conversations I'm having, but these listening skills, the listening is usually the hardest and that's when I'm speaking that's also a listening test. And if he is unable to understand me in a fast speed, I slow the speed down but which actually gives me a good idea about what their listening skills is about, and there is no need to have a listening test. But if I was to set it up into one to one to test everybody, so it is going to be a computerized. Nowadays, so you must be thinking about everything without you being there. No teacher, so it should be computerised, am thinking you know, we put a conversation for students to listen to and then also have translation, Arabic to English and English to Arabic, it gives you a good understanding of their translation skills, not only translation skills, but comprehension skills. And then there is also reading comprehension and also you need to be testing their writing.

Rahaf: for speaking and listening, do you think it is better to test how students perform, or how students perform and interact?

Iman: well we said the interaction is the most important part of all of this, it is how can I, for example when I ask the student when I said to you we do a presentation, this is performance, tamam excellent but there is interaction stop and I ask you questions. Can I ask you, for example, you prepared to speak about something but if I stop you in the middle would you be able to continue? Can I divert your speaking? And then you still can continue so that's why I have to test the interactional skills.

Rahaf: tamam, that's all for me, would you like to add anything?

Iman: I wish you all the best. I wish I can see this happening

## APPENDIX 7: LEARNERS' SCRIPTS

### Naya

Rahaf: so, you're a learner of Arabic. You've been learning it for quite some time. So can you tell me a little bit about your purpose of learning Arabic? and for how long have you been learning? And why did you need that?

Naya: well, I come from Russia, and back there in Russia I was studying English and I was always very interested in languages. So, at some point I have achieved this proficiency in English, and then I realised that I need some more languages and I wanted to study a language that is not a European language. so, I just chose Arabic. I wanted to get a degree abroad, so I came to England.

Rahaf: did you start learning Arabic in Russia?

Naya: no only here

Rahaf: for how long have you been learning?

Naya: so, I started in 2011. Last year I went to, last year that's 2013, last academic year I went to Morocco as my year abroad.

Rahaf: so, do you speak now Moroccan Arabic?

Naya: no not really. I never tried to learn Moroccan Arabic, but when I was there, because I thought that I really want to concentrate on Fusha, and we really had a good level of fusha in our school in morocco. So, no I never really tried learning it but I regretted a little bit because eventually after t 6 months of just being there, I just began to understand and learn some words.

Rahaf: so basically, your purpose of learning Arabic is to have a degree and get a job and ...

Naya: yeah but ... I don't know exactly what I want. I'd like to study Arabic linguistics. That's what I'd like ideally. like for example, linguistics, syntax and Moroccan dialect especially, it's very interesting. Ideally, I'd like to work, to stay in the academia later. So, I'd like to work with Arabic but probably ... I don't know exactly. This is the plan, maybe I'll have to work with the language and some other field before I do my PhD, I don't know.

Rahaf: do you think you would think of going to one of the Arab countries, living there or getting a job?

Naya: yeah absolutely. This is what I would like to do when I graduate. I would like to go there and work before I come back and do my masters. While I work there, I want to improve my amiyah as well.

Rahaf: why did you choose morocco?

Naya: I didn't really choose morocco, because at that point, the situation was really difficult. There were very few choices. There was Alexandria in Egypt and Morocco. And I heard a lot that the situation was not very good in Alexandria so I just went to morocco.

Rahaf: in the Arab country, in Morocco, where you learned Arabic, which category of Arabic did you learn? MSA or the dialect?

Naya: I learned MSA

Rahaf: in school?

Naya: yeah

Rahaf: how did you communicate with people? in French?

Naya: no, I communicated with people in Arabic

Rahaf: in fusha you mean?

Naya: it took me a while to actually start communicating with people in fusha because I felt very uncomfortable doing that obviously because, whenever as you can imagine, I don't know how many of your Nayas went to morocco and what kind of experience they had. But basically first six months I wouldn't really communicate, it would always be very awkward although my speaking in classroom was very good. I was already an advanced student.

Rahaf: your speaking in amyiah or fusha?

Naya: in the classroom in fusha was very good, I thought! But whenever I'd go outside, I wouldn't be able to communicate with people so it was always very awkward, I would use gestures and I didn't feel ... well, people just looked, they would, if I started speaking in fusha, they would reply in French. You know this would make me ... I do speak French but why do you assume I would speak French? I'm from Russia, you know, maybe I speak ... that's the only two languages I speak maybe. I speak Russian and Arabic, why do you speak French with me? So of course this would make me really angry sometimes. But at some point I gained this, a bit more confidence, and also I took quite a big trip around Morocco, so I had to communicate with people at some points. They wouldn't speak anything but Arabic or the dialect. So they would understand me and they would try to speak fusha. And eventually I did learn quite a few phrases so I would use them and mix them with fusha, and this is how communication would go basically.

Rahaf: and for the first six months, how did you survive with the daily situations like going sown streets, going to buy your groceries...?

Naya: I don't remember exactly. I think I'd just be quit, point at things, that's what I did.

Rahaf: and after that? After this six -months period? How did you communicate?

Naya: I felt very confident actually in speaking this mixture of fusha and Moroccan Arabic. it was actually fine, because when I came back to England, I did another semester and then I went back to Morocco for Christmas holidays and it was very .. you know I felt very comfortable there... I went to a festival for the first time, and I could speak with people although lots of people in fact speak English, but in Rabat where I stayed nobody spoke English. So, I was very confident about speaking and they would understand me ... I don't know.

Rahaf: what were their reactions when they heard you speaking fusha, while they don't even speak it or know it?

Naya: I think most of people liked the fact that I speak fusha .

Rahaf: that's nice! Because in other countries like in Syria or in Egypt, many students of mine told me when they start speaking in fusha, people laugh first because it was really weird for them. But maybe in morocco because it is a more open-minded country...

Naya: I don't know actually. They would laugh, that is the kind of response that I would get at the beginning so people would laugh at me. But then it all depends on the level of confidence you have because when I started speaking fusha with people, you know I would put a little bit like uhh Salamualaikum so I wouldn't be exactly myself when I spoke. I would be like a character who spoke. So, people would try and just go along with it.

Rahaf: so, it was more like a performance for you than speaking a language!

Naya: yeah exactly

Rahaf: so, you said you spoke with native speakers in fusha basically?

Naya: yeah fusha and some words that I knew in Moroccan. But I would always learn new words in Moroccan especially my last month. I would just say something in fusha and say “kaifa nakoul biddarija?” (how do we say in the dialect?) and they would say this and that. So eventually I just use fusha to learn more darija.

Rahaf: how did you find the relationship between fusha and the Moroccan dialect? Did you think that’s it’s easier to learn fusha and then learn Moroccan?

Naya: yes, definitely.

Rahaf: would you go vice versa?

Naya: no never! It doesn’t make any sense learning darija first and then fusha.

Rahaf: why do you think so?

Naya: I feel it really helps now that I know fusha and I just need to know how to say words differently. It is just that I have the basis and they have a lot of words that come from fusha but mean different things. I don’t remember for example for cloths they have something

Rahaf: kufthan?

Naya: no, it was something like *Ihtijajat* or something. Something like this I don’t remember exactly. Whenever I learned a new word, I thought this makes sense actually I know this word from fusha, and you can make those connections, it was very easy.

Rahaf: was Moroccan close to fusha, as far as you know?

Naya: no not close.

Rahaf: did you feel like learning a new language?

Naya: it was new, but also because I speak French, like I have some level of French. Maybe that’s why it was easier for me. I didn’t feel it was completely a new language. so, some things were new, I felt they get really a dialect.

Rahaf: now from a self-assessment perspective, how do you identify your level of Arabic?

Naya: I identify it as low advanced probably, but in terms of comprehension, for example reading, or listening but not (speaking). I’m not really stable at this point, so sometimes, I speak very well especially if I have spent some time in Morocco and then I come back and I speak very well in the class but then I don’t really speak here all the time so my level goes down very quickly. So low advanced I would say definitely, because I would, well I can open an advanced Arabic book and I can read from it so that probably makes me advanced.

Rahaf: what do you mean by an advanced Arabic book?

Naya: for example, Alkitab advanced

Rahaf: did you try to read media texts?

Naya: yes of course, I do this all the time I try to read Aljazeera

Rahaf: do you find that easy?

Naya: some if it yes, if I know the topic especially. Some of it is not very easy.

Rahaf: why do you think some of the texts are not easy? Do you think it is the topic? Or you're not familiar with the things happening in the Middle East for example? Is it because of the linguistic level?

Naya: I feel it is the structure. I notice that I understand some authors better. There is a section about opinions, so there are some authors that I can understand them better than the others. Sometimes I know the words and I read through and I don't understand the structure. So, the structure sometimes is very difficult especially if it is a very long sentence. So, it just takes time...

Rahaf: you said you're low advanced. that kind of knowledge do you think you lack that makes you low advanced?

Naya: I think I lack the knowledge of amiyah because even when I'm more comfortable in Morocco, when I listen to some other like Egyptian for example, Egyptian Arabic, no I don't quite understand this. So, I think I need that because whenever I watch a video on YouTube for example, it always will be a mixture of fusha and ammiyah very often and I wouldn't understand that. Also, in general vocabulary as well and syntax so I need to work on that as well.

Rahaf: did you find it easy to communicate with people culturally wise?

Naya: well in morocco definitely, but I don't know if I could do the same in other countries, so I don't think I could. It took me a while in Morocco as well

Rahaf: how did you learn?

Naya: well, by making mistakes obviously

Rahaf: do you remember any of these mistakes that you made? maybe not mistakes, any misunderstanding.

Naya: let me think ... I can't remember exactly but people there when you live there, they really know whether you're local or not. like when my friends come and visit me, they really stand out but I feel very much at home there, and people don't think of me as a tourist for some reason, so I know something about that.

It wasn't my first time that I moved to another country, I have my own strategies, because first time I moved to London and I had to get used to do things here. If I do something new I used to ask people around, what do you do. I remember last time I went I had presents for my teachers and I was asking; one of my teachers she had a baby so I was asking if it is ok to give her, and what kind of presents would be ok so I would ask people, other Moroccans in advance. So, I wouldn't really get into these situations

18:55 speaking about religious expressions she had used

Rahaf: do you consider yourself proficient in Arabic?

Naya: no no I don't. I think proficient just means that you are able to understand any sort of texts pretty much, and any kind of spoken piece of language, I'm not I can't do that.

Rahaf: is this how you define proficiency?

Naya: yeah, to me. Proficient is, at the moment in English I can understand very much everything. I can't think of any time recently that I wouldn't understand something, or I wouldn't be able to express something. In Arabic, this happens a lot obviously. I can't understand everything and I can't express everything.

Rahaf: at which skill so you think you're more proficient?

Naya: at the moment, reading.

Rahaf: if you take a proficiency test o Arabic and you start answering the questions, what kind of questions would you expect to see?

Naya: I would expect a piece of written text, comprehension questions and listening in fusha then maybe speaking exam. Writing as well.

Rahaf: let's talk a little about speaking. You expect this test to test you in fusha or amiyah or both? Listening and speaking wise

Naya: if it's amiyah then which one?

Rahaf: it depends on the country maybe you want to go to

Naya: well, then both

Rahaf: together or separately?

Naya: separately

Rahaf: for listening and speaking?

Naya: yeah

Rahaf: why do you think separately?

Naya: both at the same time! But I don't know actually how it works, that's the thing if you know what I mean. For example, we have one of our teachers; he's Algerian I think, and I think he just uses both. Sometimes he uses words from Amiyah, but in general it is fusha. So if that's this kind of mix then yeah. That's the kind of thing I would expect. But ideally I don't know how you can be called a proficient user of Arabic if you can't understand Amiyah. I don't think it does proficiency

Rahaf: what type of questions would you expect?

Naya: in reading comprehension?

Rahaf: in reading for example

Naya: perhaps open ended questions. I wouldn't expect them to be much different from something we normally have in any language. Some of them would be yes or no questions, some of them would be multiple choice, and others would be open ended, a mixture of all those.

Rahaf: back to speaking, how do you feel you're most comfortable being tested in your oral proficiency? Personally, do you prefer one to one interview? or do you prefer to be tested within a group?

Naya: one to one definitely

Rahaf: why?



Naya: I'd be tested within a group if there is other students as well. Well, I'll be more comfortable in a group

Rahaf: so you don't find it difficult being interviewed, having one to one interview?

Naya: no sometimes I prefer that

Rahaf: do you have a reason? Or do you just feel that?

Naya: I did a few of my presentations, I asked to present just in front of the teacher rather than in front of the class. Because I always feel more comfortable doing this in Arabic. I'm fine presenting in English but sometimes in Arabic I don't feel very comfortable. So for presentations, in my first year, I asked for being –to do my presentation just one to one so that I feel more comfortable.

Rahaf: do you think the cultural aspect of the language, of Arabic, should be assessed and why? Why not? And if yes how do you think the cultural aspect should be assessed? What kind of culture?

Naya: it is a good question. I don't know

Rahaf: just reflect on your experience in Morocco

Naya: what kind of cultural knowledge that you think every foreigner in a country should know? In an Arab country

Naya: I don't really know. I think if you were to assess some of this cultural knowledge, if we're talking about language so that's language is the most important thing anyway. So I think it is the use of certain expressions correctly would be a good enough indicator of somebody's cultural knowledge.

Rahaf: so do you think it's important to assess the cultural knowledge?

Naya: to some extent, it's just important to see if a person can reply appropriately in this respect. It doesn't mean a thick knowledge of history or something, but obviously yeah.

Rahaf: do you consider the knowledge of a spoken form of Arabic essential to identify the level of proficiency?

Naya: yes

Rahaf: should this knowledge be tested?

Naya: yes

Rahaf: if you were to learn a dialect, if you had a choice, which dialect would you choose?

Naya: I'd choose the Levantine.

Rahaf: why do you think so?

Naya: I started a little bit of it and I think it's quite useful to know in terms of it covers a large area and a lot of words are, well it can be understood by other speakers from other regions as well as far as I know and I find it more, I think it's more beautiful than ... it's more pleasing

Rahaf: do you think a proficiency test should specify one dialect to test?

Naya: one dialect is enough. I think if it's not pure I can understand,.. Just for example recently I went to this lecture in the Egyptian cultural centre so all of it was in fusha, they were actually told that students from Westminster would be there so they were trying to adapt. But there was one lady from the audience and she just started speaking amiyah because she was just asking a question and she was speaking for a long time and I could understand the jest of it. This is why I think the knowledge of one ammiyah is enough, at least to understand others.

Rahaf: do you think a proficient user of Arabic should understand... well two questions, should be able to speak more than one dialect? And the other question should understand more than one dialect?

Naya: a proficiency student?

Rahaf: yes

Naya: no not necessarily for both questions. I don't think you need more than one dialect, to speak more than one dialect, but ideally that's a good thing. I would like to speak more than one dialect eventually but I don't think a proficiency student should be, because as I said before I think I had an impression that people from different regions can still understand each other if they speak one. For example Egyptian dialect, people understand it in general because it is all over

Rahaf: how about understanding more than one dialect?

Naya: it just comes eventually from learning one dialect. This is from my experience... This is how I feel at the moment.

Rahaf: if you were in a setting here there were more than one native speaker from different countries speaking and they actually know that someone knows fusha and one dialect and he's not a native speaker. Do you think you would understand what they're talking about? All of them?

Naya: I would expect them to speak something close to fusha

Naya: so, they would adapt their language

Rahaf: I think so because this is what I saw from Moroccans from different regions. They were speaking fusha. I remember I was on the plane and there were two people, one from Marrakesh and I think the other one was from Agadir and they just started speaking fusha and I thought how strange and then I heard that this guy said oh yes I'm from Morocco and yes I'm from Agadir and they were both flying to London so they just continue speaking fusha and at this point I thought; well now you're speaking fusha ... to each other ... ok!

Rahaf: have you ever been assessed in Arabic?

Naya: yes, as in university

Rahaf: what kind of assessment?

Naya: well, we always have exams... We would have writing exams; written exams, speaking...

Rahaf: when would you have it? After learning for two months? Or after a term?

Naya: I had my first exam after about two weeks of learning Arabic because I was late for my course, flying from Moscow, my visa was late, so I missed two weeks of it so I studied for two weeks and then I had my first written exam.

Rahaf: was it a placement test?

Naya: no there wasn't a placement test because we all started from scratch. I did have a placement test in Morocco several times when I joined the course so there would be a test. Would you like to know about the test? the placement test?

Rahaf: yes, please

Naya: ok so the placement test was... Actually I don't like the test, it was a very bad test to be honest

Rahaf: interesting... Why?

Naya: so the first five questions would be about joining the letters together which is ok, but then I don't understand the point of joining letters together if later I'm asked to read a text! Obviously I can join the letters, right? Then there would be translating a simple phrases like "this is a big book" "this is the small table" then there would be a reading comprehension text but they are would be directed at. I don't think any of those test would be directed at an advanced user of the language, they were all up to intermediate. They were very strange to me.

Rahaf: I see, how did you know they were up to intermediate?

Naya: because they were very very easy, something I would do in the beginning of year 2. Then we were asked to write an essay, given two topics, one just anything about yourself, and the other one I think it was about Arabic ; fusha and Amiyah.

Rahaf: was there a question about Amiyah?

Naya: yes, such a common thing

Rahaf: really?

Naya: uh no no there would be... I think the question was, can you describe, explain why is it important to study, why is it important or not to study fusha at universities, like in Arab universities?

Rahaf: so, there was not a question in Amiyah itsel?

Naya: no no of course not

Rahaf: why did you think it's a bad test?

Naya: because it's just badly designed I think. It was good for beginners, it was very good I thought so they could place you exactly what kind of beginner you are, whether you need to go to the very beginning and start joining letters or you know you're done with the letters, you can learn about the big table and small table. So, it was good for the beginners but it couldn't actually place me ... what kind of. because they had for every level they had beginner 1, beginner 2, beginner 3, intermediate 1, 2, 3, advanced 1,2,3 and after that media Arabic they had a special course. So, for me, it'd never be able to say whether I am advanced 1,2 or 3

Rahaf: I see! That's why you went to advanced 1

Naya: yes eventually

Rahaf: did you think you're more than that?

Naya: no I was happy with 1, as long as I can. It doesn't really matter, alkitab advanced is quite advanced and I just like it.

Rahaf: so you studied Alkitab in Morocco?

Naya: yeah

Rahaf: do you study Alkitab here as well?

Naya: no, at the moment we're just doing a lot of different... mostly we're just doing authentic materials

Rahaf: where are they from?

Naya: some are from... like yesterday we were reading a passage from a book and discussing it in Arabic?

Rahaf: what kind of passage?

Naya: was literary piece of writing

Rahaf: can you tell me a little bit about your examinations here?

Naya: ok! So we're tested on different skills separately. So for example, one exam would be a written exam, another one is speaking, listening so they would all be separately tested about once a month. So for example, a month ago we did a written test and now just a couple of days ago we did a listening test so something like this.

Rahaf: is there a final test that you take it and they give you a certificate ...?

Naya: yes so the final test... so they all form the mark at the end... so there is no really such thing as a final test. So there is a final test as in the spin of time but actually it is not that final

Rahaf: is this alike to the tests you've been taking during the academic ..

Naya: almost similar.. there will be an essay, one part is an essay and the other one is translation from English into Arabic, and it takes about three hours all of the test. So, in a way it is different because it's three hours but actually same kind of things we do in class

Rahaf: how about reading?

Naya: for the final test we don't have reading as far as I can tell. But we did have it last year. The test was different so we had grammar part and reading and writing so it was altogether in this test, but this time we only have writing and translation.

Rahaf: if you remember, what kind of grammar questions did you have?

Naya: I really don't remember. I think it was correct the mistake, some of them, and some of them were something else but that was before I go to Morocco so I don't remember exactly

Rahaf: do you think these tests are good or bad?

Naya: I think correct the mistake is really good, correcting mistakes really show your level

Rahaf: the tests here in general? The advantages and disadvantages?

Naya: the is advantages of the listening test we had some time ago a couple of days ago, I thought it didn't really show my level, I don't know what I'm going to get for it . normally o get good or excellent but I'm just worried about this particular test because it just we had to listen and answer the questions at the same time while we're listening and I found it very difficult to listen in Arabic and then answer in English or take notes in Arabic as well. I can't do it very fast. I just need to pause and write it down just for a second, so for example if I do the same

and I'm in control of the recording I can pause at any time , that's much better. It actually shows... I don't think this is the ... Because understanding,, if I were just watching a video and understand it I can do this and then just to summarize.. but if I'm asked specific questions about the videos I don't think showing it to me in one go and asking me to answer the questions while I'm still watching it would that give me the chance to think about it a little ... so I don't think this is fair because if I could do this I could understand every word or If I were to read this text, that's even better you know

Rahaf: so you were supposed to answer in English

Naya: yes but I now he last year students they were given the same, no not the same but similar listening task but they were asked to summarize the text in Arabic which I think is probably easier actually.

Rahaf: do you think if you were to answer in Arabic would be easier for you? That would make the task easier?

Naya: yes because I wouldn't be able to write what I actually didn't know in English

Rahaf: Any advantages of this test? Do you think it really assess the knowledge that you've been gaining? Same vocabulary? It helps you use this vocabulary later?

Naya: I don't think this particular test ... I quite agree with all the other tests we take normally but this one I don't think it really shows my actual level if understanding the spoken language

Rahaf: do you think the translation question work? Do you consider it a good question or not?

Naya: yes I really like translation

Rahaf: from Arabic to English or English to Arabic?

Naya: from English to Arabic

Rahaf: do you find it easier?

Naya: sometimes yeah , ijust enjoy it . it is a new thing for me relatively so I'm really enjoying doing it

Rahaf: would you like to add anything?

Naya: no I don't think I have anything to add.

Follow up interview: Model of native speaker

Rahaf: So since you started learning Arabic, have you even thought of imitating a kind of model or a person a particular person or a set of standards that you want to meet? Or as a speaker of Arabic you want to be like this person or you want to be able to do this kind of things? Have you ever thought off that?

Naya: imitating as in, like imitating a native speaker I know? Is that what you mean?

Rahaf: yeah well maybe. When you wanted to speak, learn did you want to speak like a native speaker or you didn't mind actually.

Naya: well, I do now, this is what am doing at the moment actually. Because I moved to Bahrain and am trying to because what I did before was MSA but now am trying to learn the dialect; something I haven't done before. So, yeah am trying to, while am trying to learn the dialect, I'm trying to imitate and watching a lot of tv series and trying to imitate exactly what they're saying there. Not sure if it answers your question. did I understand you correctly?

Rahaf: yeah, I mean you learnt Moroccan in the past, right? I mean you tried to speak a little bit of Moroccan although you were studied fusha

Naya: yeah I did, that's right.

Rahaf: now you're trying to learn the Bahraini colloquial

Naya: yeah that's right/

Rahaf: so when I asked you about like about imitating some person, a native speaker or whatever, you mentioned the colloquial straight away. Why is it so much related to the colloquial? Who is the native speaker of Arabic according to you?

Naya: I think I must have said this before that fusha is not something, it doesn't have any native speaker really. And it is something people learn later in life something. Of course when Rahaf want to say like I want to sound like a native speaker to me it is always the dialect

Rahaf: why do you want to sound like a native speaker

Naya: I don't care about sounding like a native speaker that much. It is just, well, I'd like people to understand me better and I'd like to understand, I mean I understand it to a certain degree, yeah I'd just like to understand it more to sort of be you know to have a conversation when I'm treated as an equal.

Rahaf: what do you mean sorry?

Naya: well, especially I feel this a lot here now that I'm a foreigner, they don't speak to me the way they speak to each other. And yeah I'd just like to be able to speak to them to the native speaker here in Bahrain to Bahrainis same way they speak to each other and it is just an interesting dialect I guess.

Rahaf: one last question, how you define a native speaker of Arabic. one more time, am not sure if you understand what I mean. I mean there are a lot of native speakers in the Arab world, you know what I mean, a lot of people classify those people according to many variables. For you, who you describe as a native speaker?

Naya: now you're right, am not sure what you mean. Anyone who speaks an Arabic dialect and as any native speaker, a person who acquires the language as his first language as a child. So anyone has done so whether they were born outside the Arab world or somewhere in an Arab country and required an Arabic dialect growing up as a native speaker.

Rahaf: great! And how about if , you know this applies to a lot of people who are born maybe in London and they speak the colloquial as heritage learners and then they might not be able to read in MSA but you still call them native speakers?

Naya, yeah I think so yeah

Rahaf: would you like to imitate them then? To be like them? Speaking colloquial but not being able to read MSA maybe? Or maybe your colloquial is much much better than your MSA

Naya: no I think I want to be able to do both of these. I enjoy the fact that I now can read and write and can understand the dialect so. These are completely different things. You know, what am doing now is completely different from the Arabic I did at university.

Rahaf: I see, in what sense?

Naya: it is just well everything really, the grammar the pronunciation, the way it is used, the way people speak... it is

Rahaf : you mean now the colloquial

Naya: yeah I mean the colloquia, the Bahraini dialect is very different. You know sometimes right now even if these are the exact words that I know and if I saw this written down, I wouldn't be able to understand. Sometimes when I hear somebody speaks, I just don't register those words completely which is a bit strange, you know. Because I can do this in fusha, you know if am listening to a radio programme in fusha, I don't have a problem understanding that. A dialect is just completely different.

Rahaf: are you now able to use a mixed version of both like a dialect and MSA?

Naya: Sort of, I understand most of what is being said, probably, 80%. I can't react that quickly so I don't have I don't speak that well yet but I can hold a conversation. I do that now and again with because I'm teaching at a school at the moment. And sometimes when we have parents meeting, some parents don't speak English so I go into speaking fusha and a bit of the local dialect and that kind of work sometimes; most of the times. I definitely get the message across.

Rahaf: yeah sure. Would you like to add anything?

Naya: No no

## **Yaman**

Rahaf: you learned Arabic here in the UK. Tell me about your experience in learning.

Yaman: when I joined King's to do my MA; I found out that you could do a language alongside your studies so I registered. The only available level was level 3 so I joined and thought level 3 would be so high for me and I think I discovered that it probably was. So I stayed with it for a few weeks, a few months but I found out I wasn't able because of my MA course, which was requiring me to do a lot of work, I wasn't able to give a lot. So after a couple of months, I basically dropped it.

Rahaf: so, what did you learn in this course? What kind of Arabic?

Yaman: we were expected to read things and answer questions about the text. It was in fusha, it was to be honest, I never really felt I learnt something but it was just an opportunity to speak in Arabic and be around people speaking in Arabic and can practice in Arabic which is for me here in the UK something that I don't always get an opportunity to do. but I didn't really get the sense that I learnt that much to be honest

Rahaf: how long was it for?

Yaman: that course was a term but again I stayed for something like a half term

Rahaf: which is a month or two months?

Yaman: I think two months, maybe. Something like that

Rahaf: and you basically learnt fusha?

Yaman: we were taught in fusha

Rahaf: any speaking, listening?

Yaman: yes, speaking, listening, reading, and writing

Rahaf: speaking and listening in fusha?

Yaman: yes, the teacher was delivering the lesson in Arabic as well. She didn't speak English; I mean occasionally she would say something in English when the class is lost, but otherwise it was in Arabic

Rahaf: did you learn Arabic in any other place?

Yaman: yes, I guess I've been learning Arabic informally for I'd say for 8 years, informally and with big gaps in between and not very intensely, but I've been engaged with the language for that period, it probably started with a few words with the Egyptian colloquial dialect when I go on holidays there. And then that turned into memorizing verses of the Quran and then later trips I stayed for longer in Egypt, picked up more of the colloquial language, somehow was also picking up fusha, I don't know how that was happening, I've done about month of lessons about three or four times a week in an Arabic school in Cairo. Again I didn't take it so seriously I was always late for lessons, I didn't do my homework and I just didn't feel that .. I've never been a good student of languages to be completely honest. I didn't feel very engaged by the methods of teaching so I basically didn't go for the second instalment of that, I think the most,, after I became a friend with someone who is also an Arabic teacher, we would, we attempted to do Arabic lessons with each other and particularly on Skype after I left, that didn't also go too well. We'd also start having conversations and joking, but he also was very skilled in reading the Quran, he has known all the rules so what we'd done was go over parts of the Quran together and actually I found that it was always the Quran that I found easiest to learn and I've always been told that my Arabic pronunciation is good and I think that's because of the Quran, because when I compare myself to my siblings; one in particular who has spent longer in Egypt than me, I think my pronunciation is probably in general far better than hers, and the only thing that I have different to be honest is learning the Quran. Also, I think the Quran taught me about the structure of Arabic which is different from English, so where, I don't know the technical words, but where the object in the sentence, the subject and this and that. So, I find myself, even though my Arabic is very broken, because of what I've memorized from the Quran, I find even my broken Arabic sometimes structured correctly even if I'm saying something feminine in a masculine form

Rahaf: did learning the Quran help you understand media texts for example?

Yaman: I have to be honest and say I've never really engaged with the media that much and actually I find sometimes listening to the news is too fast for me sometimes to keep up while is reading and often reading articles, so for example if I came across an article in Arabic, I'd feel confident to open it and try to understand the jest because I'd always look for the three letters root of a word and then relate that to a word which I know and also attempt to understand additional letters which imply present tense, past tense, the pronouns and stuff like that. So, in that way I could not read but decipher, I prefer to call it decipher in the meaning so yeah so in that sense, yeah depending if I'm listening to something fast, I might, I'm probably better at reading actually than listening.

Rahaf: your purpose of learning Arabic was basically Islamic?

Yaman: Islamic and cultural, yeah they both came at the same time to be honest when I was old enough to travel by myself. I started going to Egypt and I basically fell in love with the culture and history and the religion, in my case Islam or whatever they all came at the same time, but yeah religion was a big factor.

Rahaf: so, you said you went to Egypt many times and you learnt there in an Arabic school. When you learnt there, did you learn MSA, which is fusha or the spoken dialect?

Yaman: in the school, it was fusha but it was the school wasn't officially religious, but the management was religious so I found that the curriculum did have probably more Islamic



elements than any school might have, I remember for example, being played the Quran and that was one of the texts that we were working with. And the teacher was religious and they knew that I'm probably Muslim, so there was more emphasis on Islam than might be in another school.

Rahaf: how did you speak with people then?

Yaman: in the streets?

Rahaf: yes

Yaman: with broken Arabic

Rahaf: what kind of Arabic?

Yaman: Ammiyyah

Rahaf: how did you learn ammiyyah? Because you said you haven't officially learned it

Yaman: that was from picking up from being in there, and to be honest I think this was for me the best way to learn Arabic is to: one) be in the context where it is spoken and to immerse yourself in that context, and I remember one time noticing after spending a lot of time in Egypt, maybe one of the longest periods I was probably there by that point for 4 or 5 months, and I remember laughing at myself when I noticed it, but with the little Arabic I had and as broken as it was, I found myself thinking in Arabic, after I have spent so much time there and I thought that this is probably the point why someone really starts to learn quickly when they start thinking in that language (10:41) so for me I probably learn the most from being around people speaking Arabic, being in a country that thinks in Arabic, that speaks in Arabic and then not only that me having to think and somehow even starting to think in Arabic, and that's where I'd say I learnt the most. and the amount of contact I've had with teachers, I think is completely disproportionate to the amount of Arabic I have actually learnt. I mean it's been a long time, it is not like it's been over a couple of months, but I can only say it was from very informal ways of learning, just being such as just being somewhere, such as just engaging with the language, memorizing Quran, all of these kinds of things where you're not kind of formally learn Arabic, I think all of these things that have the biggest effects on learning Arabic to be honest.

Rahaf: in fusha or Ammiyyah?

Yaman: both

Rahaf: because you know when you're saying learning Quran, for me it is different when you say learning Quran and then learning MSA, they're different; two different styles, two different sets of vocabulary and Ammiyyah is a different story but if you want just to compare MSA to the language of the Quran, there is a huge difference, but interestingly you said learning the Quran helped you understand MSA

Yaman: I think so yeah, I don't really know how my fusha has made me as good as my Ammiyyah, there is not really an explanation for that because again I've either mainly been engaging with Ammiyyah, being in Egypt and speaking with people and even from my dad or family and friends, or on the other side, listening to the Quran, memorizing the Quran, being instructed in the pronunciation and recitation of the Quran so to be honest I don't really know where the fusha has come from. I don't really think this month in the school, in an hour for a few days a week and even when I'm turning in late and not doing my homework. Yeah I don't ...

Rahaf: how much time have you spent in Egypt? I mean if you go during the summer, how much time would you spend?

Yaman: when I was at university, I'd go for 3 months every summer, so that was for 3 years, so that's 9 months altogether. After university, I then went for 7 months, so now 16 months and then I came back to London and then I went for another 4 months so that's 20 months, near to 2 years,

Rahaf: if you were to speak fusha with people, what would you imagine they would say, how would they react?

Yaman: I know that some of my family used to live in an area where there are a lot of foreign students who were from places like Malaysia and Tunisia and many African countries and they come to study in Alazhar for Islamic studies and they learn fusha, and I remember my family, one cousin in particular laughing when she found out that I was studying fusha, she said like you're going to be like one of those students who try to speak in streets in fusha and it is really funny for the Egyptian people. so I think *I was aware that if you speak fusha in Cairo, you'll probably come across... It'll be humorous for the people; they wouldn't probably take you that seriously unless you're like a sheikh or something like that.* And do you know there is another society language, which I believe in, I think this is what helped me being in Cairo to not be ripped off that much for I think people to generally strangers to receive me quite well and that was what I would describe as, I don't know what to call it but the feeling to other language, the emotion so I'd say, even I had been learning Arabic just from being raised by an Egyptian Arab father and going to Egypt and being in in touch with that side of my culture even with broken Arabic, if I could communicate with that part of me which fusha would have undermined, I think. *Fusha is very formal, I think maybe can create a barrier between native Arabic colloquial speakers even when a sheikh speak in fusha, somehow they do create a barrier between themselves and the person they're speaking to. This kind of a very formal relationship they establish because of the language, so even speaking in very broken colloquial Arabic, I think it allows you to express this hidden side to language, which is more emotion and even hand gestures and a kind of intonations and rhythm and stuff which I found actually especially for example when I was, I remember actually one time being in a market in Cairo, a very busy and well-known market for ripping off tourists and foreigners and we were in a shop and a friend of mine who was studying fusha was trying to communicate with the owner of the shop and the owner was almost making a deal of the fact that he was making mistakes even though his Arabic is probably better than mine, but it was because he was coming across speaking fusha as very distant and strange and even and stuff and then the shop keeper ended up trying to then I don't know allow me to speak on his behalf and I probably had worse Ammiyyah than he had fusha but somehow I was able somehow to establish a better relationship with him and take away.. My friend has a kind of almost a joke for this shopkeeper, I can't remember why he was reacting like that but to try kind of bring it down to a more respectable level and I think that demonstrates the difference between using fusha or using broken fusha and broken ammiyyah in a kind day to day life.*

Rahaf: so, do you think broken Ammiyyah would work better than fusha?

Yaman: I guess, it is a judgment from my cousin has said as well. It seems that, I don't know how to describe it but I mean I do the same thing in London. I mean even though my friend who is an Arabic teacher in Cairo, his Arabic is very good, his pronunciation is very good, his Arabic is very strong, but he told me when you're taking a taxi, you don't speak in this form of Arabic, you speak the Arabic that's spoken in the street so you don't get ripped off. And I do the same thing in London. I'd found myself speaking a different form of English with a different accent and different intonation depending on whom I'm speaking to. Now I'm making an effort to speak very clearly, in university I make an effort to speak very clearly, where I live for example which is quite a in a city densely populated, working class area, I generally don't speak like this because it would alienate you from the people there in many cases, and sometimes even, believe it or not, I think it puts you in risk when because I think there is some criminals who would perceive that as a weakness so you end up speaking the form of or a dialect that maybe too much big widely used in order to make yourself one of the people of certain place. And again if

you're working in a shop in London, you tend to, I have noticed people who are from different classes would tend add more working class flavour to the way they speak and somehow I think this is because it is the accepted or the established way of communicating if you're working in a shop usually. So, I've noticed people for example, when I was doing work experience in a charity shop, the owner was, not the owner, the manager was Scottish, and she had a strong Scottish accent but what I'd always hear what we'd call it more cockney accent coming out which is the kind of the typical working class London accent. It'd start coming out when she starts working inside the shop. So, I think even when I went to Egypt for example, it is interesting how the dialect becomes different there, sometimes you feel that the dialect from the north of Egypt is used to show that someone is more connected to the rest of the world because Cairo is a metropolitan city and it is where all the institutions are based. But on the other hand, sometimes the heavy upper Egyptian accent is used to show one's or affirms one's identity or quality that's associated with up Egypt so you might find the upper Egyptians going to Cairo sometimes might emphasize their own dialect so it is interesting how people use different dialects which they are able to use in different contexts and for different purposes and to reach out different people. Even sometimes I've noticed that when a sheikh in Cairo is giving a ceremony, giving a khutba, they might be speaking in fusha the majority of the time, but they often move between the register of fusha and colloquial Arabic, sometimes to communicate in a different way to touch a different part of the people listening sometimes they move from the fusha which is very formal to give a clear message but then sometimes they break into the colloquial in order to tap into (24:41) a deep part of the people listening and to communicate with them in a very personal close way. So yes it's interesting ..

Rahaf: from a self-assessment perspective, how do you identify your level in both fusha and Ammiyyah? I want you to describe what kind of knowledge you have in both?

Yaman: I always say that I have very bad Arabic in both. Since I started learning Arabic, my English pronunciation has gone bad! But I think the truth is that I have a foundation of both. I can read and write and I can communicate in both Egyptian colloquial Arabic and the formal Arabic, I think if someone is willing to make an effort, they usually understand exactly what I'm trying to say. If someone is not willing to make an effort, maybe less so but nevertheless, I would feel confident going to any Arab country, to live in any Arab part of the world and to know that I can be understood and understand at the same time. But I'd call it more survival Arabic, I'd find it much more difficult to speak about politics about parts in fact to make a point, just to make points in general, I find it difficult to make my point in Arabic, but I wouldn't find it difficult to survive in terms of how to navigate, or if I ever needed something or someone needed something from me, those kind of basic kind of ...

Rahaf: in both fusha and ammiyyah?

Yaman: yeah but I mean if I could only speak fusha without ammiyyah, it would probably be more difficult, because I know most people understand Egyptian ammiyyah it gives me more, not just more confidence but I think more, the fact that people know, it means that I'm much more likely to be willing to communicate with them, but I'm guessing if I was from another part of the Arab world where people are less aware or informed on knowledge about their dialect, I'd probably struggle a lot more.

Rahaf: what kind of knowledge do you think you lack that doesn't allow you to make point?

Again, when you that way you've put it there, it is the other thing, not the linguistic side of vocabulary, it is the other side that I'm much more confident in. I mean even sometimes when I see my friends who are raised here, sometimes even my siblings but I can think of an example ,you realise that there is two things there is the language side and there is this more kind of whatever the other thing you just described is, the kind of more cultural side, I think it has a profound effect on you know like it is not just about being able to speak the language, to be successful or to be, to kind of be harmonious with the place is not just about the language, you

know any colonial ruler might have gone to a land and known the language but the person was treated with suspicion and even contemned and they were rejected and whenever invited into people's homes and so ultimately they can only ever know this place to a certain extent because of the way they were received. On the other hand, someone who doesn't speak a language but maybe the people welcome them and see themselves in that person and that person see themselves in them sometimes they can be initiated... into the culture and warmly received into the culture... so basically is this linguistic vocabulary side but not the other side; the cultural side. I'm not, no doubt I was born and raised in Britain and that means that you have a certain way of thinking and living which is specific to the place that you know best or that you've spent most of you time in or whatever, no doubt yeah, but in my case, as far as Arabic is concerned this is I think the vast majority of what I lack is more linguistic vocabulary.

Rahaf: do you think yourself a proficient user of Arabic?

Yaman: no, I wouldn't regard myself as a proficient

Rahaf: why not?

Yaman: again, vocabulary, grammar.

Rahaf: if you were to take a proficiency test in Arabic, a one similar to the TOEFL or the IELTS, would you expect that test would examine your level on ammiyyah?

Yaman: yes, if it was a colloquial test

Rahaf: if it was a general proficiency test of Arabic? if I want to identify your level of Arabic in general, would you expect it to

Yaman: my expectation is that they would be speaking in fusha, that's my expectation, because if they were speaking in a dialect, the next question would be what dialect?

Rahaf: but then if this proficiency test is taken by a student or by someone who wants to live in an Arab country, would this identify his true level of Arabic?

Yaman: no, I think if it was a good proficiency test, you'd have to determine the place that you're going to.

What I expect is one thing and what I think they should be doing is another thing. I'd expect that they will be testing my fusha, what I think they should be doing is testing both because if I'm writing at work even any kind of report, it would be probably in fusha, where but day to day working inside the office with staff, and working with the public is going to be in Ammiyyah.

Rahaf: you said your cultural knowledge is better than your linguistic knowledge. Do you think this cultural knowledge should be assessed in a way?

Yaman: I guess I mean it is difficult for me to think about how you can assess it.

Rahaf: should it be assessed?

Yaman: I mean from the perspective of a company, it is in the interest to be assessed because ultimately if they're hiring someone who has no awareness if the culture, etiquettes and all these kind of things, it is probably goanna cause problems for them. So I think within their interest, yeah particularly depending on the situation of that country, I mean in times where there is political or economic problems, I think these kind of things would become much more significant because the societies are generally that much more divided anyway and maybe in times of when there is stability and strong economy or stuff maybe it is problematic I'm not sure. But yeah I guess I mean this is something that happens anyway, humans do this anyway. Usually if someone behaves in a way that another person thinks it in offensive, they begin to

reject that person and also the person is likely to reject that thing that rejects them, that's just a general lack of harmony and I think, so in a way life does this way of testing itself. But I guess it would be beneficial not only for the work place but also for the person who is considering relocating to be aware of this kind of things but how you' test I'm not sure.

Rahaf: do you consider the knowledge of a spoken form of Arabic, any spoken form is essential?

Yaman: I think it depends on where you're living. I know people who lived in Cairo for years without knowing Arabic and without learning Arabic. And ultimately they spent most of their time in central Cairo. Most of their friends would have been English-speaking foreigners, and they would have worked in English speaking places such as English language schools and ultimately from work to, you know, recreation activities after work, there was little need for them to actually know Arabic that well maybe the basics such as using taxis and transportations and buying things from shops and stuff but then you can imagine maybe living in a place where there is less foreigners, less work with this foreign language, in that case it would become essential to learn Arabic. So, it depends, I mean if you live in big metropolitan cities, Beirut, Damascus, Cairo, maybe it is much less important in terms of just getting on with life than for example living in villages or places or smaller cities where there is not much there is not many people from other countries so it depends I think.

Rahaf: if you were to live in an Arab country you would learn a dialect, is that what you're saying? But if you're learning Arabic for a different purpose, let's say for academic purposes. Say you're doing an MA here in Islamic law for example. Do you think you need to learn the dialect? Any dialect?

Yaman: yes, to a lesser extent but you could argue, learning Islamic law you might find, I mean with this example I think you could survive without colloquial Arabic, because they're likely most of the people who have studied it and teach it use formal Arabic every day and they're confident to speak and be spoken to in formal Arabic but I think there is a lot of subjects where this is probably not the case

Rahaf: can you give an example?

Yaman: I can't really give a proper example because I'm just assuming. Other subjects such as for example, arts subjects, humanity subjects not including literature and these kinds of things. Yes they read and write in these languages and maybe even teach but in guessing day to day like within the kind of Islamic learning I've noticed there is a culture of valuing fusha, I know the only people who I know, I've heard of one, I'm sure there is a lot but I only remember hearing of one person who was an Arab philosopher who decided to only speak fusha from a certain point they didn't speak ammiyyah. Other than that the only people who I know who speak fusha are Islamic scholars or teachers and the only person who I know who I've never heard speaking in ammiyyah aorta from a few words here and there or apart from a few lines every so often again when he kind of break the formal thing is an Islamic scholar. So I think they have a culture of valuing it, I haven't noticed this anywhere else so I think if you want to study in Islamic studies it would be beneficial but it depends, I mean if you're going to study something from here for example if I was in London and I wanted to study the Egyptian film industry and I wasn't planning living over there, most of my research would be reading articles and books and no doubt they would be written in fusha, then I'll probably would .. from that colloquial Arabic. in fact, it might even be more beneficial than colloquial because I think I might be able to read about, maybe if I'm not in just Egyptian film but film from every Arab country, so it depends

Rahaf: now the case of living in an Arab country for a foreigner. Do you think if a foreigner learns one dialect, they can survive in any Arab country? You speak Egyptian, if you went to Syria, would you be able to survive?

Yaman: again, it depends in this case yes, I've noticed my dad for example who speaks the Egyptian dialect of course,

Rahaf: but your dad is a native speaker, I'm talking about the nonnatives

Yaman: yeah I know you'll see what I mean. So, he doesn't speak any other dialect and I've noticed when he's with any Arab he makes no effort to be understood

Rahaf: yes, that's the case with Egyptian Arabic

Yaman: yeah so I mean in this case you would expect, and they would understand him and they actually often make an effort to speak in his dialect. If they're from Morocco for example, they wouldn't speak in their own dialect. And I've been even told from a family member in Saudi Arabia for example, he said if there were two Arabs from two different countries and they wanted to speak to each other, they might even speak in Egyptian colloquial dialect rather than fusha because they might actually even be better because of films and music and stuff, they might even be better in the Egyptian dialect but and maybe the same could be said for the countries like Syria and Palestine where the dialect is quite similar and also well-known because of music and film and culture , but I guess if you were from the gulf or if you were from Morocco, I don't think you could expect people to fully understand you

Rahaf: do you think knowing one dialect is sufficient for successful communication?

Yaman: it depends on the dialect.

Rahaf: which dialect would you use say if you weren't interested in the Egyptian dialect?

Yaman: in order to be able to communicate?

Rahaf: to be able to communicate with all people, the majority of Arabs

Yaman: probably the Levant

Rahaf: this is my last question. Have you ever been assessed in Arabic?

Yaman: I believe so yes.

Rahaf: which assessment tool has been used?

Yaman: I don't know, to be honest I think in both cases, they were assessment that they were informal and created by the institution where I was

Rahaf: so was it like a test

Yaman: yes, a test

Rahaf: a written test?

Yaman: maybe like a questionnaire; choosing the right word for a sentence, the meanings of words

Rahaf: was it an achievement test?

Yaman: actually, in both times when I studied Arabic in formal ways I don't think I went to a test but that's another story

Rahaf: but you said you've seen a test, yes?

Yaman: yeah when I started so they know what level they ...

Rahaf: so, it's a placement test

Yaman: in London and in Cairo

Rahaf: so, you've never taken an achievement test! What kind of items were used? Here in King's if you could remember

Yaman: again I can't really remember but I think stuff like I mean I can get you one of them actually... but I think things like complete the sentence with one of the word available so there was a missing word or something and stuff like that

Rahaf: how did you feel taking that test?

Yaman: they were all low-level tests so I usually done quite well

Rahaf: why?

Yaman: maybe they were usually Arabic for beginners that kind of things. I don't know, but I usually found them easy ... I don't know maybe the later parts would be for people of higher level I can't remember

Rahaf: would you like to add anything

Yaman: no

Follow up question- Model of native speaker

Rahaf: so, first whom do you describe as a native speaker of Arabic?

Yaman: as far as I understand a native speaker of Arabic is someone who was raised within the Arab speaking world such that Arabic is their native language. I usually wouldn't differentiate between ammiyyah and fusha personally. Although I do appreciate that this could be quite a significant, you could have a significant impact on how much of an Arabic speaker in the world because some dialects are further away from standard Arabic than others. but I guess in any country where Arabic is a significant part of the ammiyyah and also the official language of the country I would consider those people to be native speakers.

Rahaf: how about people like you who were born and raised in a European country or in a different, I mean non-Arab country. And they speak the colloquial. I mean heritage learners do you still consider them native speakers of Arabic?

Yaman: to a certain extent. I mean not, maybe not myself because of the level of my Arabic and the fact that I was never actually taught Arabic at home. It was something I picked up later. But I guess people who are from background particularly where both Arab are Arabic and speaking Arabic to each other and then pick up Arabic as you would pick up any language without former learning, I would consider that native, But, this is , I'm just applying a definition which maybe has a technical, a precise definition I'm applying it to my own understanding and may or may not be accurate. I guess any, anyone who maybe I change mind to anyone who picks up language without formal learning, I might consider a native speaker.

Rahaf: when you say language, you mean the dialect or the standards, or both?

Yaman: yeah yeah, either although of course not many people would pick up, yeah it is a good question. Now when you answer more questions the answers are not so clear. Ok, I guess I

would include within the category of native Arabic speaker anyone who speaks a dialect of Arabic and picks it up informally and anyone who is from that background and then goes on to study formal Arabic formally, standard Arabic formally.

Rahaf: during your experience of learning Arabic, you did courses you know in many countries in Egypt and in the UK. Did you want to sound like a native speaker or a particular kind of model? Have you got this goal that I want to learn till I reach this kind of level of fluency or proficiency of this kind of person; native or non-native...

Yaman: yeah, kind of. I want to be fluent, I think mainly to be able to understand and to be able to communicate but not necessarily. I'm not sure to what, maybe to a certain extent because of some idea about my identity or something or feeling that I should know Arabic because of my background. But also, one thing to know Arabic for reasons that any human could have such as an interest in the Arab world or an interest in the Islamic world, Arabic for Islamic history or ideology, I think that'd play quite a significant role. So I don't know to what extent I would say it was wanting to know the language or even wanting to know it like such and such person.

Rahaf: do you think a learner any learner of a foreign language, do you think they would reach a level of native speaker, or like native speaker? Do you think it is achievable?

Yaman: yes, of course.

Rahaf: why do you think so, why it is achievable. In what sense?

Yaman: because a native, native does not imply a level do for example, I know native speakers of English and Arabic who don't have high levels of English and Arabic and would speak and write making many errors whether spelling mistakes, grammatical errors and so on and so forth. The nativeness as far as I understand does not imply quality whereas when learning a language, you can then quite quickly even achieve the same level as a native speaker.

Rahaf: linguistically, you mean?

Yaman: in every sense. I mean I know many people for whom English is their second language that know English writing and speaking better than many people I know who speak English as a first native language, who are native speakers of English. And likewise, with Arabic. you know very often an academic for example who learns a subject who learns another language might learn it in much greater detail than for example an uneducated person who speaks that language as a native speaker. So for me native does not imply any standard or any level, it just actually more or less how the language is required.

Rahaf: do you, can you describe, this is my last question. Can you describe who is the native speaker of Arabic that you want to be like?

Yaman: mm am not sure; it is a difficult question. I guess

Rahaf: you could describe the abilities they could do, or what kind of abilities that you want to have actually.

Yaman: am always attracted to the idea of being able to extract meaning which isn't necessarily obvious. So, for example to be able to extract new words of a word based on its roots; or root rather. And yeah I find the issue of roots very interesting and I guess, if, in terms of a level that I aspire to it might be one where am sensitive to differences that the forms of the words can have on the meaning, the affect or the how the roots constitute the meaning or how even the vowels can affect the meaning. that is I think that is the area that am most interested in.

Rahaf: do you think all native speakers of Arabic can do that?

Yaman: no, I know that most of them can't.



## Glen

Rahaf: hello, thanks for coming today.

Glen: hello

Rahaf: so tell me, when did you start to learn Arabic and why?

Glen: in 2006 as part of my undergrad course in oriental studies

Rahaf: for how long?

Glen: for 4 years in undergrad and the third year was spent in Syria. So I wasn't being taught by a university there but yes.. I only studied by private teachers in Syria; I didn't go to Damascus University

Rahaf: what was your purpose of learning in Syria?

Glen: well, same really, to pass my degree

Rahaf: was it an optional language module that you had to take?

Glen: yeah sort of, I mean I applied to read Ancient Near Eastern Studies, so stuff before Arabic but I had to take a second language with that and I chose Arabic because it is useful. But I'm also interested in Arabic literature; I mean I'm now doing a PhD in medieval Arabic so it is a general interest

Rahaf: what variety of Arabic did you learn in Syria and here in the UK?

Glen: oh, here we studied, we simultaneously were taught fusha and also Palestinian ammiyyah. We were taught to read and write in fusha but to speak only in Ammiyyah. That was the theory. But obviously in Syria I learned fusha and Syrian Ammiyyah, which is different

Rahaf: why did you learn Ammiyyah?

Glen: the university of Cambridge feels it is important. This is the short answer. but yeah I think even ... so we met students from other UK universities in Syria who hadn't studied Ammiyyah and that kind of made us grateful that we had and I think even if we hadn't I'd definitely want to study it once I go to Syria because you quickly realize that fusha is not actually spoken, if that makes sense

Rahaf: can you say a bit more about this? Just give me some examples, when you were in Syria, why did you think you need to use Ammiyyah?

Glen: well, people don't speak fusha is the short answer. I mean Syria is ok, but I mean I had friends studying in Egypt where really no one speaks fusha at all, but even in Syria you know, if you wanna do shopping or whatever, then you can't really get around, you probably would get around speaking fusha, but you would feel very much like a foreigner, I look like a foreigner anyway. You're learning a language; you want to get to speak to people as they speak to you

Rahaf: have you been interested in learning anything that's related to religion? I mean the variety, the classical Arabic that's more related to the Quran?

Glen: yeah, I mean I took a module in Quranic studies in Cambridge and we didn't. So, the Cambridge course you can't just learn Arabic, the course is Arabic and Islamic studies so you're learning Arabic and everything that any Arab has ever done, so obviously, a lot of Islamic history specifically came into that. And yes, when I was in Syria, I studied, yeah because I ended up living in Sayyeda Zeinab, where there are many many shi3i 7awzaz so I studied in

those where obviously, the curriculum was deeply religious nature. It was good, you learn words studying fiqh which you would not learn studying elsewhere. Does this answer the question?

Rahaf: yeah, was there any difference, a big difference between the classical Arabic that you learned regarding religious purposes and the Modern Standard Arabic?

Glen: I don't think I'm clever enough to know the answer to that, I now know that there is because I know that probably fusha is not the same as the Classical Arabic, but I don't think I would have noticed that at that time. I mean when you're reading Quran you notice that you're doing things you're not taught, but I never studied poetry as an undergrad, the classical poetry. So, the short answer is that I don't think my studies were involved enough to have been fully aware of the structure of differences. I mean obviously there are differences in vocabulary ...

Rahaf: in Syria, when you went there, you had a previous knowledge in Ammiyyah. Was it to the level that allows you to communicate with people?

Glen: *when I first went to Syria, I was living with students of Sharia who were not Syrians, and who were wearing jallabiyyahs and they're actually mostly Tunisians. it was the opposite, they only really spoke to me in fusha, and I think I, because in Cambridge we only were taught to speak in Ammiyyah, so it was kind of the opposite, which was quite strange. Then I stopped living with them after a month, so things normalized but also the Ammiyyah I learned wasn't Syrian Ammiyyah.*

Rahaf: so, did you find it difficult to communicate with people at the very beginning?

Glen: not very difficult, I mean my Arabic was fairly good. But if at the very beginning, a Syrian had come up and started speaking Ammiyyah with me very fast, I wouldn't have understood very much, not even because of the vocabulary so much as you know the rhythms of... the sukoon at the beginning of every word.

Rahaf: so, have you tried to speak with them in fusha? Or you just?

Glen: I think I honestly can't remember, I'm sure when I first got there, I was speaking to them a lot in fusha because I just wasn't good in Ammiyyah. I'm trying to remember the kind of transactions I had, it's mainly getting buses and buying vegetables, I mean I can't remember a situation but I can communicate with people at all, but that doesn't mean I was speaking Arabic very well.

Rahaf: how do you identify your level of Arabic? in both fusha and Ammiyyah?

Glen: my CV says I'm fluent in both, I think I should probably change that because I haven't been in Syria since 2009 and I'm very rusty especially that since then I have learned other languages, that kind of confuses things, my classical Arabic is fluent, I read all the time for my work and yeah. After being in Syria for 9 months, I then went to Jordan and when I was in Jordan people assumed that I must have, I must be half Syrian or something. Now I would say my knowledge of Ammiyyah is advanced because I like to think it is advanced. When I hear people speaking Syrian, then it starts turning and I start remembering how to talk again, but I find it very difficult to spontaneously start talking to someone with Syrian Arabic if there isn't Syrian Arabic coming back to me.

Rahaf: which kind of knowledge do you think you lack? In Fusha, you said you consider yourself fluent, which means you have the required level of knowledge that makes you proficient or fluent

Glen: yeah, if you put Alma'arri in front of me, I would start to cry but yeah Arabic poems excepted, yeah you would say this.

Rahaf: when it comes to Ammiyyah, what kind of knowledge do you think you lack that you don't consider yourself fluent? You said you're just advanced.

Glen: I suppose the vocabulary, I just, you know lack of awareness of... Colloquial is the things that people normally say, and there is a difference between what the people normally say and the things they can understand and I have lost the memory that instinctively goes to what people normally say, so I could make myself understood but they know I'm not ... I mean I don't think there is anything... to the extent if there is grammar Syrian Arabic, I don't think that there is anything that I don't understand

Rahaf: this is a technical question now. Do you think there is a distinction between fluency; being fluent in a language and being proficient in the same language?

Glen: oh definitely! My definition of fluency is if someone, if you're speaking on the phone and someone can't tell you're not a native.; which means there isn't an exacting definition of fluency. While sometimes an assessment of a proficient comes underneath good... I mean fluent you can sound like a native and people can't tell you're not on the phone, and proficient could be anything less than that

Rahaf: interesting! Then you said you're fluent, which means more than proficient.

Glen: yes, it is as narrow as if the question is: do I think if I was speaking standard Arabic on the phone, people would think I was an Arab. The answer is probably not, I suppose. I mean the claim that fusha is not really spoken by anyone (in defensive of my claim to be fluent).

Rahaf: have you ever been tested in Arabic? have you taken any high-stake test?

Glen: yeah the undergraduate finals are the very last tests

Rahaf: can you describe these tests if you remember?

Glen: oo I mean we had oral exams where you had I can't remember now how It was actually. I mean we had some... I think what we had to do was... we'd go there, there'd be a piece of paper outside with some topics on.. we had 5 or 10 minutes to think about things, to say about the topic and we have to go and have a conversation about it.

In listening we just had some spoken Arabic being read in a radio programme or something, and you had to answer questions about what have been said. Then reading and writing, it was straightforward... write an essay in Arabic on such a topic.

Rahaf: listening and speaking, were they in fusha or in Ammiyyah?

Glen: speaking would have been in Ammiyyah, I think listening may have been in both

Rahaf: separately or together? Was the text a combination of both?

Glen: no there were separate exams. I mean I don't really remember listening, I seem to remember things like you know radio news, so that would have been in fusha but maybe there was an ammeya component (?), I don't know.

Rahaf: when you went to Syria, did you have a good cultural knowledge? And do you think this cultural knowledge was important?

Glen: I think I don't know.. it depends how you define cultural knowledge. I mean the short answer is no not really; we weren't extensively prepared at all. We were taught things about the Arab world you know names of foods and things like that. But I must emphasize, you know, I was mainly doing the course I was doing because I wanted to learn about ancient and near eastern literature so I wasn't particularly interested in names of different Arabic forms.. this was before I entered the course, and then a bit but not really yes in fact I hope my department never hears this, but when we came back from the year abroad, there were quite a lot of unhappy voices about not feeling that it did go well structured but I mean, I don't know what it means ... it is bad to call it orientalism but you know, I'd studied medieval stuff and studied things about Islam which a hundred years ago would be considered proficient to know everything that goes on inside Syrian peoples' minds I don't think that's what we were told. Also, what I remember vividly is that a lot of what we were taught in fusha was kind of media Arabic; how to talk about politics and things, that was just you know the kind of things we were asked to read and write about which of course you can't talk about in Syria.

Rahaf: so this is kind of knowledge that I'm interested in. you know about the culture, you know about the politics but you can't speak about it. Did you know that you can't speak to a native speaker about politics?

Glen: no but maybe I was just naïve, maybe other people would have been aware of that and we certainly weren't told it. I mean I should make clear that for the year abroad we didn't all go Syria, that was an instructive programme to that degree, (20:39) so there is no kind of formal advice about these issues in Syria. We had informal discussions with older students who had been and come back, but that was kind of contingent... that wasn't very structured

Rahaf: do you think this knowledge is important to survive in that environment?

Glen: yes, definitely.

Rahaf: should this be assessed? Tested?

Glen: gosh!

Rahaf: I mean within a reading text; you have something related to the culture and you are required to give an opinion for example?

Glen: I don't know. Perhaps, the reason I hesitate is that it sound like it is going to get into anthropology, which is, you know even ethnography, which is a whole different thing

Rahaf: but can the language be taught without the culture?

Glen: of course not. I mean for some reason I suppose my instinct is to say well it'd be nice to read some Syrian novels and of course some Syrian TV and that kind of thing. That seems safer than taking classes of the details of Syrian culture and more different Syrians do in their lives. To me that sounds invasive But then I work on Medieval Literature so anything involving living people seems invasive to me,

Rahaf: well when I see assessed, I don't mean that you have to be taught like a cultural course or the Syrian environment. I mean within the language itself, sometimes you have a reading text about women in Syria or I don't know about politics in Syria

Rahaf: well that's what I'm trying to say. The tool of assessment would be a reading text or a listening text within some cultural aspects

Glen: yeah that's seems natural

Rahaf: do you think the knowledge of a spoken form of Arabic is essential?

Glen: it depends on, I mean I think

Rahaf: if you were to live in one of the Arab countries ...

Glen: for living there I mean definitely yes. But it depends on what you mean by essential. I mean I know oil workers who don't speak a word of Arabic; they live in compounds in Saudi Arabia and they seem fine. I mean any course that aims to teach Arabic, I mean, would be hugely distorting if it didn't teach the spoken Arabic ...

Rahaf: can we say George you're proficient or fluent in Arabic with being able to ..

Glen: oh no of course, but then I think just from experience, even if you speak a dialect of Arabic, it is very difficult to write you're fluent in Arabic on you CV because if someone says ok fine you're fluent in Arabic, talk to this Algerian then you have to explain to them that you are only fluent in some kinds of Arabic which obviously has political and historical reasons. But yea certainly, the short answer is you should certainly be taught some type of Syrian of spoken Arabic... and yea, to be clear, spoken meaning colloquial Arabic.

Rahaf: apart from the North African dialects, speaking one dialect, would that enable you to understand what other native speakers might say?

Glen: I mean generally yeah but of course it depends which dialect. I mean Syrian is a dependable. Again that depends where they're from and people from the deep south of Iraq Bedouins might struggle with people from the mountains of Yemen

Rahaf: you're in touch with very specific groups of people

Glen: no I'm not saying this from a long experience of talking to Yemenis. I mean again you could certainly have a conversation but equally... Let me start again. If you speak one of that kind of central Middle Eastern dialects, then you almost certainly going to be able to talk to people and they'll be able to talk to you but equally you won't necessarily understand them particularly if they're not making an effort to be understood and other times if they're choosing to be hard to understand

Rahaf: so, do you think if they make some changes to their dialect, it becomes more intelligible that you would understand them?

Glen: yeah definitely, like if I were to speak in a thick Glaswegian accent, then that would cause an obstacle to a non-native speaker understanding me.

Rahaf: but do you know that we native speakers when we meet, I'm a Syrian and when I meet with an Egyptian or a gulf girl or guy,

Glen: yeah of course you kind of meet half way, and that raises the question of what you're speaking, again, if you're meeting each other half way then there is some kind of international Arabic that you both. Yeah I don't know

Rahaf: if you weren't to learn the Syrian dialect, what other dialects would you be learning?

Glen: I don't know. I suppose Iraqi, because I don't know that's biased but because I work on chiasm, I have an interest in being able to talk to Iraqis

Rahaf: that's still Levantine. Not the gulf? Not the Egyptian?

Glen: I don't know, I mean I probably have very superficial reasons for my attitudes to all of these. I don't like the sound of Egyptian kind of ... And Syrians seem to have a lot of time laughing at Khalijes, and I kind of have adopted this

Rahaf: you have a good knowledge of the Syrian culture by the way

Glen: yeah again so that would be a reason why I kind of... and then I mean it, you asked me which ones would I learn, I mean it depends on what I wanted to do, in terms of the ones useful well I think Egyptian is useful because, khaliji I'd say it is less useful because English is much present than Arabic .. I guess Lebanese is very close to Syrian but it is kind of less... arabaised Syrian and French and so ..

Rahaf: is learning one dialect enough to communicate with native speakers of Arabic? or nonnatives who learned other dialects?

Glen: I mean possibly, again my answer is slightly skewed because when speaking Arabic, I have often been in seminary and religious contexts where for example people speak in fusha and that, I mean.. It is very nice, you have an Ethiopian, Indian and English man all speaking fusha together because it's their shared language. I feel Syrian is a performance in a way that fusha isn't. When I'm speaking Syrian, I'm adopting an accent, adopting something that's very culturally specific, I mean you have, I always feel I have to change my personality when I'm speaking Syrian because of the Syrian way of ... presenting oneself is very different from the English way of speaking oneself, that's much less the case in fusha, I feel fusha is much more neutral. The reason I'm saying this is that I very much don't look on Syrian as something international, but this doesn't mean it practically isn't but yeah I'd feel very strange adopting the Syrian accent to talk to an Egyptian because I'm not Syrian you know even though logically pragmatically Syrian is the Arabic or the colloquial Arabic I speak most proficiently.

Rahaf: so, with an Egyptian you would speak fusha?

Glen: well, I probably, I mean in reality what I end up speaking with them certainly is a weird fusion of fusha, and Syrian and probably some Iraqi.

Rahaf: and with a non-native who speaks a different dialect from the one you know? If they don't speak English of course

Glen: I suppose, yeah again, I'd probably end up, again I want to say I don't know because I've been in a situation that I've been kind of wondering to myself which dialect should I be speaking while having a conversation, I think this is almost certainly influenced by the fact that my Syrian is very wastey, I haven't been in a Syrian context for a long time, so my Syrian Arabic is less instinctive than it used to be. Maybe it may be well the case, I mean I spoke Syrian to Jordanians because there is no much difference, and I spent a month or two in Jordan and I quickly decided that I much prefer Syria to Jordan. Sorry I find it hard to answer the question but it is a question I'm asking myself

Rahaf: if you were to speak with me, how would you speak?

Glen: I'd try to speak Syrian with you; it would be a good opportunity

Rahaf: I know it is hard to remember now, but back to the test that you've taken after you graduated. Firstly, apart from that test, have you been tested in Arabic?

Glen: we had exams in early years, other than the times at university; I haven't been tested in Arabic again since I graduated

Rahaf: ok. Haven't you been tested before you joined the PhD program?

Glen: no, they just believed me when I said, I mean I suppose I had a bit of paper saying that I have a degree in it but no they didn't feel they need to test me.

Rahaf: back to that test, the only high-stake test that you took was that the one you took when you graduated?

Glen: yeah I mean in previous years, the final test you have a grade and with a grade you end up with the previous years, you would still be given a grade but as long as you passed nothing would actually happen to you, you know you would be pleased .....

Rahaf: in an oral test, if you were to take a proficiency test in Arabic, what kind of test tasks would you expect me to do?

Glen: I suppose just talk to me

Rahaf: in fusha and Ammiyyah or in both?

Glen: well I'd have expectations based on the knowledge of who you are, and equally depend on what you said you're going to test me in

Rahaf: let's say I'm testing you in fusha and Ammiyyah. Do you expect that to be a hybrid text of both? Or each separately?

Glen: are there texts of both? I suppose that kind of odd

Rahaf: yes, I can speak to you in the Syrian dialect in fusha structure and vice versa

I can say nihna endana katheer mn almashakel bi mujtamaana

Glen: right! That's just weird

Rahaf: if you listen to any radio or tv shows that are supposed to be in fusha, they do both.

Glen: I suppose you're right, but for me it seems odd. Entirely back to what I've come to expect, maybe that's Cambridge training, I guess that's also kind of again having a lot of background in religious establishments and in kind of classical scholarship then you expect proper Arabic to be proper Arabic, if you're doing something else, then do something else.

Rahaf: so, you prefer them to be tested separately?

Glen: yes, preferably not one straight after the other

Glen: the same way, I have to, it is like, it is a bit like looking at numbers upside down, you can feel your brain is straining because it is doing something in place is not expecting to have to do it... you can speak it but you're not expecting to read these, and suddenly it becomes unfamiliar so yeah I very much have that sensation when I see spoken Arabic.

Rahaf: do you see spoken Arabic written apart from social media?

Glen: I do but not that much because I suppose I'm not a huge user of social media

I don't know enough about these things to even, like when I do come across spoken Arabic written down, it seems to me that there isn't an agreed upon way to write certain things, like some people, I mean there is always the Egyptian thing of using an alif maqsura instead of a ya and sometimes using a ha instead of a ta marboota I don't know. I know in Jordan in schools they teach colloquial Arabic in the Latin alphabet, you're not supposed to write it in Arabic, you have to write it in the Latin script which I can't see why.. sometimes it is really really odd

Rahaf: would you like to add anything

Glen: no it is just really interesting

### **Follow up interview- Native speaker model**

Rahaf: so, during the journey of learning Arabic, did you aspire to any kind of model, or any kind of descriptions, abilities that you wanted to achieve?

Glen: well because when I was in Syria, then definitely there was an object to sound, to be able to speak like a Syrian certainly. And when I, yes but then I, because I spent 9 months in Syria then a couple of months in Jordan, that was then confusing because do you still kind of keep aiming to be like a Syrian or do you adjust to then becoming a little bit more Jordanian? So, I mean that was obviously heavily conditioned by where I was and the dialect I have surrounded by. But outside of, I honestly, I think outside of that context it is quite difficult because yes you, in terms of spoken then you need, you really need to aspire to speaking a dialect because there is nothing, if you're going to speak fluently you have to be speaking like a particular, the inhabitants of a particular place. so I did keep that aspiration to kind of, yeah to be able to speak like a Syrian, because I simply because it was the one I was, the one I could do. I had spent a lot of time there, but that obviously pretty much necessitated finding Syrians to talk to; which wasn't always easy.

Rahaf: you spoke about being a Syrian or Jordanian, you haven't spoken about; you know, I don't know It is interesting for me because you said a Syrian or Jordanian. It is a country based it is not you know a whole image of Arabic native speaker. Why do you think so?

Glen: well, because there are differences and you do have to adopt an accent in a dialect because, I mean, you can't not speak any of them. I mean fusha is a different thing and I don't know. But this is, I don't think I .. yeah

Rahaf: so for you, a native speaker; the concept is related to a dialect or a colloquial?

Glen: it is interesting, isn't it? I mean one can aspire to speak fusha fluently I suppose, but it is not nearly as, I mean in some ways it is obviously good because you know then people say your Arabic is academic and scholarly and you know. I aspire to be because of the work I do, I obviously aspire to be able to read classical Arabic as fluently as possible and being able to reproduce that in speech is you know a necessary I suppose, but if you can only speak fluent fusha I don't know that is not, in an important way that is not nearly as pleasing because you haven't, obviously people can't refer to me as a Syrian because I don't look Syrian but you know the ability to actually, I mean you use the phrase native speaker, no one is a native speaker of fusha, and I don't know I think there is an aspiration to be able to reproduce and you know integrate into the way of speaking, that is actually a way in which people actually talk. I think partly because I don't know I enjoy being able to imitate accents, and I enjoy being able to reproduce the pronunciation to it so it is part of that too and obviously you know the accent the intonation is a big part of a particular Arabic dialects (arifti shloon= you see what I mean)

Rahaf: arift shloon ..

Glen: I think I don't yes I think that is probably. if I was in a context where, I mean I've never, I've never really been in an Arabic university context, or somewhere like that where there was a demand to be able to speak fusha often and . so I suppose if I was, then that might be more of an incentive to aspire to speak fusha like a native whatever this means

Rahaf: how do you define a native speaker of Arabic then?



Glen: how do you define a native speaker of Arabic. I don't know isn't that easy? someone who's spoken it since they were a child. It is becoming vague, isn't it? Yes but I

Rahaf: spoke what?

Glen: an Arab, one of the languages which are conventionally identified as dialects of Arabic

Rahaf: a lot of people, I mean not a lot of people, I mean some people in the Arab world wouldn't be learning fusha because we learn fusha through the dialect, some Arabists or linguists they call them illiterate, and they call their language the illiterate spoken Arabic, would you aspire to speak like this kind of category, the language of this category?

Glen: I do, I mean. I'm not sure, to me that doesn't seem like a separate question I mean I suppose because I don't know whether you can tell just from the dialect someone speaks are there dialects that are distinguished by none of this because also of being able to speak fusha? I don't think there are. Probably there are somewhere in Yemen. I don't know but yeah I, maybe this is an answer to a different question. I suppose there are some dialects which the most Arab would sound strange you know if I spent a year living in northern Oman, then obviously I'd have a very distinctive accent which would be unlike most of the Arabic speakers I'd meet in a kind of a non-northern Omani setting ... but you do have to learn one dialect. I feel I haven't answered the first question.

## APPENDIX 8: ROMANISATION SCHEME

Arabic Alphabet	IPA	Transliteration symbols	Arabic Alphabet	IPA	Transliteration symbols
ء	ʔ	ʔ	ض	ʒ	ḏ
ب	b	b	ط	tʃ	ṭ
ت	t	t	ظ	zʕ	ẓ
ث	θ	ṯ	ع	ʕ	ʿ
ج	ʒ	ǧ	غ	ɣ	ǧ
ح	ħ	ḥ	ف	f	f
خ	x	ḫ	ق	q	q
د	d	d	ك	k	k
ذ	ð	ḏ	ل	l	l
ر	r	r	م	m	m
ز	z	z	ن	n	n
س	s	s	هـ	h	h
ش	ʃ	š	و	w	w
ص	sʕ	ṣ	ي	j	y
<b>Short vowels</b>			<b>Long vowels</b>		
ا	a	a	ا	a:	ā
اِ	i	i	ي	i:	ī
اُ	u	u	و	u:	ū

Table adapted from Pedersen (2008)

## APPENDIX 9: PILOT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

### Questions- based teachers' interviews:

- a) Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? Where were you trained as an Arabic teacher? Where you have worked? How do you define Arabic proficiency?
- b) Do you think a proficiency test should be communicative? Why? What is the importance? Why not?
- c) What do you understand by language proficiency? What do you understand by Arabic language proficiency?
- d) Describe one of your students who you thought he/she was proficient in Arabic. And another one who you thought he/she was not
- e) In your perspective, what characteristics best describe the communicative Arabic proficiency? And what does characterise a communicative test of Arabic proficiency?
- f) Given the sociolinguistic situation of Arabic, do you think the knowledge of the dialect influences your understanding of Arabic proficiency?
- g) What do you think the competences that Arabic proficiency test should assess?
- h) In the light of diglossic nature of Arabic, how do you define a native speaker of Arabic?
- i) On which criteria, do you think a test should specify the level of proficiency of a non-native speaker of Arabic?
- j) Examples provided below are taken from ACTFL guidelines. Can you reflect on these tasks and let me know what you think in terms of; the construct measured, the variety under assessment, and the type of questions asked.

Please listen to example 4. Refer to it at this link

<http://actflproficiencyguidelines2012.org/arabic/index.php?p=listening&l=superior&e=true#nav>

Example 5 at the following link:

<http://actflproficiencyguidelines2012.org/arabic/index.php?p=listening&l=advanced&e=true#nav>

Speaking:

<http://actflproficiencyguidelines2012.org/arabic/index.php?p=speaking&l=intermediate&e=true#nav>

All examples

<http://actflproficiencyguidelines2012.org/arabic/index.php?p=speaking&l=novice&e=true#nav>

Questions- based learners' interviews:

- a) Do you consider yourself proficient in Arabic? Why? Why not?
- b) What was your purpose of learning Arabic? What did you need that for?
- c) In the Arab country where you learnt Arabic, which category of Arabic did you learn? For example, Quranic, MSA, dialect.
- d) Which type did you use for communication with native speakers?
- e) Do you consider yourself a proficient user of Arabic? why/why not?
- f) From a self-assessment perspective, how do you identify your level of Arabic? Which kind of knowledge do you think you lack? For example; strategic, cultural. etc.

It is worth noting that those questions could be modified according to the interview conditions and research direction.