

Oral Communicative Competence in Classical Arabic A Reading in Linguistic Foundations

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Abstract:

This study provides a linguistic foundation for the concept of oral communicative competence in Modern Standard Arabic by unpacking its conceptual structure and analysing its theoretical and functional underpinnings. The article is organised around two main themes. The first focuses on clarifying the concept and its foundations by defining what oral competence is and specifying the nature of the target language, Modern Standard Arabic, as an interactive, living language. It highlights the following features: immediacy, the duality of reception and performance, contextuality, social appropriateness, and the role of non-linguistic signs in meaning.

The second axis examines the structured linguistic bases of this competence across levels of analysis. Starting with the phonological basis, it includes the articulatory and prosodic dimensions and the role of suprasegmental phenomena in imbuing discourse with meaning. It then moves on to the morphological and syntactic bases that ensure structural well-formedness, before finally addressing the lexical/semantic basis and the pragmatic basis, which account for speech acts, interactional conventions, and the discourse context. The study concludes that oral communicative competence is an integrated system in which structural levels work in conjunction with contextual dimensions to facilitate positive communication.

Keywords: competence, oral communication, Modern Standard Arabic.

Introduction:

Contemporary linguistic and didactic fields have shown a marked interest in competence, as it is a concept that bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and the practical use of language. If oral communicative competence is the overarching goal of language learning and use, activating it raises questions about the nature of the targeted linguistic input and its expressive characteristics. This issue is further complicated when it comes to Modern Standard Arabic, as for centuries it has largely been taught and practised through writing rather than speech, except in certain specialised areas. This situation poses methodological and linguistic challenges that could contribute to the

development of oral communicative competence as a living language. Undoubtedly, the development of this competence cannot occur independently of its linguistic roots, particularly the structural and pragmatic dimensions. Rather, it requires an examination of all levels of the linguistic system, starting with the phonetic foundation in both its articulatory and rhythmic aspects, moving through morphological and lexical structures, syntax and semantics, and finally reaching the pragmatic and contextual dimensions that ensure social appropriateness and immediacy within oral communication.

From this standpoint, the study aims to address the following problem: What is the role of linguistic foundations in the formation of oral communicative competence, and to what extent does interaction among these foundations at phonetic, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels contribute to building and grounding this competence in Modern Standard Arabic?

1. Oral communicative competence in modern standard Arabic: Concept and Foundations

1.1 The concept of oral communicative competence

Before presenting the notion of oral communicative competence, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the concept of competence in language and terminology.

Competence (linguistically)

In *Lisan al-Arab*, the term كفاية (competence) is associated with the root كفى: . if it suffices, meaning it fulfils the matter.' It is also said: 'I asked for his sufficiency in a matter, so he sufficed me,' meaning 'this matter is enough for you—i.e., it suffices you.'¹

In the hadith: "Whoever recites the two verses from the end of Surat al-Baqarah in one night, it will suffice him," meaning it will make him independent from standing at night (i.e. it will replace that act). The term is also used for كفاة (those who serve), i.e. helpers who carry out service.

Thus, the linguistic definition of competence indicates a fundamental meaning: fulfilling the matter, or accomplishing it without specifying any particular level or degree. It also conveys the meaning of sufficiency/relieving of need, as indicated in the hadith: if something suffices you, it does so without requiring you to perform that other act.

Competence (terminologically)

In the field of linguistics, the concept of competence is primarily associated with Chomsky because he linked it to language performance (speech acts). He defines it as follows: "That implicit, innate capacity that all individuals have regarding their language. It is the capacity of individuals to produce and understand new sentences, as the internalised system of rules governing the language enables individuals to do so and generate an infinite number of sentences"².

¹- Ibn Manzur, Muhammad ibn Makram ibn Ali, *Lisan al-Arab*, 3rd ed., Dar Sader, Beirut, Lebanon, 1414 AH, vol. 15, p. 225.

²- Mohamed Al-Deridj, *Competencies in Education*, Rasmis Publications, Knowledge for All Series, Rabat, Morocco, 2000, no. 16, pp. 50–51.

Brown likewise defines it as: ‘that implicit knowledge of the language system, its rules, vocabulary and all its parts, and how these parts come together’³.

In this sense, linguistic competence is an innate, rule-based system within human beings. It enables speakers to understand and produce an unlimited number of sentences. A speaker cannot speak without possessing this implicit prior knowledge of the rules and mechanisms of the language, and of how its elements are organised and structured. Through this knowledge, the speaker can construct sentences they have not previously learned, building them according to the rules embedded in their mind.

It should be noted that there is a difference between innate linguistic competence and its external manifestation, which is performance. Performance is defined as ‘the speaker’s ability to produce and comprehend speech’⁴, i.e. speech in its physical form. In this way, although linguistic competence is a limited rule-based system, it enables performance or production to have infinite possibilities in actual use.

Although Chomsky’s view, based on the dichotomy between competence and performance and marking a departure from structuralist linguistics (which treats language as a fixed phenomenon stored in the speaker’s mind), has attracted criticism, it is not entirely free from it. For example, Hymes recognises the importance of linguistic competence in mastering the rules of language, but criticises Chomsky for overlooking the ability to use language in social interactions. Hymes argues that ‘knowledge of the linguistic system alone does not enable the speaker to use language competently because language is not only acquired as sentences or linguistic knowledge; rather, it is acquired as appropriate expressions for social situations and not for others’⁵. Consequently, the speaker must take into account the situation’s conditions, including time, place, interlocutors and changing social circumstances, since the speaker is in constant interaction with their surroundings. The term ‘communicative competence’ emerged from this. It is not confined to the linguistic component manifested in skills related only to the lexicon, syntax, and phonetics, as the transformational-generative programme claims. Rather, it is formed by interrelated and intertwined elements that include linguistic levels such as sounds, words, and structures, as well as non-linguistic elements such as conversational implicature⁶, ellipsis, and insinuation (hinting), along with cultural and social considerations. Thus, in this sense, communicative competence comprises multiple, overlapping and interconnected aspects of concepts that all converge within the integrated

³- Douglas Brown, *The Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, trans. Abd al-Rahim Chaaban and Ali Ahmad, Dar al-Nahda al-‘Arabiyya, Beirut (no date), p. 44.

⁴- See: Khawla Taleb El Ibrahim, *Principles in Linguistics*, Dar al-Qasbah Publishing, Algeria, 2nd edition, 2006, p. 105.

⁵- Chaaban, Zakariya. (n.d.). *Functional Language and Communication*. ‘Alam al-Kutub al-Hadith, Irbid, Jordan, 2011, p. 52.

⁶- Hassan Toubi, *Integration Pedagogy and Didactics of Oral Communication*, Africa al-Sharq, Morocco (n.d.), 2012, p. 117.

linguistic system that realises the functions of language across its phonetic, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic dimensions.

Based on this, we can say that oral communicative competence is the mental and cognitive ability to formulate phonetically, syntactically, and semantically correct sentences and to use them appropriately in different communication situations. With this definition, competence becomes an operational, performative concept governed by context and the rules of social use. It therefore aligns with Chomsky's previously discussed concept and does not conflict with it.

2. The nature of the targeted Modern Standard Arabic

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is defined as follows: "The language of the Qur'an and literature. It is a pure language, sound and free from any defect, in which no colloquial or foreign expressions mingle — unlike the vernacular."⁷

Two levels of MSA emerge from this understanding when we consider how it has been used in practice and what the Arabs spoke:

1) The level of veneration/recitation : This refers to the most formal form of MSA, used in situations requiring respect. All classical and heritage Arabic texts were written in this form. It also changes more slowly over time than spontaneous speech⁸.

2) The level of intimacy/casualness : Also called less formal or spontaneous communicative MSA , this refers to the style used in relaxed situations. It is characterised by frequent simplification through reduction, elision, abbreviation and assimilation⁹.

The discussion in this study is based on these two levels, without including other levels of performance. In particular, 'Middle Arabic' is not included due to its widespread colloquial features, such as starting words with a consonant and frequently using colloquial and foreign words.

3. Characteristics of Oral Communicative Competence

Oral communicative competence is characterised by a number of features. The most important of these can be summarised as follows:

3.1 Immediacy

Immediacy refers to the futurity/immediacy of the linguistic communicative event, i.e. the production and reception of discourse occur at the same time, with no time gap for the speaker to review their utterance. This is a feature of oral communication, closely linked to the circumstances of the situation and the element of time. In oral interaction, the exchange is direct between speaker and interlocutor. This is in contrast to written communication, where the speaker has the opportunity to revise, rephrase and edit their writing. In writing, there is a temporal interval between writing and reading.

⁷- Ahmad Mokhtar Omar, Dictionary of the Contemporary Arabic Language, Al-Kutub Al-Alamia, Egypt, 1st edition, 1429 AH/2008, vol. 3, p. 1711.

⁸- See: Abd al-Rahman al-Hadj Salih, 'Reinstating the Importance of the Arabic Language in Arab Society', Journal of the Supreme Council for the Arabic Language, special issue, 2009, p. 66.

⁹- See: Abd al-Rahman al-Hadj Salih, 'Arabic Language Between Orality and Textual Editing', Journal of the Joint/Assembled Arabic Language Academy, Cairo, 1990, no. 66, p. 74.

This feature is one of the greatest obstacles to research into oral discourse in general. Researchers find themselves faced with linguistic units that are not stable because ‘measuring the length of oral linguistic production and analysing it does not benefit from the unit adopted in written communication, which relies on the sentence unit, since oral discourse depends on direct interaction between speaker and listener’¹⁰. This complicates the researcher’s task, increases their workload and forces them to identify linguistic and non-linguistic elements that enable them to break down the discourse in order to understand and analyse it.

3.2 The duality of reception and production (listening and speaking)

Oral communication requires the simultaneous presence of both the speaker and the listener. Production is the visible aspect of the communication process. Furthermore, ‘speaking competence is not a simple movement that occurs abruptly; rather, it is a complex process despite its seemingly sudden appearance. It takes place in multiple steps: elicitation, thinking, formulation and, finally, articulation (pronunciation).’¹¹

In this process, the speaker demonstrates the ability to convey meaning smoothly by observing the correct rules of morphology and syntax. Added to this is the phonetic dimension, represented by correct verbal delivery in terms of stress, intonation, connected speech, pauses and the proper articulation of consonants from their correct points of articulation. The level of the listeners and the social and psychological circumstances that may affect the production of language must also be taken into account.

As for reception, it requires the listener(s) to decode the linguistic and non-linguistic symbols addressed to them, including the tone of the discourse and body movements, in order to understand the speaker’s intention and achieve positive communication. Thus, we observe reciprocity during the exchange between participants, with each person taking turns to speak in a step-by-step manner. In this sense, the influence between speaker and listener is mutual¹². A good speaker is, by definition, also a good listener. There is an immediate and instantaneous exchange between them, as well as a direct adaptation that enables the speaker to modify, abandon or revise part of what they are saying within a very short time.

3.3. Contextuality and social appropriateness

Oral communication can never occur between a speaker and a recipient outside the context and all its components. Context occupies a central role in the communication process, regardless of the type or form of communication. It is the compass that guides the listener towards the speaker’s intended goal. Tamam Hassan defines it as follows: ‘By context, we mean the sequence that connects what is being said. Therefore, we can consider it from two angles: first, the sequence of elements through which the speech structure is realised — in this case, we call it “text context”;

¹⁰- Hassan Toubi, Op. cit., p. 92.

¹¹- Zohir Saad Ali, ‘Sky Within’, in *Recent Trends in Teaching the Arabic Language*, Dar al-Manhajiyya for Publishing and Distribution, Amman, 2015, p. 99.

¹²- Mohamed Nadhif, *Dialogue and Characteristics of Communicative Interaction: An Applied Study in Pragmatic Linguistics*, Africa al-Sharq, Morocco, 2010, p. 18.

and second, the sequence of events, namely the elements of the situation in which the speech occurred — then we call it “situation context”¹³.

From this, it becomes clear that there are two types of context: An internal context, which includes everything related to language, such as sound, morphology, syntax and semantics, and an external context, which comprises all the external circumstances surrounding the communication process, including time, place and the psychological and social conditions affecting the content and manner of speech.

These elements are among the most important foundations of communicative competence and a good speaker cannot dispense with them during oral communication. They determine the precise meaning of words, especially those whose meaning relates to how they are performed (e.g. interrogative forms, exclamations, irony/sarcasm). Context is also a fundamental factor in directing the speaker’s style, enabling them to identify when they should adapt their language to suit the listener. For example, speech in an educational context differs entirely from speech in an intimate context, and political discourse differs from discourse in a context of admonition and preaching. Moreover, context enables the speaker to omit many details by facilitating the establishment of relationships between speaker and listener, eliminating the need for excessive elaboration and explanation. This is what makes oral communication rapid and economical.

Social appropriateness refers to the speaker’s observance of the social rules and values within which communication takes place. As stated: ‘The entire linguistic competence is the skill of managing the language structures as required by the speaking circumstances — namely, the ability to communicate effectively according to what the speakers of the language have agreed upon.’¹⁴ This involves taking into account the listener’s social status, age and gender, as well as the nature of the relationship with them, in order to avoid disputes and verbal conflicts that usually arise from misunderstandings. It also involves the speaker building a communicative relationship with their listeners that is acceptable to them by using suitable expressions and words for each situation.

3.4 Paralinguistic Performances Accompanying Speech (Non-Verbal and Extra-Linguistic Cues)

These refer to the cues that accompany spoken discourse and affect its meaning, or to the part of the speech event that is not a linguistic construction, but rather variable and accompanies speech. Examples include bodily gestures, facial expressions and changes in voice¹⁵.

These cues play an essential role in most instances of oral communication, regardless of its form or type. Mastering and using them appropriately is considered an indicator of oral communicative competence. Some of these cues are vocal and arise directly from the speech stream itself, such as stress, intonation, rhythm, speed of delivery, pauses, and linking, while others are non-vocal, such

¹³- Tammam Hasan Omar, *Linguistic Ijtihadat (Linguistic Endeavours)*, ‘Alam al-Kutub, Cairo, 1st ed., 2007, p. 237.

¹⁴- Abd al-Rahman al-Hadj Salih, *Studies and Research in Arabic Linguistics*, Mufm for Publishing, Algeria, vol. 1, 2007, p. 184.

¹⁵- See: Hamdan Redwan Abu Asi, ‘Utterance-Associated Performances and Their Effect on Meaning’, *Journal of the Islamic University (Human Studies Series)*, Vol. 17, No. 2, June 2009, pp. 58–59.

as facial expressions, particularly eye contact. These are followed by hand movements, body posture and the distance between speaker and listener.

All these elements and other accompanying speech performances contribute to the development of oral communicative competence when used well by the speaker, who achieves compatibility between these cues and the words uttered, manages the oral interaction between speaker and listener, and expresses emotional states appropriately, such as sadness, joy and regret. These cues are also among the most important factors in comprehension and attention, as they include stress patterns and pauses, as well as suggestive and expressive gestures. This breaks monotony and helps maintain the listener's attention.

Furthermore, beyond the aforementioned characteristics of oral communicative competence, Modern Standard Arabic has features that set it apart from many other languages and dialects in terms of oral communication. One such feature is its reliance on case endings) to determine the grammatical and semantic functions of words. Ibn Fāris (d. 395 AH) states: 'As for inflection , it is through it that meanings are distinguished, and through it one comes to know the purposes of speakers.' The Arabs have this ability, which others lack, of differentiating meanings through vocalic movements and other means.¹⁶ Thus, Modern Standard Arabic does not always depend on the position of the word in the sentence structure to determine meaning. Instead, it has structural flexibility that enables the speaker to rearrange the order of words without ambiguity in meaning thanks to the vocalic inflectional markers.

In addition, the oral heritage of Modern Standard Arabic provides it with many spontaneous expressions and words used in Arabic oral discourse. Speakers include them automatically in speech, such as Qur'anic verses, hadith and proverbs that are commonly uttered in everyday usage.

2. A study of the linguistic foundations of spoken communicative competence in Classical Arabic.

The linguistic aspect provides the infrastructure and fundamental basis upon which any eloquent spoken performance in Classical Arabic is built. Spoken communicative competence is not just a skill for oral presentations; it is an integrated linguistic system that links sound to structure and meaning. The most important linguistic foundations upon which this system rests are as follows:

2.1 The phonetic (sound) foundation:

Sound is the first building block upon which oral communication in any language is established. In fact, spoken language originates from sound, whereas writing is merely a linear representation of sounds. Sound is 'an audible, changeable physical phenomenon; an essential means of communication among speakers; and the most suitable and fastest means of communicating, exchanging information and conveying notifications'¹⁷. This foundation is determined by two essential dimensions:

¹⁶- Ibn Faris and Ahmad ibn Zakariya al-Qazwini, *The Companion on the Jurisprudence of the Arabic Language and Its Issues and the Habits of the Arabs in Their Speech*.

¹⁷- Samira Refass, 'Phonetics of Discourse and Performance Techniques', *Al-Mi'yar Journal*, University Centre of Tissemsilt, Algeria, no. 4, December 2011, p. 23.

a) The articulatory (pronunciation) dimension

This refers to the correct production of linguistic sounds by articulating them at their proper articulation points. Each letter is given its due, so that its sound characteristics are realised as intended in relation to the surrounding sounds within the speech sequence. In this regard, the speaker should be able to produce the sounds of their language correctly by activating and engaging the speech organs so that they perform their functions according to the conventions and controls that govern specific language sounds¹⁸.

This can only be achieved through the soundness of the speech apparatus in two respects: first, freedom from articulatory defects, and second, freedom from performance defects. Articulatory defects are understood as organic impairments that affect the speech apparatus and prevent the speaker from producing certain sounds at their correct articulation points or achieving the expected sound qualities. 'Speech is the ability to pronounce words clearly and intelligibly. Examples of speech disorders include stuttering and lisping, which can cause embarrassment, withdrawal and shyness.'¹⁹

These defects are particularly evident in Classical Arabic due to the precision of its articulation points and the specific qualities of its sounds. Any disruption to articulation or sound quality results in semantic ambiguity: a phonetic error can invert the meaning of a word completely. This is similar to lisping, where the tongue is placed between the teeth when pronouncing *sīn*; the sound may then resemble *thā*' or *shīn*. Thus, instead of saying '*sāra*', one might say '*thāra*', and instead of '*samara*', one might say '*thamara*'. The difference in meaning in such words is clear, and the negative impact on spoken communication is significant because it affects the semantic dimension directly.

b) The rhythmic (prosodic) dimension

This refers to the temporal and organised vocal structuring to which speech is subjected during spoken communication. It reflects the regular and deliberate use of elements of verbal structure. Consequently, it enhances the efficiency of conveying messages and facilitates communication, directing the listener's attention through its persuasive and aesthetic dimensions. This dimension is realised in spoken communication through several vocal elements, the most important of which are:

1) Stress:

Tammam Hassan defines and explains the mechanism of stress, stating:

'Sound, by which the transition occurs from one vocal layer to another, requires a certain amount of pressure on the diaphragm and the lungs, and the amount of breath needed to produce the sound increases accordingly.' When this extra amount is directed onto the vocal cords, the sound rises above the surrounding sounds; therefore, it appears with greater clarity. This relative clarity is called stress.²⁰

¹⁸- Kamal Basher, *The Art of Speech*, Dar Gharib for Publishing and Distribution, Cairo (no date), 2003, p. 176.

¹⁹- Radhi al-Waqfi, *Dyslexia: Learning Difficulties in Language*, 1st ed., Princess Tharwat College, 2008, p. 180.

²⁰- Tammam Hasan Omar, *Al-Bayan in the Marvels of the Qur'an*, 'Alam al-Kutub, Cairo (no date), 1993, p. 262.

Stress is not merely an increase in pitch or voice intensity. Rather, it is a highly significant functional and persuasive semantic tool in spoken communication. It is a fundamental key to determining semantic focus and preventing ambiguity, as it directs the listener's attention to the most important word in the speech sequence. Just as punctuation marks in writing help us to understand the relationships between words, stress fulfils a comparable role in spoken communication. This is because, for example, the speaker may intend to separate two ideas or clarify the end of a sentence by using falling intonation or slight emphasis on the final word before pausing — thereby signalling to the listener that the speech has concluded, much as a full stop does in writing²¹.

Stress is one of the key factors in developing spoken communication skills. It is connected to the speaker's psychological state, the circumstances in which the speech is delivered and the communicative goal that the speaker intends to convey, such as emphasis or emotion. Therefore, it is used to differentiate meanings or forms by changing its position. Stress is thus a semantic-rhythmic foundation that enables speakers to control rhetorical rhythm, resolve syntactic ambiguities and enhance the effectiveness of communication.

2) Intonation

Intonation refers to 'the successive, orderly patterns of vocal pitch levels across a whole sentence or consecutive portions of it'²². It is associated with the sentence as a whole, or with parts of the sentence, rather than with different isolated words. In this sense, it differs from stress, which generally applies to parts of the sentence and focuses on words and sounds. In contrast, intonation concerns the broader organisation of the sentence as a whole. This makes intonation particularly important in spoken communication because it helps to determine the main structural patterns of the sentence and distinguish between them vocally, thereby guiding the overall meaning of the utterance.

Accordingly, it enables the listener to distinguish between declarative (informative) and non-declarative (requests/creations) functions, as well as between different types of non-declarative speech in different contexts. Intonation also establishes the boundaries of grammatical units, such as the separation of main clauses from subordinate or parenthetical clauses. Most importantly, intonation reveals the speaker's psychological and emotional state, expressing affective stances such as sadness, regret and joy. Through intonation, the listener can tell whether the speaker has finished their statement and completed their idea, as indicated by a softening or reduction in vocal intensity, or whether the speaker is continuing the discussion, as indicated by uninterrupted rising intonation²³.

²¹- See: Atiya Souleiman Ahmad, 'Suprasegmental units in the Qur'an: the segment/part, stress and intonation' (Surat al-Waqi'ah as a model), Modern Academic Academy for University Books, Cairo, Egypt (no date), p. 50.

²²- Houssein al-Bahnasaoui, *Phonetic Studies by Arab Scholars and the Modern Phonetic Lesson*, Dar Zahra' al-Sharq, Cairo, Egypt (n.d.), 2005, p. 234.

²³- Claude Hagège, *The Structure of Languages*, trans. Ahmad Haji Safar, Arab Translation Organisation, 1st edition, 2016, p. 49.

Intonation ‘contributes to reducing the gap between the vast diversity of meanings and the scarcity of formal graphic media used to express them’. This is why spoken communication is more suggestive and expressive of intentions than written communication. Saying the phrase ‘the sky is rainy’ in an admiring context differs from saying it in a reporting context, and also from saying it in an interrogative or astonished context. It is the performative vocal tone that accompanies the speech which differentiates meanings, clarifies implications and reveals the speaker’s intended purpose. In writing, this is only shown through punctuation marks. While punctuation can indicate whether a statement is exclamatory, interrogative, satirical or reproachful, it cannot convey intensity, which is why spoken communication is more effective: intonation is a direct, rhythmic interaction with the listener.

2.2 The morphological and syntactic foundation:

Syntax involves arranging words to form meaningful sentences and determining the grammatical inflection of word endings according to their position. This level is one of the most important foundations of spoken communicative competence and cannot be discussed in isolation. Knowledge of syntactic rules enables the correct use of word endings and sentence formation, protecting both speech and writing from errors. Semantic functions are thus defined, and ambiguity between speaker and listener is reduced or eliminated.

Furthermore, syntax provides speakers with linking devices that ensure discourse flows smoothly and coherently. This is reflected in the listener’s understanding and continued engagement in the conversation, as they accurately grasp references and their points of reference²⁴.

Morphology (the study of word structure) is concerned with the internal structure of words, their derivation and how their forms vary according to meaning and circumstance. Morphological competence ensures the correct formation of words. Classical Arabic is a particularly derivational language: the more proficient a speaker becomes in understanding the mechanisms of morphological derivation, the easier it is for them to quickly find and use the right words effectively. This enables speakers to generate hundreds of related words from a single root, giving them great flexibility in choosing precise wording while avoiding pauses of hesitation and the need to search for the right word.

2.3 The lexical and semantic foundation:

The lexical foundation is the core upon which spoken communicative competence is built. It contains the speaker’s stock of words, terms and roots — the resources they use to express and shape their ideas into verbal forms. While syntactic and morphological rules govern the ‘engineering’ of discourse, the lexicon provides it with lexical fluidity. This ensures expressiveness and enables speakers to use the correct terms for things and adapt words to different situations.

²⁴- Ibrahim Khalid Ibrahim, ‘Cognitive Integration Between Linguistic and Communicative Competencies in Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers: An Analytical Study’, Second International Conference on Cognitive Integration and Experience in the Social Sciences, Istanbul University, 2019, p. 693.

As has been noted, ‘human beings have a highly efficient capacity to process the immense quantity of lexical units when performing linguistic production and reception processes’. This capacity operates within a measurable time frame of hundreds of milliseconds. It enables a person to store lexical information in their mental lexicon and access it by either retrieving it in full or using it to construct other components according to specific mechanisms. This capability enables speakers to move smoothly across different levels of spoken communication, whether in argumentation, dialogue, description, narration or other discourse types.

Moreover, the organised and precise vocabulary in the speaker’s mind helps them to recall the semantic fields associated with the topic of conversation. This is reflected in their spoken output in real communication situations. Stephen Ullmann emphasises this when he states: ‘There is a mutual relationship between word form and meaning: it is not only the word that calls forth the referent, but the meaning can also call forth the word. When I think of ‘a table’, for example, I will pronounce the word that denotes it, and when I hear that word, it makes me think of the table”²⁵.

Spoken communicative competence necessarily entails a need for the semantic level due to the need for the lexical component. Words are vessels of meaning and speakers do not merely retrieve the correct lexical unit, but activate semantic fields to embed words within networks of meaning. In this way, speakers move from possessing lexical items to generating and constructing meanings in a manner consistent with various communication contexts.

There is no doubt that discussing meaning (semantics) involves more than just word-level meaning; it also covers the meaning of structures and larger units. Meaning is ‘the outcome of the semantic interaction between the meanings of words, and the syntax that the speaker establishes among them’²⁶.

Consequently, speakers must possess sufficient competence in sentence patterns, such as conditionals, exclamations and questions²⁷. Understanding syntactic meaning enables accurate control of grammatical case endings and the correct placement of words, allowing the listener to immediately grasp the intended meaning upon hearing the utterance.

Additionally, syntactic structures enable speakers of Classical Arabic to align their speech with the demands of the situation. This is reflected directly in the intonation and vocal patterns during oral performance. Consequently, spoken discourse shifts from a purely syntactic (grammatical) level, which is subject to formal syntactic laws, to a fluent, flexible and smooth performance that is suited to different communicative contexts without violating the controls of Classical Arabic that we discussed earlier.

²⁵- Ammar Bashiri, ‘Lexical Access in the Production of Oral Language in Modern Neurolinguistics’, University Centre Abd al-Hafid Boulsawf, Mila, Algeria, Vol. 9, No. 1, January 2025, p. 388.

²⁶- Stephen Ullmann, *The Role of the Word in Language*, trans. Kamal Busher, Maktabat al-Shabab al-Munira, Cairo, 1982, p. 64.

²⁷- Mahmoud Akasha, *Linguistic Analysis in Light of Semantics Science: A Study in Phonetic, Morphological, Syntactic and Lexical Semantics*, Dar al-Nashr lil-Jami‘at, 2nd edition, Cairo, 1423 AH/2011 CE, p. 123.

2.4 The pragmatic foundation:

The pragmatic foundation is the final stage in establishing the linguistic basis of spoken communication competence. While the previous foundations focus on developing an internal linguistic system and generating meanings, the pragmatic foundation brings language into the realm of actual use and the external context in which speech is produced. Pragmatics is ‘a general inferential cognitive framework that treats utterances within their enunciative (speech-producing) contexts and discourse within its communicative (interactional) conditions’²⁸.

This definition shifts spoken discourse from being merely a technique of interaction to a cognitive, knowledge-based mental space. Rather than being merely a dry linguistic invocation of language rules and mechanisms, it involves mental inferential processes through which the interlocutor infers the speaker’s intended meaning beyond the utterance itself — an utterance whose meaning is renewed as the context of enunciation changes.

This pragmatic dimension is manifested in cultivated (Classical) spoken communication through several indicators, the most important of which are:

2.4.1 Intentionality (Purposiveness):

This refers to the underlying purpose behind an utterance, or the hidden aim that prompts the speaker to direct their speech towards a specific goal. The listener must recognise and interpret this purpose in order for communication to be successful. Therefore, it is necessary to link human linguistic activity to psychological activity — that is, to the speaker’s intended aim. As stated: ‘For communication to occur, utterances must have meaning “for” a specific purpose. In other words, the speaker must intend to convey a particular thing.’²⁹

Thus, intentionality determines the goal of speech. Specifying this goal enables the speaker to select precise lexical items and syntactic structures, ensuring that the intended meaning is conveyed to the listener without ambiguity. Consequently, spoken communication is not merely the repetition of meaningful sentences; it is a living use of language that serves a specific communicative function, which the speaker seeks to achieve with the listener.

The principle of intentionality is used to achieve appropriateness in context. Speakers adapt their spoken discourse according to the situation of their audience, which determines the degree of brevity and elaboration in their speech, as well as the type of discourse that is suitable for their audience’s context. Intentionality also directs non-linguistic signs, whether auditory, such as stress and intonation, or non-auditory, such as bodily gestures. Therefore, meaning does not rely solely on grammatical inflection and precise lexical items, but also requires proper guidance of intonation, voice stress and meaningful pauses. Coherence between bodily performance and spoken utterances is also required, since bodily movement is one of the most important factors in conveying the

²⁸- Masaoud Sahraoui, *On the Conceptual Apparatus of the Contemporary Pragmatic Lesson: Pragmatics as the Science of Language Use*, presented by Hafiz Ismail Alawi, 2nd ed., Alam al-Kutub al-Hadith, Irbid, Jordan, 2014, p. 32.

²⁹- Jacques Moeschler and Anne Reboul, *Dictionnaire encyclopédique de pragmatique*, Éd. Le Seuil, Paris, p. 67.

intended meaning of speech. Sometimes, bodily movement can convey meanings that contradict the words themselves³⁰.

It should also be noted that the intentional speaker does not merely deliver the speech, but must also observe the listener's responses through facial expressions or questions, adjusting their intention or changing their style as necessary during the exchange. This enables the speaker to correct mistakes and ambiguity by rephrasing the speech to serve the communicative purpose.

2.4.2 The Cooperative Principle

Grice argues that the process of communication is fundamentally governed by a general principle: the cooperative principle of conversation. According to Grice, any shared conversation must be respected by its participants, who must contribute in a rational and varied manner to facilitate the interpretation of utterances³¹. Grice further explains that this principle is based on four maxims derived from it, which interlocutors must observe:³²

The maxim of quantity: It requires the speaker to contribute an amount of information that is necessary in the given context and no more.

The Maxim of Quality assumes the speaker's sincerity and truthfulness, as well as their possession of adequate grounds and arguments to support their claims.

- The Maxim of Relation: It requires the conversation to remain relevant to the subject matter — i.e. that it relate to what the speaker has said previously and to what others have said.

- The Maxim of Manner: It means expressing oneself clearly and smoothly, without ambiguity or obscurity.

Through these maxims, the cooperative principle effectively contributes to achieving mutual understanding between speaker and listener. Each party should therefore make an effort to ensure the success of the communication process. However, speakers may violate these maxims to create implicit meanings, for example by using rhetorical devices such as allusion, insinuation and metaphor. This reflects the speaker's communicative competence and their deep understanding of rhetoric and style, particularly when they move beyond literal meanings towards contextual and pragmatic meanings that are appropriate to the situation and circumstances.

It is also worth noting that the cooperative principle in eloquent performance reduces the listener's misinterpretation of utterances, which often arises from the difficulty of some classical vocabulary. Thus, clarity and appropriateness narrow the gap between classical Arabic and the level of the recipient.

2.4.3 Conversational implicature

This refers to the implicit meaning that the listener infers, which goes beyond the literal meaning of what is said. In other words, it is the intended meaning that is not stated explicitly. As the saying

³⁰- Hamdan Redwan Abu Asi, *Utterance-Associated Performances and Their Effect on Meaning*, p. 84.

³¹- Anne Reboul and Jacques Moeschler, *Pragmatics Today: A New Science of Communication*, trans. Sayf al-Din Dagfous and Muhammad al-Shaybani. Dar al-Tali'a for Printing and Publishing. 1st edition. Beirut, Lebanon. 2003. p. 55.

³²- See the same reference, pp. 55–56.

goes, ‘People may say what they mean, they may mean more than they say, and they may mean the opposite of what they say.’³³ Clearly, ‘what is said’ refers to the verbal value of words and expressions, whereas ‘what is meant’ refers to what the speaker wants the listener to understand indirectly, based on the assumption that the listener can grasp the speaker’s intention through the conventions of use and inferential devices available to them³⁴.

Conversational implicature thus meets the cooperative principle: for the speaker to succeed in conveying meaning to the listener, they must base their communication on the assumption that the cooperative principle and its maxims are operative between them. If the speaker appears to violate one of these maxims, the listener will rationally infer an underlying conversational implicature that the speaker intends to convey through this breach. Thus, the cooperative principle constitutes the general logic of interaction, while conversational implicature is the meaning that results from adhering to, or failing to adhere to, that logic.

Conversational implicature enables participants in the communication process — the speaker and listener — to grasp the intended meaning beyond what is actually said. When one party uses allusion or insinuation, the ability to infer the hidden meaning reflects a high level of maturity in oral competence, as well as a precise understanding of the rules of linguistic usage and its contextual indicators. Furthermore, speakers must be trained to violate some of the maxims of the cooperative principle in order to generate meanings that listeners can understand, particularly in forms of discourse such as dialogue and disputation.

2.4.3 Speech Acts

A speech act is defined as the “performance that the speaker brings about merely by uttering certain expressions”³⁵. Examples include commanding, forbidding, promising, questioning and designating, among others.

This definition is central to the theory established by its founders, J. Austin and John Searle. It assumes that language is an action rather than merely a statement. For example, when a speaker says ‘I promise to help you’ or ‘I order you to go out’, the utterance does not fall under the categories of truth or falsehood. Instead, it carries an institutional (performative) force that brings about an immediate change in the interactive reality between the interlocutors. If we apply this meaning to Arabic, the purposes, meanings and implications conveyed by Arabic communication formulas and expressions — such as the different styles, whether informative or performative (in the imperative/constructive sense) — constitute the theory of speech acts³⁶.

During oral communication, the speaker needs the ability to use language pragmatically, moving beyond the mere memorisation of linguistic patterns to produce utterances that reflect a deep

³³- Mahmoud Ahmad Nahla, *New Horizons in Contemporary Linguistic Research*, Dar al-Maarifa al-Jamiya (n.d.), 2002, p. 33.

³⁴- Ibid., p. 33.

³⁵- Masaoud Sahraoui, ‘Pragmatics among Arab Scholars: A Pragmatic Study of the Phenomenon of Speech Acts in the Arabic Linguistic Heritage’, *Dar al-Tali’a for Printing and Publishing*, 1st edition, Beirut, Lebanon, 2005, p. 10.

³⁶- Ibid., p. 10.

knowledge of how speech acts are carried out in order to achieve their intention and convey their message to the listener with true communicative purpose, without neglecting the contextual indicators surrounding the speech situation. For example, a request made in the form of a plea or advice has more impact than a strict command in contexts of preaching and invitation. Similarly, an explicit command is more forceful in situations involving motivation and encouragement. In this way, speech acts enable the speaker to move beyond merely describing things to actually producing an action that has an effect in reality. Without this ability, eloquent discourse remains theoretical and unable to achieve intended communication.

Conclusion:

Based on the preceding discussion, we can conclude that developing oral communicative competence in Classical Arabic is not simply a matter of rote or mechanical instruction. Rather, it is a complex linguistic process involving the close interweaving of the conceptual framework with structural and pragmatic operations. Linguistic analysis has revealed that effective oral communication in Classical Arabic necessitates an accurate understanding of its features, as well as an engagement with its performative aspects, such as immediacy, the duality of reception and production, and contextual and social appropriateness.

At the level of linguistic foundations, it has become clear that successful oral communication in Classical Arabic depends on integrating the levels of the language system. This begins with the phonetic dimension and progresses through the regularity of morphological and syntactic structures. It also encompasses the richness of the lexical repertoire, ultimately resulting in accurate meaning and proper understanding of the pragmatic rules that link utterances to their situational (rhetorical-contextual) settings. On this basis, we may propose the following:

In teaching Classical Arabic, the focus should shift from abstract grammatical rules to an interactive, pragmatic approach that uses oral communication as both the goal and the means of language acquisition.

It is essential to pay particular attention to prosodic and rhythmic dimensions in education and training programmes, as these are key to reviving the vitality of fluent classical Arabic conversation and reducing learners' sense of rigidity, artificiality or formality.

The functional Arabic lexical repertoire related to everyday communication should be expanded to challenge the stereotypical perception of Classical Arabic as confined to heritage or literary texts that are distant from lived reality.

- Classroom instruction should draw on realistic communicative situations and tasks, such as debates, dialogues and role-play, because these compel learners to apply linguistic foundations in genuine circumstances requiring immediacy and speed in both reception and production.

In summary, improving oral communicative competence in Classical Arabic requires moving beyond fragmented approaches and adopting a more comprehensive linguistic vision that integrates structural rules with pragmatic conditions. This opens up broader prospects for making Classical Arabic a living, effective language capable of genuine interactive use in everyday and educational practices.

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