
Assessment of Arabic Oral Proficiency

Mahdi Alish
The United State Military Academy

Background

- Attempts to address assessment problems:
- Modifying the OPI introduction (2004)
- Proposing the comprehensive model (2000)
- Revision of the Arabic Guidelines (1989)
- Testing the Standard and Colloquial varieties separately

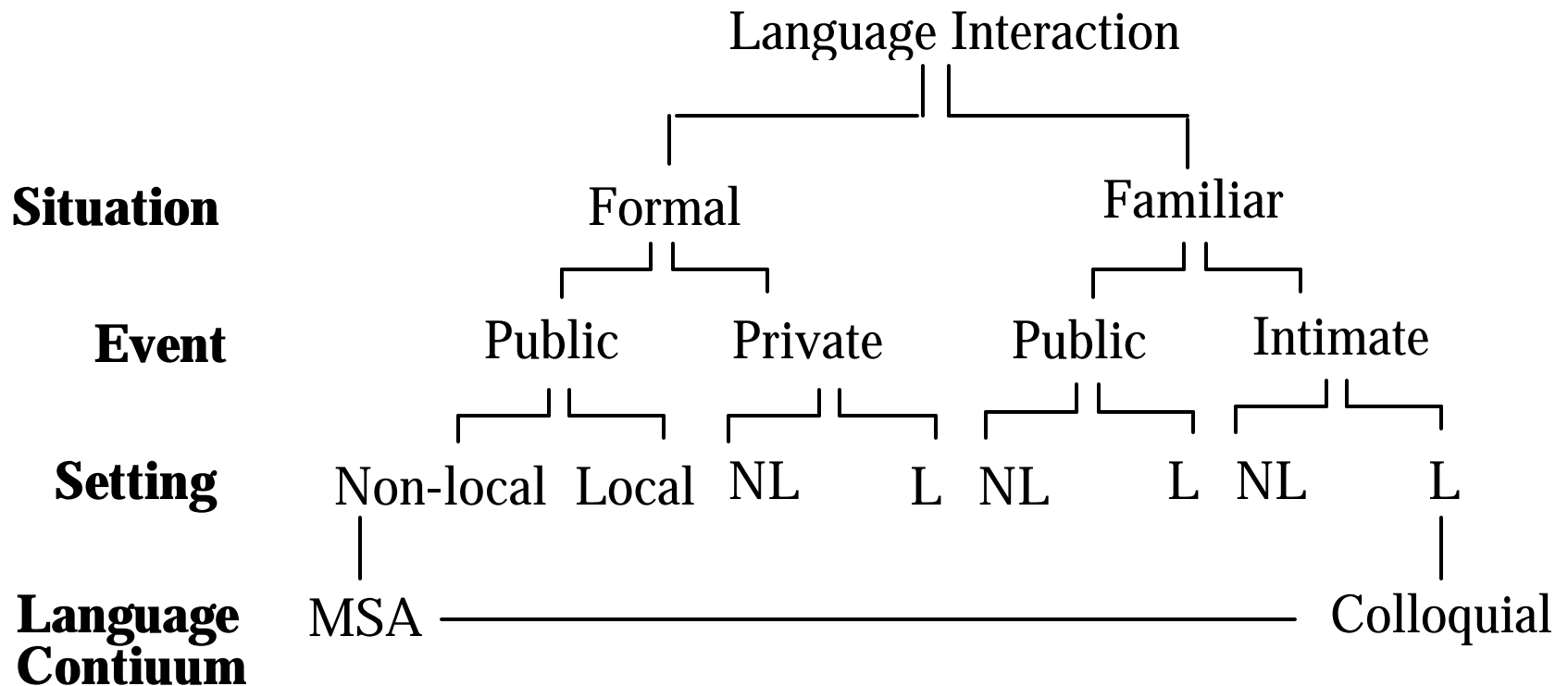
Demographic change in test takers

- Beginning learners intending to study abroad
- Returning intermediate and beginning learners
- Advanced and Superior learners to study abroad
- Government employees with varying levels of proficiency
- American professionals
- Heritage speakers: two types
- Educated Arabic native speakers

Testing the dialects of Arabic

- A flawed approach
- Implies that proficiency is divisible
- Violates the Arabic diglossic model
- Has a problem in construct validity
- Robs Arabic of its main characteristic
- A test of Appalachian English?
- Problem in rating

A Conceptual Framework for Spoken Arabic



Current problem

- Need to obtain a rating that reflects the examinee's true ability in Arabic:
- Ability to perform along the language continuum
- Sensitivity to the dialect/standard distinction
- Sensitivity to register
- Degree of control in each variety

Two Testing Models

- The consecutive model (flawed)
- The interface (sociolinguistic) model. It has...
- A similar structure to the OPI
- Planned integration of situations that call for the use of MSA and CA (test format)
- OPI as a formal setting (use MSA)

Elicitation

- Five phases as in the OPI
- Multiple role-play situations at predictable intervals
- Select appropriate RPs for MSA and CA
- Examinee's performance determines type of situation to be selected.

Oral Proficiency Test Format

(Note: Multiple occurrences of Global Tasks and Role-Plays)

1	1+	2	2+	3	3+	4-5
WU	WU	WU	WU	WU	WU	WU
GT1	GT2	GT2	GT2	GT3	GT3	GT4
RP1	RP2	RP2	RP2	RP3	RP3	RP4
GT1	GT2	GT2	GT2	GT3	GT4	GT4
RP1	RP1	RP2	RP3	RP4	RP4	RP4
WD	GT2	GT3	GT2	GT3	GT4	GT4
	RP1	RP2	RP3	RP3	RP4	RP4
	WD	WD	WD	WD	WD	WD

Rating

- Same assessment criteria for MSA and CA
- Degree of control of each variety
- Evaluating understanding and speaking
- Unitary versus dual score

Unitary Versus Dual Scores

Interviewee	Unitary Score	Dual Score	
		MSA	CA
A	5	0+	2+
B	4+	4+	5
C	3+	3+	4
D	2	2	0