



# LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT BY USING GRIDS

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## Abstract:

This present paper is an attempt to explore the potential of using information grids for testing English as a foreign language. The student has to process and evaluate each information piece presented in boxes to judge whether it serves as the correct answer or not. Trial assessment has been carried out to investigate empirically the hypothesis adopted in this study that grid assessment yields more elaborated and accurate data than the current techniques like multiple choice and short-answer questions. The results indicate that the difference between the means of the scores on the two tests is significant in favour of grid questions. The criterion-grid assessment correlation yields a high validity coefficient of 0.789, and the criterion-current assessment correlation is 0.634. Reliability coefficient of the grid questions is 0.847 and that of the current ones is 0.775. In the light of the findings, grid questions are recommended for testing grammar

## ملخص البحث

يهدف البحث الموسوم (التقييم بطريقة مربعات المعلومات) الى عرض امكانية استخدام هذه الطريقة في اختبارات اللغة الانكليزية، حيث يقوم الممتحن بتقييم كل معلومة داخل مربع ويقرر اذا كانت صحيحة او خطأ. جرى تقييم عملي وقورنت النتائج بين هذه الطريقة والطرق الحالية المعتمدة في الأختبارات فانشرت النتائج الى تفوق هذه الطريقة على الطرق التقليدية لكون نتائجها اكثر ثباتا و مصداقية عند مقارنة معاملاتهما.

## 1.1 Introduction



This paper intends to explore the potential of using information grids for testing ELF in general, and English grammar in particular. The main purpose behind exploring this new testing technique is to reveal its potential as a new technique in testing.

It is true that many language teachers and specialists express a deep mistrust of language tests and testers in schools. This mistrust is frequently well-founded. It cannot be denied that a great deal of language testing is of very poor quality and are not long enough to provide a generous sampling of the area or areas tested. They are also criticized for assessing recognition and recall rather than reasoning, thinking or problem solving. Too often language tests have a harmful effect on teaching and learning; and too often they fail to measure accurately whatever it is they are intended to measure. The following test items taken from primary and intermediate Ministerial examinations for the year 2005 exemplify this problem.

### **Primary, 2005**

A-Write the number of the item and the letter of the correct answer.

- 1- What ... her name? (a-'s b-do c-'m d-'re)
- 2- Do you want these apples? No, I don't want...(a-it b-him c-them d-you)

### **Intermediate, 2005**

Write the number of the item and the correct choice

- 1- The letters ...yesterday. (types , was types , are typed , were typed)
- 2- I know the man ... painted this picture. (whom , whose , what , who)

As an alternative, this study intends to introduce the idea of testing as problem solving by using a new technique named 'grid'. The researcher has been exploring the potential of using information grids for testing grammar in a variety of ways and for

different levels. The basic idea of using this technique came originally from Egan (1972) who used it for testing chemistry.

The hypothesis adopted in this study is that grid assessment yields more elaborated and accurate data than the current approaches in connection with the learners' linguistic and communicative competence.

The main objectives behind exploring this new testing technique are

- to reveal its potential as a new technique in testing,
- to discourage the use of inappropriate testing techniques, and
- to recommend it as a new technique for testing language if it verifies the hypothesis.

The significance of carrying out this study is to acquaint teachers of English with recent techniques in the field of testing

## 1.2 Definition of Grids

The dictionary meaning of grid is 'network of squares numbered for reference', (Hornby, 1979:385). Figure (1) shows this. The students are required to communicate their understanding of the material presented in the boxes and respond by selecting the boxes they think are appropriate to their answers and presenting them as a number or sets of numbers. In some questions the order in which the numbers are presented may also be important. Hence, the name 'structural communication' is used for this form of testing (Johnstone, 1988).

1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12

Figure 1

## 1.3 Basic structure (The size of the grid)

The appropriate size of the grid, Egan (1972) recommends, is related to the age of the student using it. For intermediate level students, a grid with twelve boxes (4 x 3 or 3 x 4) is sufficient.

For upper intermediate a sixteen-box grid is quite appropriate. The largest grid used contained twenty boxes, and this can be used with advanced students.

A study by Gallacher (1984) has shown that results from grids are reliable even when the grids are presented in various orientations (e.g. 3 x 4 or 4 x 3) and when the information is arranged in a variety of ways across the grids. Generally, the researcher has adopted the grid of twelve boxes (3x4) and (4x3) as shown in Figure 2. Grids with nine, fifteen, and sixteen boxes are also used when appropriate to the material being examined.

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9
10	11	12

Figure 2

#### 1.4 The responses and their significance

When the students are asked to select the boxes which are appropriate to their answers of the questions given and present them as sets of numbers, they will actually present a mine of information to the examiner about their knowledge. The examiner will see what student has got the answers correct by choosing the right boxes and what student has chosen them wrongly. In fact, the students are communicating their understanding of the material being tested. That is why the term structural communication is used for this technique of testing.

The potential of this form of testing can be summarized, in Johnstone's view (1988:36), as follows:

- The student's wrong choices included will give immediate diagnostic information to the teacher.
- The student's correct ones omitted will also lead to a powerful use of this technique, i.e., backwash effect on learning and teaching.



- Students may be able to present an answer at several levels of sophistication.
- An answer, correct as far as it goes, may still be incomplete or naïve
- Another answer may contain more pieces exhibiting a higher level of understanding and thus having a discrimination power. This may find a use in assessment which is attempting to generate grades.
- The one grid may be used with a group of students of a range of ability to reveal a series of levels of answer related to course objectives of varying complexity.

### 1.5 Marking Grid questions

It is common that in the examination at present, the number of marks appropriate to each sub-question is indicated. If this were to be done in grid questions, it would indicate the number of boxes to be chosen and so would detract from one of the strengths of this kind of testing. Since a set of questions can be posed on one grid as indicated in the examples below, a global mark for the whole set would be appropriate, but no indication of the weighting of each sub-question would be given.

The response is a number, or a set of numbers, or a sequence of numbers, which can be marked objectively. It has been suggested by Johnstone (1988:37) that the most meaningful score is obtained from the following formula:

The number of correct  
responses chosen

the number of incorrect  
responses chosen



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The total number of  
correct responses

the total number of  
incorrect responses

This formula can be handled by computer or manually from a table. The score would range from +1 through 0 to -1 and could be multiplied by any factor to reflect the importance of the item. The researcher, however, believes that this formula is not quite easy to use by teachers and college instructors for the very simple reason computers are not quite available at present for them. The other alternative, assigning marks to each grid would be more convenient for the time being.

### **1.6 Differences between grid questions and Multiple-choice questions**

There are several techniques used in testing students' knowledge in grammar. These include multiple choice, completion, transformation, error recognition and rearrangement. Some of these are objectively marked, whereas the others are marked semi-objectively. To these techniques, the researcher would like to add grid questions.

Beginning, there is a sharp distinction between the grid technique and multiple choice one (MC). The students, in MC questions, know that one out of four or five options must be correct and a guessing game may be appropriate. Guessing does not enter into grid assessment because the student does not know how many boxes are correct and in which sequence they are required to provide an answer. Moreover, the student has to communicate his understanding of every box in order to decide whether it is correct or not.

In addition, this testing technique has the advantages of objective questions since the answers are predetermined. It is easy to mark. It has validity and reliability. It can be set for any level of difficulty as shown in this study. Moreover, cheating is not



easy. The other distinctive difference is that in a multiple choice test, each item tests one structural point or area which is never sufficient to assess students' knowledge of that particular area. In a grid question, the contents of 12 or 16 boxes exhibit a wide range of sentence structures. Each box should be considered in response to a question and the student decides which constitutes the correct answer.

A suggested answer is provided.

When a grid question is compared to other techniques like a completion question or gap filling, and the like, it could easily be seen that the amount of material to be tested in this technique is much more than that in those two types. In addition, the range of difficulty in the grid questions is much more than that in the above mentioned techniques. The student is required to communicate his understanding of the information randomly distributed in the boxes to get to the right answer. Consequently, instead of asking the student to compose one answer or complete a sentence, the answer is broken into its sub ideas and scattered randomly across the grid. Error recognition which is a common testing technique in grammar is actually implemented in the grid question since the examinee has to choose the right boxes and leave out the erroneous ones.

To sum up, it may be said that the great samples of student's performance in this grid technique makes it fruitful for diagnostic testing and for assessing their progress. In other words, they are most suitable for formative testing to check the learners' control of certain specific structural points which have been taught recently.

## **2.1 Testing grammar**

Beginning, this study is devoted and limited to testing grammar, a subject that no doubt has recently come back into prominence. A number of new books about grammar have been published around



the world. But why is grammar once more attracting the attention of the language teaching and testing world? Hutchinson (1987:2) points out "Modern views on learning seem to indicate that systems help people to learn. And the system of a language, of course, is its grammar. The grammatical system provides a framework on which learners can build their knowledge of the new language. A knowledge of grammatical patterns and rules can also help learners to feel more secure and thus more able to adopt strategies, such as risk-taking, which will make them better language learners."

Yes, grammar is back, but today's grammar has much altered and improved. Grammar is now a much broader and less dogmatic concept. The techniques used in testing grammar have also altered. At one time, multiple-choice tests were prominent, and then error recognition and cloze tests were adopted in many standardized tests. In this paper a new tool of testing grammar is applied. This is the tool of 'structural communication grid'.

## **2.2 Methods of use**

This section indicates a number of possible ways of using these grids for testing grammar and sentence structure including synthesis, analysis, identifying sentence or verb patterns, paraphrasing, categorization, rearrangement. There are, of course, many other structural points that can be tested by using grids. The following examples have been chosen to reveal some of the applications of this testing technique. The target audience for the examples of questions given is undergraduate students who are studying English as a foreign language and the material presented covers the grammar syllabuses of the third and fourth years of the colleges of education in Iraq, department of English. The book used is A University Grammar of English (1973) by Randolph Quirk and Sidney Greenbaum. Knowledge about the language is as essential to those students as knowledge of the language itself



for explanations, justifications, and corrections of their pupils' errors.

### 2.2.1 Testing the ability to synthesize

To synthesize is to combine two or more clauses to form a sentence beyond simple, i.e., compound or complex, by means of conjunctions, which are of two main types:

(1) co-ordinating conjunctions like: and, but, or, etc. and

(2) subordinating conjunctions like: when, while, if, after, etc.

The following examples show how this ability may be tested by means of several and different subordinators when a pair of sentences is to be combined to form a single sentence containing, for instance, an adverbial clause of concession in the first or of purpose in the second.

What is more remarkable here, sentences may be synthesized by the use of different connectors, yet they keep the original meaning, a point which is still vague to many students. In fact they sometimes fail to map their comprehension as they are used to give one answer for a question. Hence, this question goes hand in hand with the new way of looking at transforming sentences from one structure to another by writing a given sentence in different ways while retaining as nearly as possible the same meaning. This exercise is sometimes called 'Putting it Another Way', Archer and Woods (1977: 183).

### Question 1

No goals were scored, though it was an exciting game. 1	However no goals were scored, the game was exciting. 2	Even if no goals were scored, it was still an exciting game. 3
--	---	---



Although it was an exciting game, no goals were scored. 4	It was an exciting game for no goals were scores. 5	Although no goals were scored, it was an exciting game. 6
However it was an exciting game no goals were scored. 7	However exciting the game was, no goals were scored. 8	Although no goals were scored but it was an exciting game. 9
<b>It was an exciting game. No goals were scored.</b> 10	It was an exciting game but no goals were scored. 11	No goals were scored; however, it was an exciting game. 12

- A. Which of the boxes contain the correct combination of the sentences in box 10? (1,3,4,6,8,11,12)
- B. Which boxes contain the correct usage of subordinators as conjunctions? (1,3,4,6,8)
- C. Which boxes have the correct usage of coordinators as conjunctions? (11,12)
- D. Which sentence structure is exactly the same as that in box1? (4)

### Notes on this grid

- Note that boxes are used several times to answer different questions. This has of course powerful diagnostic potential.
- The first question tests the ability to synthesize a pair of sentences which can be accomplished by using subordinators as well as coordinators to imply a contrast between two circumstances.
- Question A could be answered at various levels of complexity, for example the answers (1,3,4,6) would be rather right. better answer would be (1,3,4,6,8,11,12). If in response to (A) students include boxes (1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 11 and 12), they are revealing their ability to comprehend different ways of combining the same pair of sentences with subordinators and coordinators.



- In box (6) the combination is correct though the subordinator although has moved from the first clause to the second. The meaning is still correct. If the students include 6 in response to (A), they are revealing their ability to interpret sentences when the main and the dependent clause are exchanging or replacing each other.
- Box (8) contains the subordinator however which is usually followed immediately by an adjective or adverb. Hence it differs from however, the coordinating conjunction in box (12). This is an interesting point and getting it correctly exhibit a higher level of understanding.
- If students in response to (A) include boxes 2 and 7, they are revealing their ignorance of the previous point, i.e., not distinguishing between however as a subordinating conjunction or a coordinating conjunction.
- If they include in response to question (A) the box 9, they are using although and but in one sentence. Quirk et al (1973:324) state that although as a subordinator is the approximate equivalent of but as a coordinator as seen in boxes 4 and 11 and so one of them will be used to show contrast.
- Questions (B) and (C) test the students' ability to differentiate between subordinators and coordinators. If they include box 4, they are revealing their ignorance of meaning of the coordinator for, which suggests reason for doing an action, and which is not relevant here.

### 2.2.2 Testing the ability to paraphrase

Paraphrasing is giving a restatement of the meaning of a text in other words (Hornby, 179:618). This activity is badly needed by students when they are asked to explain or to make clear the meaning of a text. An advanced area in grammar usage is the expressions of necessity, obligation, advisability and the like



which have various forms. The following question exemplifies this.

### Question 2

We mustn't water the plants again. 1	We needn't water these plants again 2	We shouldn't water the plants again. 3
We ought not to water the. plants again. 4	We don't need to water the. plants again. 5	We had better not water the plants again. 6
We don't have to water plants again. 7	We are not to water plants again. 8	We haven't got to water plants again 9

- A. Which of the boxes show that it is unnecessary for us to water the plants again? 2,5,7,9
- B. Which of the boxes show it would be advisable for us NOT to water the plants again? 3,4,6
- C. Which of the boxes show that it is necessary NOT to water the plants again? 1, 8

### 2.2.3 Testing the ability to identify patterns

Another area of importance to college students is clause patterns. An English sentence may alternatively be seen as comprising five units called elements of sentence or clause structure (Quirk, et al., 1973:12) These elements are: Subject, Verb, Complement, Object, and Adverbial, abbreviated as S, V, C, O, A. The questions below assess the student's control of the clause types of the sentences given in the boxes.

### Question 3.3



Someone must be wrong. 1	Keep out of sight 2	She is putting the teapot on the table. 3	A lot of people are getting promotion. 4
Was anyone around? 5	To make a fool of yourself is a pity. 6	The twin told their mother all their secrets. 7	They are such delightful children. 8
To hear you say that surprise me 9	Here is the milkman. 10	A way went the car. 11	He threw himself from the horse. 12
Would you mind bringing me a towel? 13	Something is causing her distress. 14	I have always lived in the country 15	He has proved himself a great soldier. 16

- A. Which boxes have the clause type SVA?
- B. Which boxes have the clause type SVO?
- C. In which boxes do we have the clause type SVOO?
- D. Which boxes have the clause type SVC
- E. Which boxes have the clause AVS?
- F. The clause type SVOA is found in boxes...
- G. Stative and intensive verbs are found in boxes....

### 2.3 The grammar questions given in the Ministerial Examinations and alternative grid questions .

#### 2.3.1 The Primary stage, 2005

The grammar question which carries No 2 in the question paper is as follows:

**Q 2) A Write the number of item and the letter of the correct choice. Answer 5.**

- 1.- What ...her name? Muna. (a- 's b-do c-'m d-'re)
- 2- Do you want these apples? No, I don't want...(a-it b-him c-them d-you)



- 3- ...book is this? It's Layla's. (a-What b-Whose c-Which d-Who)  
 4- How ...are you? I'm twelve. (a- much b-many c-old d-age)  
 5- Do you like fish? Yes, I .... (a-don't b-like c-do d-don't like)  
 6- ...the time? It's eight o'clock. (a-When's b-What's c-Where's  
 d-How is)

**B- Write the number of the item and the letter of the correct choice. (Answer 5 only)**

- 1-These bags are ours. Please put...on the table. (a-they b-it c-them d-their)  
 2- This pen is mine. Where is ...? (a-yours b-you c-yours d-her)  
 3- What...your address? (a-are b-does c-do d-is)  
 4- What ...she want? (a-do b-is c-does d-are)  
 5- ... do you live? (a-What b-Where c-Who d-How)  
 6- Where ... Nada yesterday? (a-is b-were c-was d-does)

**Comments on the Items of the Question**

A preliminary step towards discussing this question is to pin down the contents of the two sub-questions and the occurrence of the areas tested. Table (2) shows the grammatical areas of the question with the number of their occurrence in these two sub-questions and the total number.

Area No.	Areas	No. of occurrence in question 2/A	No. of occurrence in question 2/ B	Total
	Verb be	1	2	3
	Verb do	1	1	2
	Question	3	1	4
	words	1	1	3
	Pronouns		2	
Total	4	6	6	12

**Table 2: The Areas of Grammar tested in Question 2**

- The first point of concern here is the unnecessary division of this question into two sub-questions since the items are testing exactly the same areas.



- The second point is that there are crucial grammatical areas in Book 2 that this question has neglected, for example :
  1. the auxiliary verb can
  2. the present continuous tense
  3. the future tense with 'going to'
  4. the time adverbs like: ago, next week
  5. adverbs of frequency like : always, sometimes, usually ,never
  6. prepositions like: under, on, in
- The technique used in testing these points is multiple choice items though the Pupil's Book gives exercises in completion technique (pages 5, 30,41, 92), short-answer questions (page 17) , matching (page 36).

The alternative type to the multiple choice question given in this exam could be grid questions. The following samples exemplify this technique and are all based on the material presented in Book.

### Grid 1

Finding answers to questions

36 High Street 1	No, it isn't 2	14 Al-Kindi Street 3
Muna is twelve 4	They're Layla's 5	He's an engineer 6
12:20 7	He's a reporter 8	She's 12 years old 9
They are mine 10	Yes, thank you 11	It's nine thirty 12

**Which boxes answer the following questions:**

1. How old is Muna? ( 4 , 9 )
2. What's the time? (7 , 12)
3. Whose keys are these? (5 ,10)
4. What does your father do? (6, 8 )
5. Is this your pen? (2 , 11)
6. What's your address? (1, 3)

### Grid 2

Completing sentences with verb 'be' or 'do'

is	Do	Are
----	----	-----



When ---your birthday? 1	How much ---you need? 2	Ali and Omer --- friends. 3
How---you do? 4	Mrs. Huda---our English Teacher. 5	What--- your father? 6
--- you like bananas? 7	These --- Mr. and Mrs. Brown. 8	They--not speak English 9
He --- never late. 10	---- not sit on the floor? 11	How----- you? 12

1. Which boxes need 'do'? 2, 4, 7, 9, 11,
2. Which boxes need 'is'? 1, 6, 10
3. Which boxes require 'are'? 3, 5, 8, 12

### 2.3.2 The Intermediate stage, 2005

The grammar question in the Ministerial examination for intermediate stage is as follows

#### Q 2) A- Write the number of the item and the correct choice.

Choose FIVE (10 Marks)

- 1- The letters ----yesterday. (typed, was typed, are typed, were typed)
- 2- He is running fast ---- he can catch the bus. (so, as well, so that, and)
- 3- You cannot pass the exam----you study hard.(unless, if, because, therefore)
- 4- If I had time, I --- him. ( will help, would help, would have helped, help)
- 5- I think it's difficult ---- a bus. (drives, drove, to drive, drive)
- 6- I'd like to ----Adnan. (meets, meet, met, will meet)

#### B- Write the number of the item and the correct choice. Choose FIVE only.(10marks)



- 1-Zeki helped the blind man----the street. (crosses, cross, crossed, had crossed)
- 2- I know the man ----painted the picture. (whom, whose, what, who)
- 3- You should have ----the work earlier.(finish, finished, to finish, finishing)
- 4- ----schoolboys will arrive tomorrow.(Two French young, Two young French, young two French, French two young)
- 5- Would you mind ----me, please? (help, helping, helps, to help)
- 6-These shirts--(are smaller rather, rather small are, small rather are, are rather small)

### Comments on the Items of the Question

A preliminary step towards discussing this question is to pin down the contents of the two sub-questions and the occurrence of the areas tested. These are: verb tense, verb form, verb passive, Conjunctions: unless, who, and partial word order.

Table (3) shows the grammatical areas of the question with the number of their occurrence in these two sub-questions and the total number.

Area No.	Areas	No. of occurrence of in question 2/A	No. of occurrence in question 2/B	Total
1	Verb tense	1	--	1
2	Verb form	2	3	5
3	Conjunctions	2	1	3
4	Verb passive	1	--	1
5	Word order	--	2	2
Tot al	5	6	6	12

**Table 3**

The Areas of Grammar tested in Question 2

The next step is to scrutinize the items tested.



- The table above shows that the two sub-questions almost test the same areas concerning verb form and conjunctions, four out of six items in each sub-question. So what is the point behind dividing the question into two since both sub-questions test the same areas and use the same technique?
- The second point is: "Why five items out of twelve are given verb forms. Aren't there other areas to be tested? Why is there only one item testing verb tense?"
- Does the passive voice deserve only one item?
- The same question goes to the relative pronouns stated in the conjunction area, again one item.

The researcher has gone through Book Five, and has made a survey of the grammatical areas taught in the book. They are as follows:

1. Passive voice
2. Reported speech
3. Relative clauses
4. prepositions including during, except, in spite of, etc
5. conjunctions both subordinators and coordinators including however, so...that, such ...that, wherever, therefore etc.
6. Question words
7. Since and for and the present perfect both simple and progressive
8. Past participle and present participle used as adjectives
9. verb forms: infinitive and -ing form

From the list above it is now quite obvious to say how trivial the item given were, and how many areas were neglected and others repeated.

The type of exercises given in Units 21-25 and used by teachers as models for writing examination questions and by pupils for practising and preparing for the examinations are mostly multiple-choice, though one or two exercises are based on transformation and supply types.



The alternative testing technique, the researcher suggests, is the grid question where the test is long enough to provide a generous sampling of the areas tested; yet, the answers are very short and take little time to form and to correct. The following grid questions are designed by the researcher on the basic structural points found in Book five.

### Grid 1

#### Infinitive and –ing form

go 1	to go 2	going 3
They wouldn't mind --- by air 4	She made me --- with her. 5	Nobody saw the thief - --in. 6
We'd better not---. It's dark. 7	My sister is old enough --- by herself. 8	It's not safe --- by a taxi. 9
Ali would like ---now. 10	He's unable --- with us. 11	She needs ---- to a doctor. She doesn't feel well. 12

1. Which boxes require 'go' in box 1?
2. Which boxes are complete with 'to go' in box 2?
3. Box 3 'going' completes boxes.....?

### Grid 2

#### Scrambled sentences

This grid is very useful for testing word order concerning the areas of several adjectives or adverbs in a sentence, or forming interrogative or exclamatory sentences.

1	it 1	a 2	What 3	Was 4	Day 5	Cold 6
2	did	book	borrow	You	Which	yesterday?



	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	came 1	of 2	them 3	of 4	All 5	nearly 6
4	young 1	she 2	boys 3	three 4	Met 5	English 6
5	miserable	very 2	child 3	that 4	Looks 5	crying 6
6	there 1	my 2	is 3	the girl 4	Over 5	Sister 6

Each horizontal row makes a sentence. Between the brackets provided, write the boxes of each row in order to make a meaningful sentence as in No.1

- 1- ( 3,2,6,5,1,4 )    3- (                      )    5- (                      )  
 2- (                      )    4- (                      )    6- (                      )

### Grid 3: Preposition and adverb particles

<b>Of</b> 1	We have run --- of bread . 2	<b>With</b> 3
She was angry--- Suha for behaving badly. 4	She was proud---her parents. 5	I haven't seen him ---- months. 6
<b>For</b> 7	She agreed --- my story. 8	<b>Out</b> 9
Ali always stays ---late before exams. 10	They are looking---- the escaped prisoner. 11	Their children were well brought---- 12
The fire brigade put... the fire. 13	<b>Up</b> 14	I wished him the best --- luck. 15

1. Which boxes require 'of' in box 1?
2. Which boxes require 'with' in box 3?
3. 'For' in box 7 completes some boxes? What numbers are they?
4. 'Out' in box 9 fills the gaps of some boxes? What are they?
5. Which boxes need 'up' in 14 to become complete sentences?

### 2.3.3 Preparatory stage / 2005

The grammar question in the Ministerial examination for preparatory stage is merely a sub-question carried No 2.B. The



other sub-question that carries No. 2.A is actually a sound discrimination exercise. The grammar sub-question is as follows:  
Q2.B Join each pair of the following, using the prompts between brackets:(Choose 5)

1- He drover badly. He lost the car. (Cause and effect. Use : therefore)

2- Ali is careful. Ameer is careful too. (Similarity)

3- He will finish his work. Then he will leave. (Sequence. Use : After)

4- The boys kept quiet. They didn't intend to be punished.(Purpose. Use: so that)

5- The street was dark. I couldn't recognize Hayder. (because of)

6- Ahmed got high marks. The headmaster praised him. (Purpose. Use: for)

7- He was steady. The news was bad. (Contrast. Use : although)

### **Comments on the Items of the above question**

- Obviously, this question is based on the transformation technique. It deals with joining pairs of simple sentences into complex ones. One may ask: Is this the only area taught during the course of study? A quick survey of Book Eight, the sixth-year textbook reveals this unbelievable fact. Yes. The book contains fifteen units, some have a point on conjunctions and others neglect grammar completely.
- Hence, the mere grammatical subject tested is coordination and subordination. An interesting point which may reveal the weak standard of undergraduate students.
- The question that imposes itself here is "Shouldn't sixth-year secondary-school students, who have studied English for eight years and who are at the age of eighteen, recognize which adverbial clause is needed, contrast, purpose, cause and the like when joining two sentences? Can't those students comprehend the meaning of a pair of sentences and decide which



conjunction whether a subordinator or coordinator is required for combining that pair?

- To sum up, it is believed that neither the type nor the conjunction is necessary to be supplied. It should be inferred by the examinees.

To go back to the subject of this paper: assessment by grids, the following grid can be used as an alternative to test the previous area. Ten sentence and six conjunctions are given in this question.

He is a very old man. He can't walk. 1	Samir switched off the lights. Then he went to bed. 2	He's a very busy man. He can't attend the concert. 3	<b>such...that.</b> 4
<b>So...that</b> 5	The case was urgent. I had to see the lawyer 6	<b>because</b> 7	I was trying to do my homework. Suddenly the light went out. 8
The match was postponed. The weather was bad. 9	The book is very easy. I finished it in an hour. 10	<b>after</b> 11	He was working in the garden. He hurt his back 12
The weather was extremely bad. The match was postponed 13	<b>therefore</b> 14	The plane took off. Then suddenly it crashed. 15	<b>while</b> 16

1. Which boxes require 'such... that' in box 4? 1, 3
2. Which boxes require 'so... that' in box 5? 7, 10, 13,
3. Which boxes require 'because' in box 6? 6, 9, 10
4. Which boxes need 'after' in box 14? 2,15
5. Which boxes require 'therefore' in box 15? 1, 3, 6, 13
6. Which boxes require 'while' in box 16? 8,12

### General Comments on the Ministerial Examinations



After examining the Ministerial examinations for the three stages, it is clear that the questions given in these examinations are:

- Not sufficient in number.
- Not comprehensive
- Two thirds of them depend on multiple-choice and one on transformation with too much guidance.
- The total number of the items in the questions for elementary and intermediate stages is ten; whereas it is five for preparatory stage.

From the above survey, it is apparent to say that the area of grammar is, in fact, not given its due importance in the textbooks or in the examinations. Hence, this deficiency will certainly explain why Iraqi learners are very weak at grammar, which in turn will lead to their inability to speak and write fluently when they come to university.

### **3.1 The Tests**

The last procedure carried out by the researcher is the application of two achievement tests; one is based on current techniques and the other on grid questions, which aim at

- verifying the hypothesis adopted in this study
- adopting more effective techniques in testing which is hoped to influence changes and developments in language teaching/ learning and testing. Davies (1985:7) states: 'Examination is a major and creative influence for change and development in language teaching.'

Statistical correlation between the scores of the two tests as well as between the tests and an external criterion are established. To find an efficient criterion might not be easy since these tests are measuring language use in an educational context. Nevertheless, the available criterion to use could be the students' final average scores in the final examinations for the four years at college.



The two tests have been tried out on a sample of twenty subjects. The tryout helps make certain modifications in the tests and determine the estimated time required.

### 3.2 Test format and administration

Two main techniques have been chosen for the first test, (henceforth test 1). They are closed-ended, i.e., multiple-choice and restricted-response where the answers are formulated by the testees themselves. As the answers are short and predictable in the second technique, scoring is objective. In the second test (henceforth test 2) the same areas have been covered but in the form of grids.

The two tests were conducted on the second of January to 80 subjects of the fourth year during the year 2004-2005 .The Subjects were divided randomly into two groups, 40 each, and test 1 was given to one group and test 2 to the other. Scoring was completed by the researcher to ensure uniformity of procedure. The areas to be covered in the exam have been chosen by the researcher from among many owing to certain considerations which can be summarized as follows: their importance, their erroneous usage by students, and of course their existence in the syllabus used. Appendix 1 shows the two tests

The four areas covered in the exams are: clause patterns, relative clauses, verb patterns with –ing or infinitive and assertive and non-assertive sentences

### 3.3 Test results

The results achieved of this study show that the mean and the median on grid questions are higher than those on the other test. Table 4 shows this result

Type of test	Mean	Median	'T' value
Grid	19.4	17	5.45
Current	16.5	15.5	

Table 4 : Mean Scores, Median and T Value on Both Tests



The means by themselves (i.e., 19.4 versus 16.5) do not provide sufficient evidence on which to base a judgement, nor do the medians. These measures of central tendency provide useful and essential information; nevertheless they tell nothing about the spread of marks or the highest and the lowest scores. These are obtained by range and standard deviation. Table 6 below shows these measures. The information about the standard deviation on both tests and the correlation between the two sets of scores show that the difference between the means is significant. It is 5.45. (see table 5)

Type of test	Range	Standard Deviation
grid	37	8.8
current	33	7

Table 5 : Range and Standard Deviation of Both Tests

### 3.4 Discussion of Tests Results

The above comparisons of the students' achievements on both tests can be summed up in the following points:

- The students' achievement on the grid questions is better than that on the current techniques.
- The results of the two tests reveal the students' weakness of basic English structures despite the great emphasis put on grammar as a basic subject in the syllabuses of the four college years at the rate of 84 hours per year.
- Grid questions provide better data than the current techniques concerning the size of the questions and the extent of the answers.
- The testees fail to produce grammatically correct sentences in their answers to questions 2 and 4 in Test 1. It is interesting to mention that 40% of the answers to question 4 in test 1 are similar. When the students were later asked about this



coincidence, their reply was simply 'We have learnt these sentences by heart.'

- The significant difference between the averages of the two sets of scores provides sufficient evidence which verifies our hypothesis that grid questions enable testees to perform better and consequently to achieve better results. The calculated value is (5.45) for a 5 percent level of significance which is higher than the critical value which is (1.96)
- Hence, it could be said that grid questions are more effective than other techniques. This was clearly shown in grid 2 and grid 4.
- The grid questions discriminate better between the more able testees and the less ones than do the other techniques in test 1. This is due to the large sample of items.
- The grid technique seems to be more reliable than the others, in the sense that scoring is objective and the samples of achievement it requires are large.
- It is also more valid in the sense that its content coverage and relevance are more than the other techniques in Test 1.

### 3.5 Coefficient of Correlation (of Validity and Reliability)

#### Validity

Table 6 shows that the coefficient of correlation between the grid questions and the criterion as well as the T-test is higher than that of between the current techniques and the criterion. This result indicates that the degree of relationship in the grid questions is significant and that there is a marked and positive relationship between the new technique and the criterion.

Type of test	Validity coefficient	T- Test
grid	0.78	11.3
current	0.63	7.24

Table 6: Validity coefficient and T-Test of both tests

## Reliability

The reliability of both tests have been estimated by using Kuder-Richardson's Method cited in Valette (1977:53). The results are shown below in Table 7

Type of test	Reliability coefficient
grid	0.84
Current	0.76

Table 7: Reliability Coefficient of both tests

Valette (1977) states that the reliability of a good test falls between 0.60 and 0.80; whereas for a standardized test, a reliability of 0.90 is tried to be attained. Again the results above shows that grid question is more reliable than the other questions

### 4.1 Summary

The results achieved prove that the grid question is more effective and gives better results than the current ones as the difference between the average scores is significant

- The criterion grid questions correlation yields a validity coefficient of 0.78
- The criterion current questions yields a validity coefficient of 0.63
- The promising results of this work provide ample encouragement for improving the existing language testing techniques
- Each grid can summarize a whole subject like passive voice , coordinating and subordinating, whereas in a multiple choice question each item tests one area
- The boxes provide a generous sampling of the subject tested whereas in other testing types 3-5 items are the maximum. Hence, it can use as an informative test to assess progress and to diagnosis problematic areas after teaching a subject or two as



well as a summative one at the end of course of instruction. Existing contents can be updated, and it can also be changed.

- This method seems to give more global assessment of the learner's performance than does the multiple choice test.
- The study shows that these questions are easy to score and easy to design and can be used several times with slight changes.
- This technique gives almost a complete map of the subject tested which in return gives a complete picture of the student's control of the area tested.
- The time it takes to answer a grid question does not exceed the time taken for other techniques
- Eventually, the flexibility of this technique seems enormous and it can be used to test objectives at several levels of complexity.

#### **4.2 Recommendations**

- The researcher recommends introducing this testing technique into public examinations and into school diagnostic and progress tests.
- The researcher also recommends using this grid technique in testing grammar for undergraduate studies especially at colleges where grammar is taught as a separate academic subject.
- This technique of testing may be applicable to teaching. The grids could be considered as tables of explanation. The students, for instance, can be shown the different ways of joining sentences with the use of coordinators or subordinators in a grid. Hence they learn the possibility of using a number of conjunctions to get the same results. This goes well with the question normally given in the exams and is called 'put it in another way' or rewrite a sentence and keep the same meaning
- Further studies on using this technique of testing for testing other language elements or skills like vocabulary, pronunciation, and reading comprehension are recommended. The researcher



has in fact started with studying and applying this tool of testing to reading comprehension.

### Appendix

#### Test 1 /Current Questions

**Question 1/** Identify the clause type of the following sentences.

1. Would you mind bringing me a towel?
2. To hear you say that surprises me
3. I have always lived in the country
4. He has proved himself a great soldier
5. Here is the milkman
6. To make a fool of yourself is a pity

**Question 2/** Combine with a relative pronoun

1. Is this the house? You were born in it
2. They took two rooms. They paid \$ 40 a week for them
3. My neighbour will tell you everything. He is an expert on such matters.

**Question 3/** Encircle the letter of the correct option.

1. The policeman made me ....my car.  
A. moved    B. moves    C. move    D. moving
2. Avoid .... with your back to the engine.  
A. to sit    B. sit    C. sitting    D. sat
3. I was rude not .....your letter.  
A. answer    B. to answer    C. answering    D. answered
4. She let us .....her telephone.  
A. use    B. using    C. used    D. to use
5. Bob is hard .....  
A. convincing    B. to convince    C. to convincing    D. be convinced

**Question 4/** Form sentences as indicated below.

1. A non-assertive negative sentence
2. A positive interrogative sentence.
3. S + Stative V+ O

**TEST 2/ Grid questions**

Answer the following three questions by writing the numbers of the correct boxes only

**Question 1**

Someone must be wrong. 1	Keep out of sight 2	She is putting the teapot on the table. 3	A lot of people are getting promotion. 4
Was anyone around? 5	To make a fool of yourself is a pity. 6	The twin told mother all their secrets. 7	They are such delightful children. 8
To hear you say that surprises me 9	Here is the milkman. 10	A way went the car. 11	He threw himself from the horse. 12
Would you mind bringing me a towel? 13	Something is causing her distress. 14	I have always lived in the country 15	He has proved himself a great soldier. 16

- A. Which boxes have the clause type SVA?  
 B. In which boxes do we have the clause type SVOO?  
 C. Which boxes have the clause type SVC  
 D. The clause type SVOA is found in boxes...  
 E. Verbs (stative and intensive) are found in boxes....

**Question2**

Is this the house that you were born in? 1	Is this the house that you were born in it? 2	Is this the house which you were born in? 3
Is this the house which you were born in it? 4	Is this the house you were born in? 5	Is this the house in which you were born? 6
Is this the house in that you were born? 7	Is this the house where you were born? 8	Is this the house where you were born in? 9
Is this the house where you were born in it? 10	Is this the house you were born in it? 11	<b>Is this the house? You were born in it.</b> 12



- A. Which boxes show the correct combination of the two sentences in box 12?
- B. Which boxes contain relative adverbs?
- C. Which boxes contain relative pronouns?
- D. Which boxes have a correct combination without using a rel. pronoun or adverb?

### Question 3

doctor 1	Given 2	some 3	the 4
ever 5	Useful 6	never 7	advice 8
her 9	Any 10	sometimes 11	has 12

Put the numbers in the right order when answering the following questions. Use as many of the boxes as appropriate to form your answers. No box is redundant.

- A. Which boxes form a positive declarative sentence?
- B. Which boxes form a negative sentence?
- C. Name the boxes that form a positive interrogative sentence?
- D.

### Question 4

He showed me how (change) the fuse. 1	They agreed (be) present at the meeting. 2	The policeman made me (move) my car. 3	Stop (make) a fool of yourself. 4
Are you ready (leave)? 5	Avoid (sit) with your back to the engine. 6	Can you teach her how (dance)? 7	Are you going (keep) me waiting all day? 8
The firm intends (mortgage) the property. 9	They don't permit visitors (touch) the exhibits 10	Bob is hard (convince) 11	Can you imagine (join) the army? 12
This rule is easy (remember). 13	She let us (use) her telephone. 14	This needs (look) into. 15	I was rude not (answer) your letter. 16



- A. Which boxes require –ing participle?
- B. Which boxes require infinitive with to?
- C. Which boxes require bare infinitive ?
- D. Which boxes contain adjectives that require an infinitive complement?
- E. Which boxes have verbs that require an object before the infinitive?

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### Question 3

We have proved your story completely true. 1	Her coat did not fit her properly 2	Each block weighed over two tons 3	Jane could see herself in the mirror 4
They broke into the Central Bank two days ago. 5	We could hardly see each other in the fog. 6	Is anyone attending to you? 7	They had made good use of the house 8
I have a picture like it in my house. 9	They have turned down my application. 10	His rudeness has shocked her. 11	The waitress wiped her hands. 12
Violent behaviour can cause many problems in our society. 13	Our college library contains over 20.000 books. 14	The Air Force reported two planes missing. 15	They admitted that she sang well. 16

- A. Which boxes contain sentences that can be transformed into the passive? 1,5,7,8,10,11,13,15,16
- B Which boxes have transitive verbs that do not allow passive transformation of the sentences? 2,3,9,14
- C. Which boxes contain objects that block the passive transformation? 4,6,12
- D. Which boxes can have two passive forms? 8, 16