

Misuses and Abuses of Standard Arabic Passive Voice in the News of the Jordanian Newspapers

Ibrahim Abushihab

Department of English, College of Arts, Al-Zaytoonah Private University, Amman, Jordan

Abstract—The line of demarcation drawn between active and passive verbs resides in the direction of the action. The passive voice in standard Arabic can be used when the agent of the sentence is not expressed. The active Arabic sentences are passivized by skipping the agent of the sentence, but without changing the word order. The paper investigates the misuse and abuse of passive voice in Jordanian newspapers. Four cases of Arabic Passive violation spotted in Jordanian written media are analyzed. Three major official newspapers issued in Jordan are chosen for this purpose: Alqhad, Addustoor, and Alrai. It also focuses on violating the Arabic passive rules.

Index Terms—Arabic passive form, Arabic passive violation, written media

I. INTRODUCTION

Arabic passive voice is used in written and spoken forms when the subject of the sentence is unknown or unnecessary to be used or when it is very well known. Sometimes, it is deleted to express a state of contempt. The speaker/writer wants to focus on the event of the sentence and to hide purposely the doer of the action. Khalil (2010) states that the early Arab grammarians focus on the form and derivation of passive verbs in Arabic which are used when the doer of the action is not mentioned because the speaker/writer wants to hide his/her identity. Languages in the world have witnessed changes throughout the ages. Some languages faced a dangerous change that shot deep into the heart of their structures. Accordingly, some have died and others are considered moribund. Ostler (2005) remarks that Language shift or maintenance refers to the tendency of its speakers to use grammatical and linguistic rules in new ways, violating the basic elements of their language. Language loyalty among its speakers may positively affect its maintenance. Weinreich (1974) focuses on the notion of language loyalty which helps keep the language. He defines loyalty towards the language as “a principle in the name of which people will rally themselves and their fellow speakers consciously and explicitly to resist change in their language” (p. 99).

The speakers of a language over time tend to use specific grammatical rules which are unlike the ones used in standard language. Abushihab (2022) assures that Language is essential for daily communication and in conveying cultural aspects, thoughts, and ideas. It is a means for people to interact culturally and pragmatically. Al-Zyoudi (2023) remarks that “functionalism contributed to linking the linguistic structure with its communicative function, and that interrogative structures were distinguished by the elements included in them, as they had the performing force in performing the function” (p. 137).

In this paper, the issues of Arabic passive violation in Jordanian written media are analyzed. The paper is an attempt to highlight the damage being done to Arabic passive by using some alien structure and linguistic aspects that lead to the loss, drain, and attrition of Arabic identity. Aldamen and Al-Deaibes (2023) assure that Adult native learners of Arabic face several common language problems in their Arabic language acquisition process. Such problems are due to the grammatical difficulties in the Arabic Language.

II. SOUND INVENTORIES OF ARABIC

Arabic alphabet is sorted as follows: 'alif (ʾ), baa' (b), taa' (t), θaa' (θ), jeem (j), ḥaa' (ḥ), xaa' (x), daa (d), ḏaa' (ḏ), raa' (r), zayn (z), seen (s), jeen (ʃ), s'aad (s'), d'aad (d'), t'aa (t'), ḏ'aa' (ḏ'), ḥyn (ḥ), ḡayn (ḡ), faa' (f), qaaf (q), kaaf (k), laam (l), meem (m), noon (n), haa' (h), waaw (w), jaa' (j).

Tables 1 and 2 display the phonetic nature of consonants and vowels in Arabic.

TABLE 1
ARABIC CONSONANT PHONEMES (ADAPTED FROM KHALIL, 2010, P. 14; SEE ALSO WATSON, 2000)

	L	LD	I	D	A	P	V	U	Ph	G
Stop	B			t, t ^ʕ d, d ^ʕ			k	q		' ?
Affr.						dʒ				
Fric.		f	ð, θ, ð ^ʕ	s, z, s ^ʕ		ʃ	x, ɣ		ħ, ʕ	h
Liquids										
Trill					r					
Lateral					l					
Nasal	M				n					
Glides	W					j				

Key: L: labial; LD: labiodental; I: Interdental; D: Dental; A: Alveolar, P: Palatal; V: Velar; U: Uvular; Ph: Pharyngeal; G: Glottal; Affr.: Affricate; Fric.: Fricative

In fact, such classification was also put by many former Arabic scholars such as Al-frahidi and IbinJinni.

TABLE 2
ARABIC VOWELS (ADAPTED FROM KHALIL, 2010, P. 20)

	Front	Central	Back
High	ii i		uu u
Low		aa a	

III. LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF ARABIC PASSIVE VOICE

The passivisation in standard Arabic can be manipulated when the agent (subject) is deleted as the following example shows:

/kataba ʕalijun ʔaddarsa/ Ali wrote the lesson.

/kutiba ʔaddarsu/ The lesson was written.

The example stated above indicates that the performer of the action is deleted without stating anything about it. It refers to someone doing the action without knowing who he is. The passive voice in Arabic is based on the vowel change rule. The short vowel following the first consonant "a" is changed to "u" and the vowel after the second consonant "a" is changed to "i". In other cases, we add/ ju/ to the stem, and the first vowel /a/ is changed to a voiceless sound. The last vowel "a" is changed to "u" as the following example:

/darasa ʕalijun ʔalmawdʕuʕa/ Ali studied the topic.

/judrasuʔ almawdʕuʕ/ The topic is studied.

Saad (1982) assures that Arabic passivisation is used without the "by-the phrase" that is used in English like in the following example:

The topic is studied by him.

Unlike Arabic, English passive may be agentive (by + agent) or agentless. The agent in Arabic passive is unknown or ignorant. The Arab speaker/ writer may face some problems when saying or writing passive sentences. He may wrongly use agentive passive sentences "min qibal" (by-phrase) as a result of negative interference from English to Arabic or incomplete acquisition of his native language as the following example shows:

Kutiba ʔdarsu (min qibal Ali). (the lesson was written by Ali)

Massalha (2005) investigates the agentive passive construction in English and its translation into Arabic. He finds that what is equivalent to (by-phrase) is /min qibal/. When translating English passive sentences into Arabic, the translator translates them literally, so they produce agentive translated sentences as the following example shows:

The rabbit was killed by the lion (agentive English Passive).

It is wrongly translated as follows:

Qutila ʔalʔarnabu (min qibal ʔal ʔasad / by the lion).

The correct translation of this sentence is to be used in an active sentence if the writer insists on mentioning the agent as follows:

Qatala ʔalʔasadu ʔalʔarnaba (The Lion killed the rabbit).

The agentless passive in Arabic is used by deleting the agent as follows: qutila ʔalʔarnabu (The rabbit was killed).

Nofal (2011) remarks that the Arabic passive voice focuses on the event and the meaning of the verb rather than the agent, so it is agentless.

IV. DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF ARABIC: CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

For many scholars, Arabic has the unique privilege of embracing the Holy Quran. This is what makes it safe and unscathed from being affected by other challenging languages over the ages. In Arabic and Islamic culture, the Noble Quran is the arbiter of the misuse and abuse of Arabic rules. Arabic has witnessed changes because of its different versions:

classical, standard, and dialects. Al-Saidat and Al-Momani (2010) state that standard Arabic is derived from classical Arabic. The structure, lexicon, and pronunciation of standard Arabic may vary locally as dialects differ from modern and classical Arabic. The change has touched the surface but not its core rules even though its rules are now under attack because some key grammatical aspects are misused by the media which are supposed to use standard Arabic. Given that Arabic society is media-saturated, the influx of foreign words, usages, and expressions are misused in the media. Alqadi (2020) focuses on the essence of creativity and affirmation in Jordanian culture. She states that realistic social constraints control the use of language in society. Among such abuses and misuses is the use of the Arabic passive voice. Its rules are being violated and it is time to stop this violation by revising the texts used in media by professionals.

V. THE IMPORTANCE OF USING PASSIVE VOICE IN ARABIC

The function of the use of passive in English is different from Arabic. In English, the passive voice is often used for stylistic purposes. This gives the reason why English passive voice has a higher frequency in comparison to Arabic. This is because English passive is agentive and agentless whereas Arabic is agentless. Hale (2004) remarks that hiding the subject of a passive sentence in Arabic could have a very good rationale. In court proceedings and litigations, giving the passive voice precedence over the active in Arabic is intended by the speaker or writer to hide the agent purposefully. Passivisation in Arabic is mostly intended for ambiguities. Fowler (1971) states that voice provides contrasting ways of distinguishing the agency of an action in a subject-verb-object statement.

Unlike Arabic, a contrast in agency in English is used by active and passive voices. The following examples illustrate the level of emphasis or agency:

- 1- The man killed the murderer.
(agent is explicitly stated in an active sentence)
- 2- The murderer was killed by the man.
(agentive passive sentence).
- 3- Someone killed the murderer.
(unspecified agent is stated in an active sentence).
- 4- The murderer was killed by someone.
(agentive passive sentence with an unspecified agent).
- 5- The murderer was killed
(the agent is unstated).

There is no real justification for using the first four sentences. Sentence (5) stands as real justification for the passive.

Crystal (1980) goes in parallel with this trend. He assures that when the agent is not stated purposefully, the focus is on the action and on its object, not on the instigator of the action. Aziz (1989) also goes side by side with the same trend. He points out that contrastive studies of the voice in English are different from Arabic. English uses both the agentive and agentless passive whereas Arabic uses only the agentless passive.

To elaborate, the agent of the passive verb is deleted in Arabic because of the following reasons:

1. It is very well-known as follows:

Xuliqa ?al?insanu d^ʕaʕifa

The man is created weak.

2. It is not specified and unknown as follows:

Suriqa ?albajtu

The house was stolen.

3. The agent is dreadful and the speaker is afraid of mentioning his name as the following example shows:

Suriqa ?al his^ʕanu

The horse was stolen.

4. The speaker is apprehensive for the agent's safety as follows:

d^ʕuriba ?assa?iqu

The driver was beaten.

5. The agent is deleted for his dignity and honor as follows:

ʕumila ʕamalun munkarun

A bad act was done.

6. The agent is deleted to express a state of contempt as follows:

?unʕidat ?alqas^ʕidatu

The poem was recited.

VI. METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

The methodology used in this study is a content analysis which is a technique that enables the audience to study written contents of communication, textbooks, essays, newspapers, novels, magazines, articles, songs, political speeches, advertisements, and pictures. The unit of analysis in this study is sentence. One hundred sentences are specified and taken from different issues of three Jordanian official newspapers: Alqhad, addustour, and Alrai. Some of these sentences are

analyzed and discussed to achieve the objectives of the paper. Six jurors (arbitrators) whose disciplines include linguistics and translation are consulted and they are asked to validate the results (see Appendix A). Analysis of reliability is calculated by the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Times of Jurors (arbitrators) agreement}}{\text{No. of Jurors arbitrators}} * 100$$

The calculated reliability coefficient is 80% which is a good value for this paper.

As stated earlier, Arabic passive does not allow an agent (subject) in the discourse for different reasons. One of which is brevity because there is no need to mention the subject. The speaker/ writer ignores the name of the agent to avoid defaming it. The rule governing the use of passive in Arabic is used in written and oral discourse. Arabic is used as a first language in Jordan. It is divided into three major forms: classical Arabic, modern standard Arabic, and dialects which are spoken. Khalil (2010) states that classical Arabic is the language of the Holy Quran and pre-Islamic literature. It contains some items which are not used nowadays. Modern standard Arabic is the official language in Jordan and is mostly used in publications and media. The dialects are spoken varieties of Arabic which have different structures and vocabulary from standard Arabic. In the current study, Arabic passive has been traced in three newspapers in Jordan. Cases of various forms of violating the Arabic passive rules are taken and analyzed in terms of misuse and abuse.

There are some cases where the agent is misused in passive sentences. There are also other cases where the passive voice verb is violated and abused by replacing it with other patterns like “tama” (perfect) + verbal noun without mentioning the agent in some cases and the presence of the agent in other cases. Below are different cases of Arabic passive rule violation. They are analyzed and the correct use is provided. The reasons for each misuse and abuse are given.

VII. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Case one

In this case, the passive verb is kept correct and subjected to the rules of Arabic, but the violation lies in the presence of the agent which is not allowed in Arabic passive rules for the reasons mentioned earlier.

Example 1:

ʔinna ʔalmantʔiqata ʔallati tuwdʔadu fiha safaratuna bi sʔanʔaʔ ʔistuhdifat min qibal quwatin ʔadʔnabijatin. (Alrai newspaper, No. 16487, 2016, p. 17).

The area which hosts our embassy in Sana'a has been targeted by foreign forces.

The correct form of the example stated above is the deletion of the agentive phrase “min qibal quwatin ʔadʔnabijatin” (by foreign forces) and to use the active agentive sentence as follows:

ʔistahdafat quwattun ʔadʔnabijattun ʔalmantʔiqata ʔallati tuwdʔadu fiha safaratuna bi sʔanʔaʔ.

Foreign forces targeted the area which hosted our embassy in Sana'a.

Example 2

Turikat owit bayan ʔadiʔatu ʔassini min qibal walidajha wa ʔuhida biha ʔila dʔadatiha. (Alqhad newspaper, No. 4101, 2016, p. 7).

Owit bayan who was newly born was left by her parents and hosted by her grandmother.

The above version is also abused by using the agentive phrase in passive Arabic form (min qibal walidajha/by her parents) where it is not allowed in Arabic passive. The correct version is to be used in the active form as follows:

Taraka walida owit bayan ibnatihima alhadiʔata ʔassini wa ʔahida biha ʔila dʔadatiha.

Owit bayan's parents left their daughter who was newly born and asked her grandmother to host her.

Example 3

ʔinna ʔarbaʔatan mina ʔaldʔarʔa nuqilu biwasitʔati tʔa ʔirati ʔisʔafin ʔila ʔalʔasimati ʔanqara. (Addustour newspaper, No. 17403, 2016, p. 7).

Four of the wounded persons were taken by an ambulance plane to the capital-Ankara.

The Arabic passive form is also abused by using the agentive phrase “biwasitʔati tʔaʔirati ʔisʔafin” by an ambulance plane. The correct form should be written in active to reveal the agent as follows:

Naqalat tʔaʔiratu ʔisʔafin ʔarbaʔatan min ʔaldʔarʔaʔ ila ʔalʔasimati ʔanqara.

An ambulance plane took four of the wounded persons to the capital Ankara.

Case Two

In this case, the passive verb is abused by using the pattern.

tamma/jatimmu (present perfect) + verbal noun and the agent is wrongly mentioned. This kind of passive misuse is the most damaging one because it hits deeper in the core of Arabic passive. We can say that the Arabic passive structure would be in danger if we do not stop such misuses and abuses.

Example 1

Biʔajʔu jatimmu ʔintixabu ʔalʔamini ʔalʔammi lilhizbi min qibal ʔaʔdʔaʔi ʔalmuʔtamari ʔalʔami. (Addustour newspaper, No. 17409, 2016, p. 2).

.... where the party's secretary-general has been elected by the members of the General Congress.

The use of “biḥajṡu jatimmu” (present perfect+ verbal noun) and “by-agent” is not allowed in an Arabic form. The correct active version of the above sentence is as follows:

Jantaxibu ḥaṣḍaḥu ḥalmuḥtamari ḥalḥamina ḥalḥama lilḥizbi.

The members of the general congress elect the party's secretary general.

The same sentence may be used in the past tense as follows:

ḥintaxiba ḥaṣḍaḥu ḥalmuḥtamariḥ alḥamina ḥalḥama lilḥizbi.

The members of the general congress elected the party's secretary general.

Example 2

tamma taḥkulu ladḥnatan min qibali ḥaldḥihati ḥalmaḥnijati (Alqhad newspaper, No. 4096, 2016, p. 3).

A committee has been formed by the concerned authorities.

The correct version of the sentence ought to be written by deleting the agentive phrase “min qibali ḥaldḥihati ḥalmaḥnijati” (by the concerned authorities) and the agentive active sentence is used instead as follows:

ḥakkalat ḥaldḥihatu ḥalmaḥnijatu Ladḥna.

The concerned authorities have formed a committee.

Example 3

Tamma ḥixtjaruhum min qibali ḥalmaktabi ḥaltanfiḥij. (Alrai newspaper, No. 16487, 2016, p. 4).

They have been chosen by the Executive office.

The above sentence is abused because of the use of “tamma ḥixtjaruhum” (perfect tense +verbal noun) in addition to the agentive phrase “min qibali ḥalmaktabi ḥaltanfiḥij” (by the Executive office). The sentence should also be written in active form to reveal the agent of the sentence as follows:

ḥixtaruhum ḥalmaktabu ḥaltanfiḥiju.

The executive office has chosen them.

Case Three

This case focuses on the abused pattern: tamma (perfect tense) + verbal noun. In this case, the agentive phrase is not used.

Example 1

Tama ḥilqaḥu ḥalqabdḥi ḥala ḥaxsin maḥbuhin fii madinati ḥirbid (Addustour newspaper, No. 17403, 2016, p. 7).

A suspect has been arrested in Irbid city.

tamma (perfect tense) is misused in this agentless sentence. The speaker fails to derive the passive form of the verb. He ought to use ḥulqija ḥalqabdḥa (was arrested) which is the passive form of the verb "ḥalqaḥalqabdḥu". Accordingly, the sentence ought to be written in passive form as follows:

ḥulqija ḥalqabdḥa ḥala ḥaxsin maḥbuhin fii madinati ḥirbid.

A suspect was arrested in Irbid city.

The agent of the sentence is hidden (covert), but it is known because the police who only arrest the suspect. The writer may state the covert agent and use the active form as an alternative for the same sentence as follows:

ḥalqat ḥalḥurtḥatu ḥalqabdḥa ḥala ḥaxsin maḥbuhin fii madinati ḥirbid.

The police arrested a suspect in Irbid city.

Example 2

Tamma naqlu dḥuḡatihi ḥila markizi ḥatḥibbi ḥalḥarḥiji. (Alrai newspaper, No. 16480, 2016, p. 4).

The corpse has been removed to the Forensic Centre.

The example stated above is used in active in terms of syntax, but its implication is passive. It also seems to be a wrong attempt to derive the passive form of the verb (nuqilat/was removed) by replacing it with “tamma naqlu” (perfect tense + verbal noun). Accordingly, the correct version should be written in a passive form as follows:

Nuqilat ḥadḥuḡatu ḥila markizi ḥaltḥibi ḥalḥarḥiji

The corpse was removed to the Forensic centre.

Example 3

Tamma taqdimu ḥalḥisḥafati ḥalḥawalijati ḥalazimati lahum. (Alqhad newspaper, No. 4096, 2016, p. 3).

The first aid needed has been offered.

The example stated above is also misused. The writer fails to derive the passive form of the verb “qudimat” (was offered) by replacing it to “tamma taqdimu” (perfect tense + verbal noun / has been offered). The correct form of the sentence is as follows:

Qudimat ḥalḥisḥafatu ḥalḥawalijattu ḥalazimatu lahum.

The first aid needed was offered.

Case Four

This case shows that breaching Arabic passive voice is due to replacing the term “tamma” (perfect tense) which was misused in above examples by other terms like ḥinahu wabaḥda (after), faqad (already), dḥara (carrying out) with abuses in passive voice. Below are some examples related to this case:

Example 1

ḥinahu wabaḥda ḥalkaḥfi ḥan ḥadḥuḡati min qibali ḥaltḥabibi ḥalḥarḥiji. (Alrai newspaper, No. 16475, 2015, p. 4).

... after the corpse has been tested by the forensic physician...

This sentence is misused because the writer fails to derive the correct form of the passive verb by using “ʔinahu wabaʕda” (after) and use the agentive form (min qibali ʔaltʕabibi ʔalʕarʕiji /by the forensic physician) even though the passive form is not used in such agentive sentences. The active form should be used instead as follows:

baʕda ʔan kaʕafa ʔaltʕabibi ʔalʕarʕiji ʔan ʔadzuḡati.

The forensic physician tested the corpse.

Example 2

Faqad tawazaʕat haḡihi ʔaltʕaqtu ʕala mustahlikin. (Alqhad newspaper, No. 4101, 2016, p. 8).

The energy has been distributed to consumers.

This agentless sentence is misused because it carries the implication of passive. Accordingly, faqad (already) is misused in the example stated above because it is used before the lexical verb (faqad tawazaʕat /has been distributed) in place of the passive form of the verb wuziʕat (was distributed). The correct form of the sentence is used by replacing “faqadtawazaʕat” to the passive form of the verb “wuziʕat” as follows:

wuziʕat haḡihi ʔaltʕaqtu ʕala mustahlikin.

The energy was distributed to consumers.

Example 3

dzara ʔilqaʔu ʔalqabdʕi ʔala ʕaxsʕin maʕbuhin fii mantʕiqati ʔalbadija. (Addustour newspaper, No. 17409, 2016, p. 4).

A suspect has been arrested in the desert area.

dzara (carrying out) is used in the example before the lexical verb “ʔilqaʔu” (arrested) as a wrong attempt from the writer to form an agentless passive sentence. The writer should be aware of forming the correct construction of Arabic passivisation which is based on deriving the passive from the lexical verb, so he should replace (dzaraʔilqaʔu/ has been caught) with the passive form of the verb (ʔulqija ʔalqabdʕu /was arrested) and delete (dzara /carrying out) which is a useless extra word. The sentence should be written in the passive form as follows:

ʔulqija ʔalqabdʕu ʔala ʕaxsin maʕbuhin fii mantʕiqati ʔalbadija.

A suspect was caught in a desert area.

VIII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Arabic Passive voice is used as a writing style when the agent is unknown or unimportant or the writer wants to focus on the object. Nofal (2011) remarks that the construction of the passive voice in Arabic focuses on the event rather than the agent. Nofal adds "agentless passive is a passive sentence that does not have an overt agentive (by phrase) and where the suppressed agent is either (i) unspecified or (ii) can be uniquely recovered from the context" (p. 149). The Journalists and writers of the Jordanian newspapers violate the rules of passive construction and it is being abused by making it agentive by using (min qibal) which is equivalent to the (by + agent) in English passive structure. They also abuse it by using (tamma + verbal noun) and using wrongly the agentive or non-agentive phrase. It is dangerous tend to use the Arabic passive construction in new ways without jeopardizing the basic rules of Arabic passivisation. Willems et al. (2003) state that linguistic elements do not change and they are stable but speakers of a language over time violate them and use different new linguistic elements. This is due to incomplete acquisition and lack of syntactical knowledge of their native language. The issue of the Arabic passive voice is under deep investigation because there is a trend of abusing the Arabic passive voice in three Jordanian newspapers: Alqhad, Addustour and Alrai. Cases of Arabic passive violation are spotted and analyzed to touch how Arabic passive rules are seriously breached. If this serious problem is not solved, such abuses will scratch the clean Arabic surface. Arabic, unfortunately, is showing signs of retreat as a result of abusing its core rules which are now coming under attack in the media which is supposed to use standard language. It is time to stop such violations because there will come a time for Arabic linguistic features to be undermined or even distorted.

We should start with schools and universities. Curricula should have courses relating to contrastive analysis between Arabic and English. The students in both schools and universities must enroll in such compulsory courses to enhance their abilities so that they can use accurate sources and target common constructions and expressions. Among the recommended approaches that may help Journalists overcome such abuses is pragmatic translation which focuses on text intentionality and grammatical constructions. The Journalists who apply for media should be subjected to a thorough contrastive entrance exam. All reports written in newspapers must also be revised and studied carefully by specialists and professionals so that they are revealed safely without language abuse. The Journalists should also refresh their language knowledge by attending obligatory contrastive analysis courses and seminars which ought to be held by the institutions they work.

APPENDIX A. A PANEL OF JURORS

Name	Rank	Specialization	Place of Work	Experience
Dr. Majid Wasfi Harb	Associate Professor	Curriculum and Instruction	Alzaytoonah University of Jordan	13
Dr. Sabha Ahmed Alqam	Associate Professor	Arabic Literature	Alzaytoonah University of Jordan	9
Dr. Sahar Farouq Altikriti	Assistant Professor	Linguistics and Pragmatics	Alzaytoonah University of Jordan	20
Dr. Dima Fathi Alomari	Assistant Professor	Discourse Analysis	Alzaytoonah University of Jordan	20
Dr. Bilal Mohammad Ayasra	Assistant Professor	Translation	Alzaytoonah University of Jordan	10
Dr. Iman Mohammad Abdulhadi	Assistant Professor	Modern Criticism/ Arabic	Alzaytoonah University of Jordan	2

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Ibrahim Mohammad Abushihab was born in Jordan 1958. He got his BA in English and MA in TEFL from Yarmouk University/Jordan (1986), whereas PhD degree in Applied Linguistics was received from Gazi University/Turkey (2003). Over the past 30 years, he has been teaching English as a foreign language to Arab students in the Ministry of Education in Jordan, Aljouf University (Saudi Arabia), and Alzaytoonah Private University of Jordan. Since then, he has been doing research in the field of Linguistics, Discourse Analysis, Stylistics, Applied Linguistics, and Contrastive Analysis. Dr. Ibrahim Abushihab is a Professor of Applied Linguistics at Alzaytoonah University of Jordan.