Results and Interpretation:
TTS Taxonomy Scheme

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This chapter presents the major findings the study aimed to discover about the test-taking strategies. Thus, it provides the answer to the chief research question:

- What test-taking strategies do EFL test-takers utilise when tackling MCFGV test items?

The strategies will be presented, with supporting evidence, in a qualitative taxonomy scheme on which the quantitative analysis will later be based.

VII.1 TTS taxonomy scheme

The analysis of the data reveals that sixty-two different TTS, i.e. TTS ‘types’, were used when tackling the MCFGV test items. This remarkable number of TTS reflects all the strategies found in the data gathered, though not every subject would necessarily use all those strategies. As explained in Chapter V.4, this study follows the line of literature that groups the strategies according to the particular domains they serve. The strategies found in that domain have then been sub-classified into the following groups that seem to match the detailed steps used in the process of tackling a MCFGV test.

a) Ten strategies for managing the test as a whole.

b) Six strategies for stem comprehension

c) Eight strategies for handling the gap.

d) Eleven strategies for handling the alternatives.

e) Twenty-two strategies for choosing the answer.

f) Five strategies used after choosing the answer.
Each strategy is provided, as far as possible, with an example of a typical subject’s behaviour as evidence for the strategy. To make the samples extracted clear for the reader, each example is accompanied by the test item. A comment from the researcher follows to identify the strategy being used. The original protocols were mostly in Arabic, but the quoted sample for each strategy is presented in an English translation. Hence, the Monotype Corsiva font represents the Arabic verbalisation (for more details about the typefaces and marks used see V.4.1). Some of the extracted samples may contain strategies other than the one being discussed because it is necessary for the reader to follow the wider line of thought. When this is the case, the strategy relevant to the point in question is underlined.

a. General test taking strategies

The following strategies are used in handling the test situation as a whole. They may occur before, during or after the strategies associated with the individual items, categories ‘b’ onwards. The general test taking strategies could, of course, be used with any test, not just multiple-choice tests, and some strategies might even apply to a wide range of tasks including non-linguistic ones. This category, therefore, may have general affective or metacognitive strategies, e.g. a.5, which may guide other cognitive strategies (O’Malley and Chamot, 1990).

a.1 Using formulaic utterance for affective value

Example1: The test is begun by: “In the name of Allah, the most merciful, the most gracious”.
Example 2: <after doing the first test sheet, about half of the test, a subject says> Thank goes to Allah that I’m doing fine. May Allah help in the rest.

Comment: The first utterance is typically said by most Muslims when starting serious work. It serves to make the subject feel good that Allah will help him and, perhaps, helps him to focus on the task. It is, therefore, a formulaic start that has both general cognitive and affective functions. The second utterance also has a similar affective value.

a.2 Skipping instructions to save time

The test situation: The instruction and the first test item are given as follows:

*Choose the word that best completes each of the following sentences:*

1. The meeting room was rather cramped and had no _________ of natural light.
   
   A. source       B. origin            C. supply         D. root

Example: The test is begun as follows: *In the name of Allah;* one < he means: item number one >, the meeting room was ...

Comment: The test instruction is skipped, though it is short, presumably to save time as the test task is a very familiar one (as Chapter III showed); from a mere first look at the items, the test-taker knows what is required. It works effectively here, even though instructions given in a test taking course or book (e.g. Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1995) would probably always recommend that the students read the instructions.
a.3 Time management

Example: <After attempting seven test items, the test-taker questions himself:> how much time have I got?.. ~ ah.. I am okay.

Comment: Almost in the middle of the test, this subject worries about the time left to finish the test and checks whether or not he is too slow. He realises that he has sufficient time to attempt all the items left. In the interview phase he was asked why he had said, “I am okay”, and he answered: “because I answered seven items within about five minutes and I had more than ten minutes for nine items, so I was okay”. This strategy corresponds with a strategy found by Anderson (1991) where the test-taker makes reference to time allocation.

a.4 Self-encouragement

Test item: 12. What job do you think you are best __________ for?

A. favoured          B. intended       C. suited              D. adapted

Example: < When the researcher announces that five minutes are left, the test-taker appears quite nervous.> What job do you think you are best ~ suited, ~ aaa aa come along come along come alooong  come along <Suddenly he says:> ‘appropriateness’ is ‘adapted’.. yes, yes, that means semantically it is ‘adapted’.

Comment: When the test-taker comes towards the end of the time allowed for the test and he still has a number of items to answer, he gets nervous and tense. As a result, his thinking seems to be hampered and he loses his normal smooth test
taking rhythm. This appears clearly in the way he tries to retrieve the meaning of ‘suited’. He seems to use a strategy of ‘self-encouragement’ to handle his emotive response when he says “aaa aa come along come along come alooong come along”. Suddenly this strategy seems to work and the apparent mental block clears and he finds a meaning for ‘adapted’. However, the meaning found is not really the correct one.

a.5 Awareness of TTS

Test item: Many people were ________ about the way the criminal escaped from jail.

A. curious  B. guilty  C. innocent  D. correct

Example: Many people were gap about the way the criminal escaped from jail. Okay, I need to guess the required word before I check the alternatives. The gap meaning, may be,~ they were ‘wondering’ or ‘afraid’.

<Then, he starts examining the alternatives > ‘curious’? I don’t think so. ‘guilty’: guilty, no; ‘correct’: no.~ The answer is either ‘A’ or ‘C’~; I don’t know them ~-. Since the answer for the previous item was ‘C’, I will choose ‘A’ for this one. In the retrospective report he says: seven <item number 7> is ‘A’, although I don’t know what it means. In fact, I dislike selecting an alternative that I do not know, but, here I had to, because the alternatives I knew were definitely incorrect.

Comment: The test-taker shows here explicit evidence of awareness of some of the metacognitive strategies that he uses/should use in the test. In other words,
code a.3 concerns the comments overtly stated about metacognitive strategies to be used or being used in the test, as a sign of general awareness of TTS.

**General comment:** When a test-taker actually applies the strategy cognitively, it will be counted as an occurrence of the relevant strategy under the individual test item strategies (code ‘b’ onwards). For example, in the above protocol, the actual inferencing of the gapped meaning is considered as strategy c.24.

**a.6 Attempting the items in order**

Comment: The test items are attempted in order starting from the first item. It was found that no subject did the test in any other way.

**a.7 Skipping difficult items and returning later**

Example: <The subject reads one of the test item then says:> *I do not know..~ let me get back to it later.*

Comment: When the subject does not find the right answer for a test item, he skips the item and goes onto the next one and later comes back to the one/s he has not answered.

**a.8 Revision**

Example: <When the subject finishes the test he says:> *Okay, let me now revise my answers.*
Comment: This test-taker attempts all the test items and then he revises the responses. This strategy never occurs part way through the test only at the end of the test items.

**General comment:** The revision strategy might occur when time is available to revise the responses, but it could not be used by our test-takers who had no free time for revision.

a.9 Never leaving blank responses

Comment: The test-taker attempts all the test items and never leaves an item without an answer. This strategy is inconsistent with that of the reading TTS found by Anderson (1991), where the test-taker skips a question that is not understood and leaves the response blank.

a.10 Estimating the score that will be achieved

Comment: The test-taker marks the items he is confident he has answered correctly and then counts the marks for the items that he thinks are answered correctly. This is probably to estimate the minimum score he will achieve in the test or, perhaps, to attempt the items again if he thinks he has not done well in the test.

b. Strategies for stem comprehension

The following strategies are those used to comprehend the stem. They are normal general reading strategies, see for example, Romero (1999), or word attack strategies (WAS), see for example, Bin-Ghali (2001).
b.11 Skipping unknown vocabulary

Test item: In ________ to your inquiry, we regret to tell you that we are unable to help in that matter.

A. response   B. problem   C. difficulty   D. responsibility

Example: <In the retrospective phase (after doing the test) a subject reads the above stem and reports:> In ~ to your inquiry ~ we regret ~ inquiry.., what is ‘inquiry’!

Comment: After completing the test, this subject shows that he does not know what ‘inquiry’ means and he repeats it, trying probably to retrieve what it means. Yet, in the introspective report (while doing the test) he reads the stem and does not question ‘inquiry’ or indicate that he does not know it, i.e. he skips the word and keeps working on, although the words is a key word. In fact, none of the subjects ever tried guessing/inferencing the meaning of unknown words in the stem while doing the test. This strategy is well known in the reading comprehension literature (e.g. Hosenfeld, 1977).

b.12 Stating problematic vocabulary

Test item: Because he is a member of the parliament, he is in a better ________ to fight for the workers’ rights.

A. scene       B. factory               C. position            D. house

Example: Because he is a member of the Parliament, he is in a better space to fight for the workers’ rights. He is member ~ member ~ what is member, of the Par.. Parliament ~ also Parliament is unclear.
Comment: He focuses on ‘member’ and questions its meaning, then uses the same strategy for ‘Parliament’, but not in a question form. This behaviour indicates that the meanings of certain words are not known or are in doubt. It could also indicate an attempt to retrieve meaning from the LTM (see II.7 for more details). In Olshavsky’s (1976/7) study, it was found that EFL readers stated failure to understand a word, quite frequently.

b.13 **Underlining vocabulary**

Example: David could not convince the bank that he would use the loan for business...

Comment: The subject underlines the word ‘convince’. In the interview he says that this is because he thought it was the key word of the sentence and did not know its meaning.

b.14 **Focusing on marks of cohesions**

Test item: The machine does not make everything; it is for a ________ function.

A. useless  B. human  C. spontaneous  D. specific

Example: The machine does not make everything; it is for a specific something functions...

There is a semicolon, so we need explanation or clarification...

Comment: The test-taker focuses on the semicolon mark to understand the stem and probably to help inference what the gap needs.
b.15  Rereading

Test item: The organisation received hundreds of letters in _________ to its request for information.

A. retaliation       B. recall       C. response       D. return

Example: The organisation the organisation the organisation received hundreds of letters in to its request for information.

Comment: The test-taker rereads the first part of the stem three times. It is a basic strategy that may indicate a lack of understanding. Nevo (1989) found a similar test-taking behaviour. It also used by native speakers when tackling a cloze test (Cohen, 1984). While rereading, the test-taker perhaps attempts to retrieve from his ML the meaning of the word repeated, or it may be an attempt to reflect on the content and perhaps try to inference what meaning and grammatical function any word must have to fit the gap.

b.16  Translation

Test item: The doctor said father will get well soon, because his illness wasn’t very ________.

A. difficult       B. serious       C. hard       D. heavy

Example: The doctor said okay the doctor said father will get well soon, because his illness wasn’t very.
Comment: The subject translates the first phrase of the stem and then continues reading. He, perhaps, wants to process in the $L_1$ what he has understood, to make it clearer in his mind and easier to handle, for the purpose of seeing later which alternative might fit the gap. This strategy is commonly used by candidates when handling an $L_2$ task, (e.g. Block, 1986; Young, 1996; Hemmati, 2002).

c. Strategies for managing the gap

These strategies are used when the test-taker reads the stem and comes to the gap, in order to handle the missing word. They might also occur in any filling-in-the-gap test format, e.g. a cloze test. However, the previous literature reviewed does not cover how test-takers read the gaps in such tests.

c.17 Skipping the gap

Example: If you’re bored with this TV programme, why don’t you change channels?

Comment: This subject reads the stem as if there is no gap. In other words, he does not pause, use a filler word or employ any noticeable way of dealing with the gap while reading the stem.

c.18 Pausing at the gap

Example: The workers wear special gloves to protect their hands from fire.

Comment: As the subject reads the stem, he pauses at the gap. The strategy in focus here is the pause itself. Whether or not the pause might be evidence of another
process (strategy) in his mind, for example, inferencing a possible answer or trying to link the meanings of the two parts of the stem, is a different issue.

c.19  Elongating the preceding word

Example: What job do you think you are best for?

Comment: This example gives explicit evidence of use of a different strategy for handling the gap. The subject fills the gap by elongating the previous word to indicate the missing word.

c.20  Using a general L₁ or L₂ filler word

Example 1: If you’re bored with this TV programme, why don’t you space channels?

Example 2: If you’re bored with this TV programme, why don’t you something channels?

Comment: When the first subject comes to the gap he uses the L₁ filler word  FPGA , which means a ‘space’ or a ‘gap’. The other subject handles the gap by using the English word ‘something’ as the filler.

c.21  Inserting the alternatives provided

Test item 1: David could not convince the bank that he would use the loan for
business__________.

A. intentions       B. purposes       C. goals       D. aims
Example 1: David could not convince the bank that he would use the loan for business intentions, purposes, goals and aims.

Test item 2: He wanted to know where Dr. Brown was, so he ________ at the main office.

A. inspected B. inquired C. guessed D. indicated

Example 2: He wanted to know where Dr. Brown was, so he inspected, inquired, guessed, indicated at the main office.

Comment: In the first item, the gap is at the end of the stem, so when the test-taker comes to the gap he goes straightaway to the alternatives. In the second example, the gap is in the middle of the stem. However, when the subject arrives at this gap, he goes to the alternatives, reads them, and then continues reading the sentence. In these two examples, the subjects insert all the alternatives. However, some test-takers insert only one of the alternatives (see example e.44).

c.22 Inferencing the part of speech

Test item: He wanted to know where Dr. Brown was, so he ________ at the main office.

A. inspected B. inquired C. guessed D. indicated

Example: He wanted to know where Dr. Brown was, so he \textit{verb} at the main office.

Comment: This test-taker figures out what grammatical type of word the gap needs, before examining the alternatives. As he reads the stem, he fills the gap with
the Arabic word فعل (verb), inferencing correctly that the gap needs a verb.

c.23 Inferencing meaning in the L₁

Test item 1: Everyone ________ Barbara wanted to go camping.
   A. excuse      B. without             C. unless           D. except

Example 1: Everyone ~ Barbara wanted to go camping. Everyone as well as Barbara wanted to go camping.

Test item 2: The hunter forgot where he had put the __________.
   A. trap                B. cage              C. bag           D. hook

Example 2: The hunter forgot where he had put the ~. The hunter forgot where he had put the ~. That means the killer forgot where he had put his ‘knife’ or ‘tool to kill with’. Trap, cage, bag, hook. <he reads the alternatives, then says:> Or it could be something that belongs to him, which here is~ ‘bag’~ ‘bag’ is a reasonable choice. Yes, ‘bag’, his bag.

Comment: How at the meaning for the gapped word (‘as well as’, ‘knife’ etc’) was arrived at is stated in the L₁ and done apparently before looking at the alternatives. The first test-taker uses a pause to fill the gap and then he repeats reading the stem, inferencing the meaning of the gap in Arabic. In the second example, the testee does not say much about the choice that follows the inferencing. Presumably, he realises that none of the four alternatives
mean ‘knife or tool to kill with’, so he makes a new inference of the gap meaning as he later says ‘Or it could be something belongs to him’, as a means of choosing one of the four alternatives.

c.24  Inferencing the missing word/meaning in the L2

Test item:  I think this problem can be _________ if we all work together.
   A. saved       B. resulted       C. solved       D. indicated

Example:  I think this problem can be if we all work together. I think this problem can be
if we all work without looking at the alternatives, it must be solved.

Comment:  The test-taker reads the stem and skips the gap and then, before looking at the
alternatives, he immediately rereads the stem and overtly inferences the right response before he completes reading the stem on the second reading.

General comment: Strategies c.23 and c.24 often occur when the subject reads the stem.
   However, if there is nothing said overtly that definitely shows their use, we do not code them, even though it is probably the case that many subjects who later go on to make choice from the alternatives do so with the help of some meaning inferenced for the gap. When the subjects choose the answer, they must often be using whatever meaning they inferenced for the gap earlier and/or making new inferencing at that point this may involve other strategies such as e.44 or e.45.
d. Strategies for examining the alternatives

The following strategies are used to handle the alternatives. Some of these strategies are related to how the test-taker scans the alternatives and others are used to infer the meaning of an unknown alternative word.

d.25 Scanning alternatives after the stem

Comment: The alternatives are not read/checked before reading the stem. i.e. the stem is read and then the alternatives. This suggests that the response is not based on a blind random choice, without the stem being read. Anderson (1991) reports that the test-takers may read the questions and the options before reading the passage, but in our MCGFV test it was never done that way.

d.26 Scanning alternatives in order

Test item: The meeting room was rather cramped and had no ________ of natural light.

A. source       B. origin          C. supply       D. root

Example: <Examining the alternatives:> A. source, B. origin, C. supply, D. root

Comment: It is explicit here that the alternatives are scanned in order.

d.27 Scanning alternatives backwards

Test item: I think this problem can be ________ if we all work together.

A. saved       B. resulted      C. solved       D. indicated
Example: I think this problem can be *gap* if we all work together. indicated, ~ solved, ~ resulted, saved, *saved*~ a a a a a a

Comment: The alternatives are examined starting with the last one, then the subject continues reading them backwards, ‘C’, ‘B’ and then ‘A’. The direction of reading in Arabic might be influencing the subject here, especially since order is of no importance in choosing the right answer. Another possible explanation is that when reading the item the eye has come to the end of the stem and then the closest alternative to start with is ‘D’.

d.28  No particular order in scanning the alternatives

Test item: I read a very interesting ________ in the newspaper yesterday.

   A. evidence       B. appearance       C. article       D. substance

Example: <Examining the alternatives:> appearance <B>, article <C>, evidence <A>, substance <D> ~

Comment: We do not know why this subject examines the alternatives in this order (B, C, A, D). He possibly starts with option ‘b’ because it appears in the test exactly under the gap, then he continues randomly.

d.29 Using L₁ cognates to infer the meaning

Test item: He had to drive carefully to ________ the big holes in the road.

   A. avoid       B. extend       C. guide       D. delay
Example: <Checking the alternatives:> avoid, extend, guide, delay ~~ *I don’t know what any of them mean.* ~ ~ guide?.. could be the same as the Arabic word *(guide)*, but still.. it does not go with the meaning above.

Comment: The subject uses an L₁ cognate to infer the meaning of one of the options. Surprisingly, the word *guide* is pronounced in the L₂ English and in the L₁ Arabic local accent in a similar way, *(قـايد [gaid])* . In the L₁ the word has the same meaning as in the L₂ but does not exist as a verb. However, the word *examined* is rejected using another strategy.

d.30 Using close words in spelling/sound to infer the meaning

The test item: The girl's bedroom was divided in half by a __________.

A. behalf B. partition C. strait D. spine

Example: *I’m not sure about the meaning of any of them* <The alternatives>. Spine.. *I don’t know what it means.* Strait.. strait, is it *straight direct*? *I don’t think* so.

Comment: The subject wonders whether or not ‘strait’ is ‘straight’, but he rightly realises they are different. Why ‘straight’? We are not sure, but it would appear because it is a known word that is close in sound or spelling to the word in question.
d.31 Using morphological knowledge to infer the meaning

Test item: The girl's bedroom was divided in half by a __________.

A. behalf  B. partition  C. strait  D. spine

Example: … Partition: I don't know what it means. .. maybe ‘part’? They could divide part of the room, so, partition,

Comment: He does not know what partition (the correct alternative) means, but he knows a similar word part that could fit in the context. He correctly thinks the two words could share the same root. In other words, he uses this type of strategy to guess the meaning of an unknown alternative. When he has done that, the meaning found seems to be compatible with the meaning of the stem, strategy e.46, so he picks this alternative.

d.32 Stating problematic alternatives

Test item: I read a very interesting __________ in the newspaper yesterday.

A. evidence  B. appearance  C. article  D. substance

Example: I read a very interesting space in the newspaper yesterday. I read a very interesting something in the newspaper~ A. evidence, B. appearance, C. article, D. substance. What is substance?!~ I don't know~.

Comment: The test-taker here focuses on an unknown alternative, ‘substance’, and queries its meaning, perhaps is an attempt to retrieve it. This strategy is in line with b.12, but here the context is different.
d.33  Skipping an unknown alternative

The test item: The student ___________ to his classmate, so that the teacher would
not hear him.
A. has spoken  B. yelled  C. whispered  D. cried

Example: < Checking the alternatives> Whispered.. I do not know what this means, has spoken.. if he talked, the teacher would hear him.

Comment: When the subject does not know what whispered means, he just moves to another alternative.

d.34  Repetition

Test item: Many people were _________ about the way the criminal escaped from jail.
A. curious  B. guilty  C. innocent  D. correct

Example: curious, guilty, innocent, correct~ curious, guilty, innocent ~ guilty, innocent, correct ...

Comment: The subject keeps repeating the alternatives. It is hard to say what is going on in his mind. However, perhaps this is one way of trying to trigger his memory to retrieve their meanings.

d.35  Translation

Test item: I’m afraid, our insurance policy does not _________ dental care.
Example: I’m afraid, our insurance policy does not cover dental care. Scare, cover, accident or insuring. ‘Does not’ is a single simple present so, it must be either scare or cover. With god’s luck, it is scare.

Comment: Whilst the testee reads the alternatives, he translates the meaning of cover in his mother tongue and then continues reading the alternatives. This may be because he is holding the meaning of the stem, and any meaning he has inferenced for the gap, in his memory, in the form of an L1 translation. It is helpful, therefore, for him to translate the alternatives into the L1 and try to decide on the answer by thinking entirely in the L1.

e. Strategies for selecting a response

In principle, when a test-taker is unable to immediately select which of the alternatives offered fits the gap, s/he tries to use some strategies to overcome this failure and compensate for the missing knowledge (more details are in Chapter II.7). The strategies grouped in this category are used to help bridge the gaps in the subjects’ ML, helping him/her to find the correct response. These strategies can be divided into two approaches: negative and positive lines of attack.

First: Negative line of attack

This approach means that the subject tries first to find the incorrect alternatives and eliminate them. He can consequently come up with the correct one or at least narrow
down the number of possible alternatives. This test-taking behaviour is used in tackling reading comprehension tests, as found by Nevo (1989). The study, however, did not explain the basis on which the alternatives were discarded. In this study, a number of mental approaches to eliminating the alternatives was found.

e.36 Elimination using pragmatic meaning unlikelihood

Test item 1: The workers wear special gloves to ________ their hands from fire.

A. put   B. protect   C. prevent   D. take

Example 1: <Examining the alternatives:> A. put,  B. protect, C. prevent, D. take ~

Put..? No, ~ it cannot be. How can they use gloves to put their hands in fire!

Test item 2: The doctor said father will get well soon, because his illness wasn’t very

_______.

A. difficult   B. serious   C. hard   D. heavy

Example 2: The doctor said father will get well soon, because his illness wasn’t very~. The doctor said father will get well soon, because his illness wasn’t very~,

maybe ‘B’, serious, because the others are difficult, hard to solve ~ .., they do not match the meaning of the sentence.

Comment: The first subject eliminates one of the alternatives by using general real world knowledge inconsistency, i.e. pragmatic unlikelihood between option ‘A’, put and the general meaning of the stem. However, although the elimination of this distractor is correct, there are, of course, two mistakes in the thought: (a)
this pragmatic general knowledge of gloves is faulty since gloves that protect from fire do exist and (b) the translation provided for from fire as in fire is not correct.

The second subject pauses at the gap. Apparently he examines the alternatives during the pause, as he later says that the option serious seems to be the right choice. He expresses the reason behind this choice as being that the other alternatives do not fit the meaning of the stem, though he does not elaborate on why he thinks this.

The first example shows that the test-takers may simply reject one, or more, of the alternatives, but not positively choose anything. The second shows that they may reject several and choose the one left.

e.37 Elimination using general grammatical rules

Test item: I’m afraid, our insurance policy does not ________ dental care.

A. scare       B. cover       C. accident       D. insuring

Example: <Examining the alternatives:> ~ ~ ~ ‘insuring’ is not suitable because it has ‘ing’, so it needs ‘is’ before it.

Comment: In examining the alternatives, the subject clearly considers a grammatical feature of this stem, which leads him to eliminate an incorrect alternative. He discards one of the alternatives, insuring, on the ground that insuring, as a
progressive form of a main verb, needs a form of be as auxiliary verb, not a form of do.

e.38 Elimination using part of speech

Test item: The above one.

Example: <The subject eliminates two options and is left with ‘B’ and ‘C’> ~ The sentence needs a verb and ‘accident’ does not seem like a verb. So, ‘B’.

Comment: The subject discards the alternative accident because he rightly realises that the gap needs a verb and this alternative is not a verb.

e.39 Elimination using lexically dependent grammatical rules

Test item: He had to drive carefully to ______ the big holes in the road.

A. avoid   B. extend   C. guide   D. delay

Example: … not ‘delay’ ~and ‘guide’ needs ‘to’ after it...

Comments: Here, guide is rejected based on knowledge of a lexical grammatical rule, that a certain preposition should follow this verb. However, the rule used is actually incorrect, because guide does not need to after it.

e.40 Eliminating synonymous alternatives

Test item 1: The killing disease _______ in so many countries.

A. went   B. went ahead   C. spread   D. faced
Example 1: <The testee examines the alternatives> .. ‘went’ and ‘went ahead’? ~ no,
because they have the same meaning. It’s either ‘C’ or ‘D’.

Test item 2: David could not convince the bank that he would use the loan for
business_________.

A. intentions       B. purposes       C. goals       D. aims

Example 2: … ‘aims’ is the same as ‘goals’. Since there should be only one correct
choice among the alternatives, the answer cannot be one of them.

Comment: The first test-taker rejects the alternatives went and went ahead and the second
rejects goals and aims. The criterion for these rejections is based on the
argument that the alternatives are synonyms, so if one was correct the other
would be correct too. However, there should be only one correct answer
provided. The second fails to spot the fact that the correct choice of a word for
a gap sometimes requires knowledge of lexical collocation in addition to the
inherent meanings.

e.41 Eliminating unknown alternatives

Test item: Because he is a member of the parliament, he is in a better _________ to
fight for the workers’ rights.

A. scene       B. factory       C. position       D. house
Example: <Examining the alternatives> sk..ssscene..? I do not know what scene means.

factory, position, house, factory, position, house ~ ~ what is parliament

<Probably because the test maker wrote the ‘P’ small> ~ ~. Okay let me see again. ~ not ‘scene’, not ‘house’ and I am not sure about the others, but I will go fooor ‘factory’ because it is associated with ‘workers’.

Comment: It can be easily inferred that the reason why this subject rejects scene is simply that it is not known to him.

e.42 Eliminating with no stated reason

Test item: The above.

Example: <Examining the alternatives> sk..ssscene..? I do not know what scene means.

factory, position, house, factory, position, house ~ ~ what is parliament ~ ~.

Okay let me see again. ~ not ‘scene’, not ‘house’ and I am not sure about the others, but I will go fooor ‘factory’ because it is associated with ‘workers’.

Comment: The reason for rejecting the alternative word scene can be inferred from the earlier report that it is unknown. However, but no reason is stated for rejecting the word house. This strategy is similar to the third strategy in the list of reading TTS found by Anderson (see II.9.2.1), where an alternative is left out because it is not understandable.

**General comment:** The first three negative line of attack strategies imply that the test-taker first establishes (correctly or otherwise) the meaning of the stem and inferences something about the grammar or meaning, etc.,
of what must fit the gap. Hi and then looks for fillers that do not match these characteristics. The fourth strategy, e.39, implies that the test-taker works in the other direction, from the filler to what must be in the stem to fit it. Strategies e. 40 and e.41 involve no attention to the stem context.

**Second: Positive line of attack**

In contrast to the preceding method, this approach means that the subject works by trying to find the correct answer, rather than by removing the incorrect ones. He may also start with negative approaches and then continue with a positive one, as in the example of e.42; or he may try the opposite way around, as in the example for e.55. The following are the positive set of strategies for choosing an answer for a MCFGV test item.

**e.43 Selecting using the L₁ wording of a collocation**

Test item: In the listening comprehension test, the student found it difficult to

__________ comprehension and reading the questions.

A. answer  B. put together  C. combine  D. display

Example: <While examining the alternatives he says:>  ~ ~ ‘to answer’ because the sentence talks about a test and any test needs to be answered.

Comment: The subject here uses the L₁ collocational wording to pick the option in an L₂ context. In Arabic, he says أجب على الاختبار, which translates literally as answer the test, as well as take the test. Since, in English, one takes a test but answers a question, the Arabic collocation, which he relies on to pick the
answer here, does not exist as a literal translation in the L₂. The test-taker is, of course, incorrect in how he has parsed the structure of the stem. The gapped word does not have test as its object anyway. Nevo’s (1989) reading TTS checklist includes a similar example where an alternative is chosen because it has a word in it that evokes an association with a word in the native language or in another language known by the reader.

e.44 Selecting using the L₂ wording of a collocation

Test item: The company received a heavy fine for failing to _________ safety standards.
   A. meet     B. conform   C. comply     D. regard

Example 1: ~ To meet, to meet safety standards ~ safety standards. *I will go for meet because it goes with safety standards.*

Test item: He is so good that I am always _________ with his work.
  A. honored     B. attracted   C. displeased   D. pleased

Example 2: He is so good that I am always something ~ with his work, ~<it seems in this silence, that he reads the alternatives>, the best one is *pleased*, because it is said like that, pleased with someone's work.

Comment: In the interview the first subject states what he means by ‘*it goes with safety standards*’, using the wording of an English collocation. In his introspective report, the second subject states clearly that the option is chosen because "it is said like that". In fact, both expressions in the two examples are recognised as
collocations in English, which the subjects would probably have met in their English course.

e.45 Selecting using pragmatic meaning likelihood in relation to a word in the stem

Test item: Because he is a member of the parliament, he is in a better _________ to fight for the workers’ rights.

A. scene B. factory C. position D. house

Example: <The test-taker examines the alternatives> sk..ssscene..? I do not know what scene means; factory, position, house, factory, position, house ~ ~ what is parliament <Probably because the test maker wrote the ‘P’ small> ~ ~. Okay let me see again. ~ not ‘scene’, not ‘house’ and I am not sure about the others, but I will go fooor ‘factory’ because it is associated with ‘workers’.

Comment: When the test-taker does not know the answer, he uses a pragmatic meaning relationship and goes for the alternative factory because it is associated in meaning with one word in the stem, workers.

e.46 Selecting using pragmatic meaning likelihood in relation to the stem as a whole or part of it

Test item: The hunter forgot where he had put the __________.

A. trap B. cage C. bag D. hook

Example: The hunter forgot where he had put the cage, trap, hock. The hunter forgot where he put the trap, the bag, the cage or the hook? What is a hook?! I
don’t know, I’m not sure, but, let’s select the ‘bag’ because he may need it to put his hunting tools in.

Comment: The test-taker has difficulty picking the correct option (perhaps because, here, all of them fit the gap). He uses the whole stem as a meaning then picks bag because it is pragmatically likely to be associated with that meaning. This strategy is rather like a positive version of e.36.

**e.47 Selecting using a lexically dependent grammatical rule**

Test item: 12. What job do you think you are best ________ for?

A. favored B. intended C. suited D. adapted

Example: <The test-taker examines the alternatives> ... ‘appropriateness’ is ‘adapted’. ... yes, yes, that means semantically it is ‘adapted’ <he means, for the gap. Then he hinks of another alternative>. Suited for you? aaa ‘suited’ ~ no, suited, because in the sentence there is ‘for’. With this preposition, it is ‘suited for’. Yes. suited, C.

Comment: The test-taker picks alternative ‘D’, adapted, then he changes his choice to alternative ‘C’, suited, because he notices that there is for after the gap and he thinks that for this lexically dependent feature, suited is better. He is right: both ‘C’ and ‘D’ have the right kind of meaning and both go with for, but ‘D’ goes with things rather than with people.
e.48 Considering the letter of the answer for the preceding item

Test item: Many people were ________ about the way the criminal escaped from jail.

A. curious   B. guilty        C. innocent         D. correct

Example: <The test-taker discards two alternatives then says: > …so the answer is now restricted to either ‘A’ or ‘C’. ~ ~ I do not know any of them. I think..<br>aah~ ~ since what come before it < the earlier test item> was ‘C’ I will choose ‘A’ here.

Comment: The test-taker narrows down the possible correct alternatives to two words, which he does not know, and then uses the code letter of the alternative to decide which response is likely to be the right one. Since the answer chosen for the previous test item was ‘C’, he thinks the answer to the present item is unlikely to be ‘C’ again. Therefore, he chooses ‘A’ and fortunately it is the right choice. When considering the position of an alternative, the letter, for an unknown answer, some literature on TTS suggests not choosing the first and the last alternatives in teacher-made test items (Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1995). However, none of our test-takers mention considering such a choice.

e.49 Selecting a letter less frequently chosen in the other items

Test item: Many people were ________ about the way the criminal escaped from jail.

A. curious   B. guilty        C. innocent         D. correct
Example: <This test-taker also eliminates two alternatives> It *is either* curious or innocent. *aaaa ~ ~ I will go for curious, because ‘A’ has not been chosen very often in the test.*

Comment: This subject is also left with two alternatives. He then uses the code letter of the alternative to decide which response is likely to be the right one. As ‘A’ in his test protocol has not been picked as often as others in the whole test, he thinks ‘A’ might be the right one, which it is.

**e.50 Selecting a letter more frequently chosen in the other items**

Test item: Whenever Steve wears a new tie, he __________ something on it.

A. winks  B. bruises  C. spills  D. scowls

Example: ...*Unfortunately, I do not know the meaning of the provided options, but let’s see aa ~ A, B, C, C, to conform, C,C .. ~ I choose ‘C’ because this letter was the correct answer in a number of my previous answers.*

Comment: When this subject cannot choose an option, he uses a positive frequency strategy to choose a response. His choice is based upon the fact that he thinks response ‘C’ was most often the correct response in the preceding test items. The interview confirmed that this was the strategy used for this item.
e.51 Selecting using English ‘likeness’

Test item: Bob ___________ the goods because he did not have enough money to pay the taxes.

A. hijacked     B. smuggled     C. pulled     D. opened

Example: <After examining the alternatives, the test-taker is left with two alternatives that he does not know> ~ Smuggled or hijacked ~ ~ smuggled because it seems more English.

Comment: This subject is left with two unknown alternatives. He picks one of them, relying upon ‘English-likeness’ as a strategy in this choice. He thinks hijacked is less English than smuggled. We cannot tell what exactly he means by this. In the L1, both alternatives exist in meaning, but not as cognates. He may be referring to the word’s phonology or spelling. However, regardless of what he means, his strategy here is English-likeness.

e.52 Selecting what ‘sounds nice’

Test item 1: The meeting room was rather cramped and had no __________ of natural light.

A. source       B. origin       C. supply       D. root

Example 1: .. source, origin..~ I know the meaning of ‘root’, but I do not know any of the other alternatives. ‘Root’ does not fit. ~~~ <Presumably he is reading the alternatives silently> ‘A’, source, is a nice word, so, I will go for it. I
do not know, but I have feeling it is the right one. <He does not say it with the stem>.

Test item 2: Fred told his children not to _________ over their toys.
A. quarrel   B. prevent   C. suffer   D. threaten

Example 2: <The test-taker skips this item because it is difficult and then comes back to it > Fred told his children not to ~ over their toys. Quarrel, prevent, suffer, threaten ~ ~ I do not know any one. Quarrel, prevent, suffer .. quarrel ~ quarrel. I will go for ‘Quarrel’ because it sounds nicer,.. ‘quarrel’ yes. <He does not say it with the stem>.

Comment: Here, both test-takers use the expression ‘sounds nice’ to explain their choice of an alternative and, in fact, they are right. This raises the question, in what sense do they think the chosen alternatives are ‘nicer’? Certainly they do not mean nicer in terms of meaning, since they do not know the meanings of the words. We also do not think they mean nicer in relation to the stem, because they do not say them with the stem. The Arabic phrase sounds nicer excludes the possible idea that this strategy means the written form looks nicer. In the interview phase, the second subject is asked what he means by sounds nice. He answers. “Its pronunciation sounds nice”. The reason behind choosing this strategy may be that the test-takers do not know the meaning of any of the alternatives, so cannot apply strategies that involve knowledge of meaning. Since they are both right, there is a possibility that the answers are chosen based on subconscious knowledge. They most likely have some knowledge of the those lexical items, though they are not aware they do. For instance, they
might have heard sequences of words like *quarrel over* in earlier teaching materials, even though they do not remember what they mean.

**e.53 Selecting a known alternative**

Test item: He wanted to know where Dr. Brown was, so he _______ at the main office.

A. inspected  B. inquired  C. guessed  D. indicated

Example: He wanted to know where Dr. Brown was, so he at the main office. Heee, he inspected, he inquired, he guessed, he indicated, ~ Indicated, inquired, ~ inspected, mmm, okay, Indicate: <means> with reference to, Inspected: what dose it mean?! Inquired, inquired: *I do not know, I'm not sure. okay, guess; let me guess, guessss...* indicate, indicate is the answer, because I know what it means, okay ‘D’.

Comment: The test-taker knows only one alternative (in fact the meaning he gets for it is incorrect) so he picks it because it is the only known one. Nevo’s (1989) reading TTS checklist includes a strategy with a similar approach, in some sense, where an alternative is chosen because it contains a familiar word that is frequently used in everyday language.

We must explicitly point out that if a test-taker selects a known alternative because he is consciously/subconsciously aware it fits the meaning the gap requires, the behaviour is considered as an instance of direct access to the ML, i.e. as ‘a’ in Figure 2.4 (see II.6.3), not as an e.53 strategy. For an example of direct ML access, see item case number 4 in Chapter VIII.
e.54 Selecting an odd alternative in form

Test item: Your son will leave the hospital soon, as his health is ________ recovering.

A. slowly B. presumably C. steadily D. interested

Example: Slowly, presumably, steadily, D. interested. ~ ~ I am really not sure ~. Of course it is not slowly. ~ ~ I think it is interested because it is the only one with 'ed' all the others end with 'ly'. <then he picks it>.

Comment: In the interview, the subject clarifies that he did not think about the part of speech the space needed when examining the alternatives, but interested attracted his attention because it had a different form. This behaviour may match in some way the strategy mentioned in previous literature, that test-taker may be drawn to an alternative because it is longer/shorter than the others (Heaton, 1990).

e.55 Selecting one of two opposite alternatives

Test item: He is so good that I am always ________ with his work.

A. honored B. attracted C. displeased D. pleased

Example: He is so good that I am always ~ with his work… honoured, attracted, displeased, pleased ~ aah, it seems to me that the best one in meaning is 'attracted', attracted with his work. ~ ~ Because there are two words that are
opposite, the answer is more likely to be one of them. So, ~ I will go for 'pleased'. Pleased with his work… the meaning is also okay.

Comment: This subject first thinks attracted is the best option for the gap, for no stated reason. However, he discards it in favour of choosing from two alternatives of opposite meaning, provided for the same item. This strategy leads him to select the correct option. He probably also uses strategy e.46 to choose pleased rather than displeased, though nothing was said overtly by him to enable us to be sure of that.

**General Comment:** Three types of context are used in some way to select answers for strategies 43 to 50: (a) the linguistic collocational context of the L₁ and the L₂ for 43 and 44, (b) the stem context for 45, 46 and 47 and (c) the test context for 48, 49 and 50. In strategies 51, 52, and 53 the alternatives are picked based mainly on factors intrinsic to the alternative word chosen, whereas in strategies 54 and 55 the alternatives are selected in relation to the other alternatives provided.

e.56 Random choice

Test item: I read a very interesting _________ in the newspaper yesterday.

A. evidence       B. appearance       C. article       D. substance

Example: I read a very interesting in the newspaper yesterday. ~ ah ~ I do not know the answer ~ I do not know the answer ~ Let me choose ‘D’.
Comment: The introspective protocol indicates that the choice is based on blind guessing. In the interview phase, the subject confirms that. He says that he did not know option ‘D’ and he had no specific basis for picking this alternative. He explicitly mentions that the alternative was picked only because if some answer was chosen there would be a chance to get a mark for it.

**e.57 Selecting with no stated reason**

Test item: In ________ to your inquiry, we regret to tell you that we are unable to help in that matter.

- A. response
- B. problem
- C. difficulty
- D. responsibility

Example:  
Unclear reading. Presumably the subject reads the stem, then he says:>
inquiry we regret, regret ~ inquiry, inquiry?! ~ okay ‘C’ < in the actual test protocol, he chooses alternative ‘C’, ‘difficulty’.

Comment: The above introspective protocol does not indicate the reason behind choosing that alternative. He also does not give any information about this choice In his retrospective protocol. He was not interviewed, either.

**f. Strategies after choosing an answer**

The following strategies seem to be used after selecting an answer.

**f.58 Suspending scanning the alternatives when one is picked**

Test item: The workers wear special gloves to ________ their hands from fire.

- A. put
- B. protect
- C. prevent
- D. take
Example: <This test item is number nine> The workers wear special gloves to their hands from fire. ‘A’, put, ‘B’, protect yes protect; ten <Test item number ten>; because he is a member of…

Comment: When the subject finds what he thinks is the right answer, which is alternative ‘B’, he does not continue reading the rest of the alternatives but, instead, moves on to the next test item. This strategy corresponds to the 13th strategy in the list of reading TTS found by Anderson (1991) and the 6th strategy in Nevo’s (1989) reading TTS checklist, where the test-taker stops reading the options when s/he reaches the answer (see II.9.2.1).

**f.59  Saying the stem or part of it with the alternative selected**

Test item: I’m afraid, our insurance policy does not ________ dental care.

A. scare   B. cover   C. accident   D. insuring

Example: <Examining the alternatives:> ~ ~ ~ yes ‘cover’ is the required word … I’m afraid, our insurance policy does not cover dental care.

Comment: After choosing what is thought to be the right answer, the test-taker reads the whole sentence with his choice, perhaps to see how the chosen word fits in the sentence in terms of meaning, grammar and collocation.

**f.60  Saying the meaning of the alternative chosen in the L1**

Test item: The machine does not make everything; it is for a ________ function.

A. useless   B. human   C. spontaneous   D. specific
Example: The machine does not make everything; it is for a ~ ~ ~. Specific function, specific function, D, *special function.*

Comment: After the test-taker chooses what he thinks is the correct response, he translates the alternative chosen into Arabic. This strategy was classified under the code d.35. However, it was later clearly noticed that translation is sometime specifically used with the chosen alternative, as this example clarifies. In this example, the translation is of the alternative and part of the stem; other examples give evidence of translation of the alternative chosen without part of the stem, e.g. example 2 for strategy c.23. In using this strategy, the test-taker probably wants to ensure that the answer matches the meaning he has inferenced for the gap, stage 2 of answering a MCFGV item (for more details see Chapter V. Figure 5.2).

f.61 Changing the answer

Test item: David could not convince the bank that he would use the loan for business_________.

A. intentions  B. purposes  C. goals  D. aims

Example: <His first choice is alternative ‘B’, but in the revision stage he says> ‘purposes’ ~ *no*, ‘goals’, *yes*, ‘goals’.

Comment: The test-taker’s first response to this item is correct. However, when revising the test, a second guess is given for no stated reason and the first answer is
changed. This matches the assertion of some theorists that second-guessing at the revision stage is likely to result in wrong answers (Alford, 1979).

f.62  Marking the item answered correctly

Example: [<in the interview phase> The researcher: What are these small marks for? The subject: When I am sure I have answered a question correctly I mark it. When I finish the test I count these lines to know the minimum score I will obtain].

Comment: This test-taker marks the items he is confident he has answered correctly. This is in order to estimate the minimum score he will achieve for the test.

VII.2  Summary of chapter

The objective of this chapter was to address the answer to the first and main research question: What test-taking strategies do EFL test-takers utilise when tackling item in the format of a MCFGV test? Hence, it contained the specific MCFGV test-taking strategies targeted by the study. The analysis showed that sixty-two different TTS ‘types’, were used when approaching MCFGV test items. This number reflects all the strategies found in the data gathered, though not every subject would necessarily use all the strategies. For each strategy, as far as possible, an example was provided of a piece of behaviour as evidence for the strategy. A comment from the researcher followed to identify how the strategy was used. As explained in Chapter V4.2, the study based its approach on the literature that groups strategies according to the particular domains they serve. The strategies found in our domain were then sub-classified into groups that seem to match the detailed steps in the process of tackling a MCFGV test.