

The VP-Split Analysis and Unaccusativity: A Comparative Study of Classical Arabic and Modern English

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Abstract

This paper aims at investigating and analyzing the different verb forms of the triliteral Arabic verb that exhibit typical characteristics of unaccusative predicates. Through providing evidence, it will be shown that Form 1 with its three variants, denominative verbs in Form 4 and, finally, Form 9 of the triliteral Arabic verbs all display typical traits of unaccusatives. Furthermore, by investigating unaccusativity in Arabic triliteral verbs, this study provides concrete and crucial evidence that argument structure is the same in all languages. Argument structure (the verb and the arguments it takes) is a universal property (Principles) and the surface structure is parametric (Parameters). Moreover, this paper attempts to prove that the VP-Split hypothesis can provide a unified structural analysis of the argument structure of the unaccusative verb in Classical Arabic as it does in Modern English. This study is conducted within Chomsky's Principles and Parameters Framework (Chomsky 1981, 1982, 1991, 1993) and the Minimalist Program (1995).

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Introduction

The typology of verbs in this paper is based on the argument structure of each verb. The typology of the English verb with respect to its argument structure according to Chomsky's theory is as follows: (i) unergative/ intransitive verb (one-place predicate), (ii) unaccusative verb (one- place predicate), (iii) transitive verb (two- place predicate), (iv) ditransitive verb (three- place predicate) and (v) ergative verb (two- place predicate).

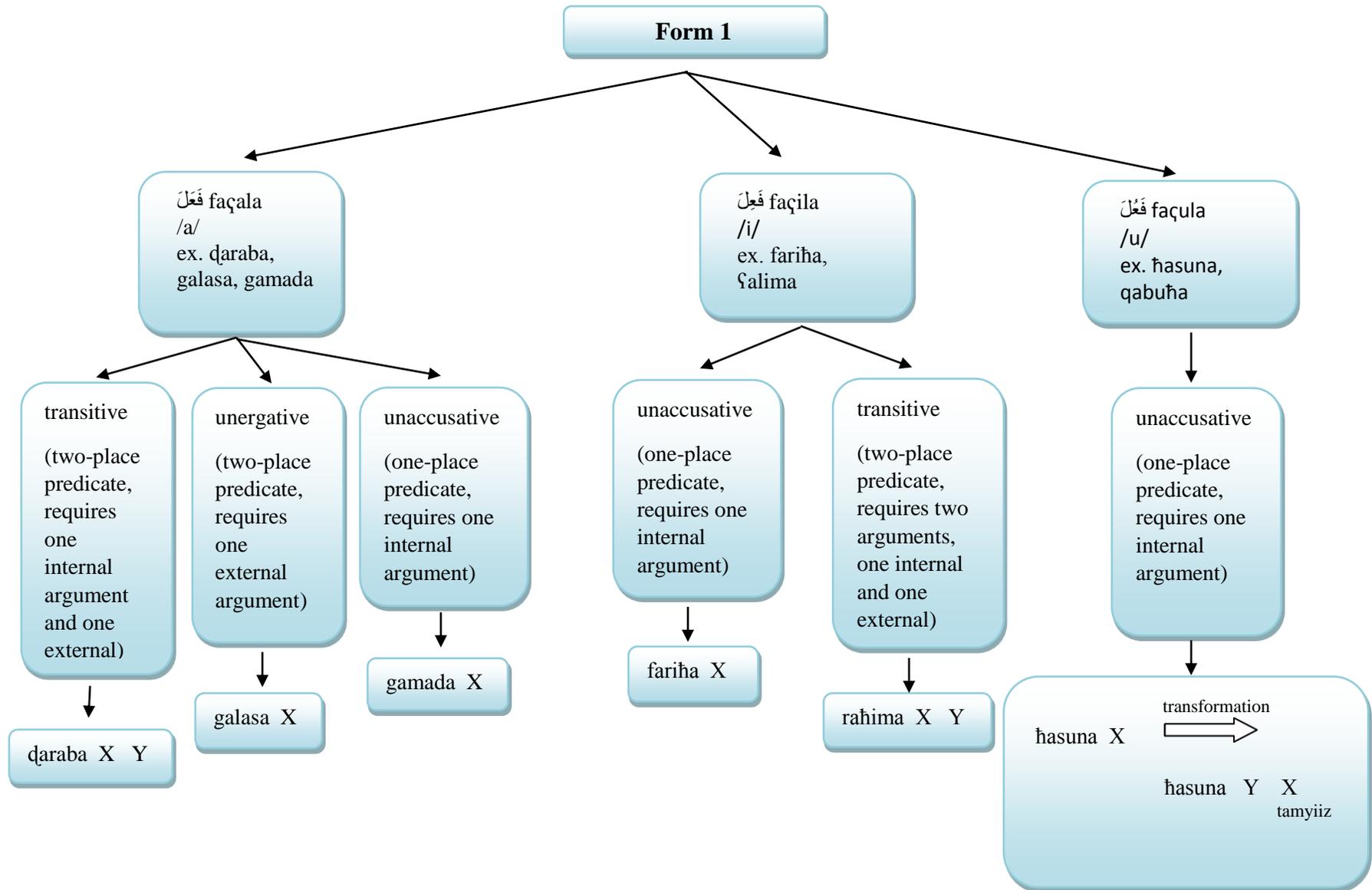
Regarding verbs which take only one argument, Perlmutter (1978) (also Burzio 1981 and inter alia) proposed in his Unaccusative Hypothesis that there are two types of intransitive verbs, unergative verbs and unaccusative verbs. The difference between them is that the only argument of an unergative verb base generates as its subject / external argument, whereas the single argument of an unaccusative verb originates in its object / internal complement position. As the unaccusative verb fails to assign accusative case to its complement, it gets raised to the Spec of the light v and gets the nominative case by being c-commanded by T.

As for transitive verbs, they are predicates which contain two arguments in their theta grids, one as its subject/ external argument and the other as its object/ internal argument. Ditransitive verbs, such as the verb 'give', require three arguments, one subject/ external argument and two objects/ internal complements. Finally, there is a class of verbs which can occur transitively or intransitively, and the subject of the intransitive alternate plays the same thematic role as the complement of the transitive alternate. Such verbs, as 'break' and 'open', are called ergative verbs. This term was initially used to refer to languages in which the subject of the intransitive verb relates to the complement of the transitive verb by carrying the same morphological case (Comrie 1978 and inter alia). Furthermore, it has to be mentioned that unaccusative verbs and the intransitive alternate of the ergative verbs are differentiated by two points. On one hand, unaccusative verbs do not occur transitively, but ergative verbs do. On the other hand, ergative verbs cannot allow the insertion of expletive 'there' in the Spec- TP position, but unaccusative verbs can.

In contrast, according to Arabic linguistic theory the triliteral verb is divided into three radicals (consonants) and variable phonemes (Wright 1896). The argument structure of the verb is implicit in each of the nine forms of the triliteral class. The verb form in Arabic through its derivational morphology comprises its argument structure. The phonological variations in Form1 (F1) *façal* فَعَلَ , *façila* فَعِلَ and *façula* فَعُلَ , for example, indicate a difference in argumenthood. Thus, to investigate the argument structure of verbs in Classical Arabic, one has to deal with phonology- morphology- syntax- semantics interface.

In order to study the argument structure of verbs, one has to state the fact that verbs in English and Arabic belong to two different morphological types. The

verb in English has a concatenative nature (McCarthy 1981). Hence, the base cannot be broken into smaller units, and the only morphological operations allowed here are prefixation, suffixation and in rare examples infixation. In contrast, the verb form in Arabic has a non- concatenative nature, i.e. the radicals *faʔ* ف, *ʕayn* ع, *lam* ل of the verb are non- adjacent. The complex nature of Arabic morphology determines the argument structure of the verb in conjunction with the phonological variations as illustrated in the following paradigm. The three variations belong to Form 1(F1) of the trilateral verb. The phonological alternations in the middle vowel in the verb are not allophones. They are phonemes as they determine the argument structure of the verb.



Linguistic Theory in both English and Arabic makes a distinction between the syntactic subject and the thematic subject and this distinction is universal. Consider the following example.

(1) There are three men in the room.

There is the syntactic subject, but *three men* is the thematic subject. The same thing is in the third derivation in F1. Hence, in the Arabic sentence in (2) the thematic subject is *wagh* and *Zayd* is the syntactic one.

(2) ḥasuna Zayd-un wagh-an
to be beautiful Zayd-nom face-acc
Zayd is beautiful in his face.

A syntactic evidence is clear in the following sentence where *wagh* originate as the syntactic subject, as well as being the thematic one.

(3) ḥasuna wagh-u Zayd-in
to be beautiful face-nom Zayd-gen
Zayd's face is beautiful.

(4) ḥasuna al-wagh-u
to be beautiful the-face-nom
The face is beautiful.

Study Questions

- a) Which verb forms of the triliteral Arabic verb exhibit typical characteristics of unaccusative predicates?

- b) Can the VP- Split hypothesis provide a unified structural analysis of the argument structure of the unaccusative verb in Classical Arabic?

Theoretical Framework

This research is carried out within the framework of Chomsky's Principles and Parameters (1981,1982,1991,1993) and the Minimalist Program (1995).

The Principles and Parameters (P&P) approach to syntax seeks to describe principles that appear to be invariant across human languages (Chomsky 1981; 1995), and to characterize in a precise manner the parameters of possible variations among languages. Hence, P&P attempts at a theory both of universal grammar and language - particular grammars. To illustrate, one of the universal principles is the Extended Projection Principle (EPP) which posits that every T constituent must be extended into a TP projection which has a specifier. In other words, every sentence must have a subject in all languages. On the other hand, one parameter of variation among languages is the null- subject parameter. Arabic has this parameter, but English does not.

Chomsky's Minimalist Program (MP) (Chomsky 1995) aims to minimize the theoretical machinery needed for derivation as much as possible. It eliminates DS and SS. MP takes language to consist of the lexicon and a computational system. The computational system selects items from the lexicon and constructs derivations that have to meet the interface conditions at LF and PF. The items merge to form phrase markers, and then categories move and merge with targeted categories in a strictly cyclic way.

The Arabic linguistic Tradition

The Arabic grammatical tradition is considered one of the great traditions in the history of linguistics, and it shares a number of fundamental similarities with modern linguistic theory (Owens 1988). This study is mainly concerned with the standardized Arabic linguistic theory/tradition concerning the morphology of the verb (Sibawayh V.4, Ibn Yaʿish V.7, Ibn Hisham, Al-Morada).

The pervasive pattern of verbs in Arabic is the triliteral verb (Wright 1896), in other words, verbs which contain three radical letters (consonants). There are also quadrilateral verbs. It is from the base form of the triliteral and quadrilateral verbs that other forms are derived in various ways. Such variations lead to modifications in the idea conveyed by the ground-form, and implicitly to effects on the argument structure of the verb. The derived forms of the triliteral verb are as follows.

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| I. فَعَلَ (faʿala) | II. فَعَّلَ (faʿʿala) | III. فَاعَلَ (faaʿala) |
| IV. أَفْعَلَ (ʔafʿala) | V. تَفَعَّلَ (tafaʿʿala) | VI. تَفَاعَلَ (tafaaʿala) |
| VII. اِنْفَعَلَ (ʔinfaʿala) | VIII. اِفْتَعَلَ (ʔiftaʿala) | IX. اِفْعَلَّ (ʔifʿalla) |
| X. اِسْتَفْعَلَ (ʔistaʿʿala) | XI. اِفْعَالًا (ʔifʿaalla) | XII. اِفْعَوَّلَ (ʔifʿawʿala) |
| XIII. اِفْعَوَّلَ (ʔifʿawwala) | XIV. اِفْعَنَّلَ (ʔifʿanlala) | XV. اِفْعَنَّلَى (ʔifʿanla) |

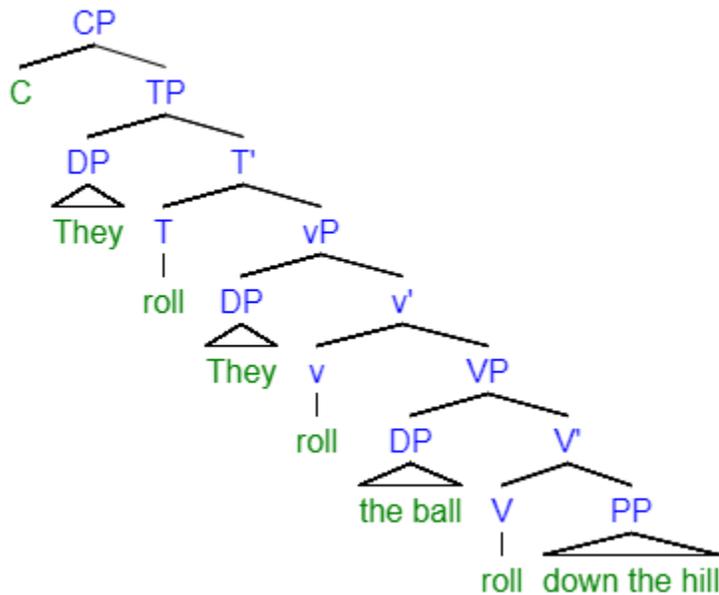
This paper is limited to Forms 1-9 of the triliteral verb. Added to that, the 3rd per. sing. masc. perf. is used in the examples as it is considered the simplest form of the verb.

The VP-Split Hypothesis

The VP-Shell (split VP) analysis was first introduced by Larson (1988). According to that hypothesis, VPs should be split into two distinct projections- an outer shell and an inner core, as illustrated in the example below.

- (5) (a) They roll the ball down the hill.

(b)

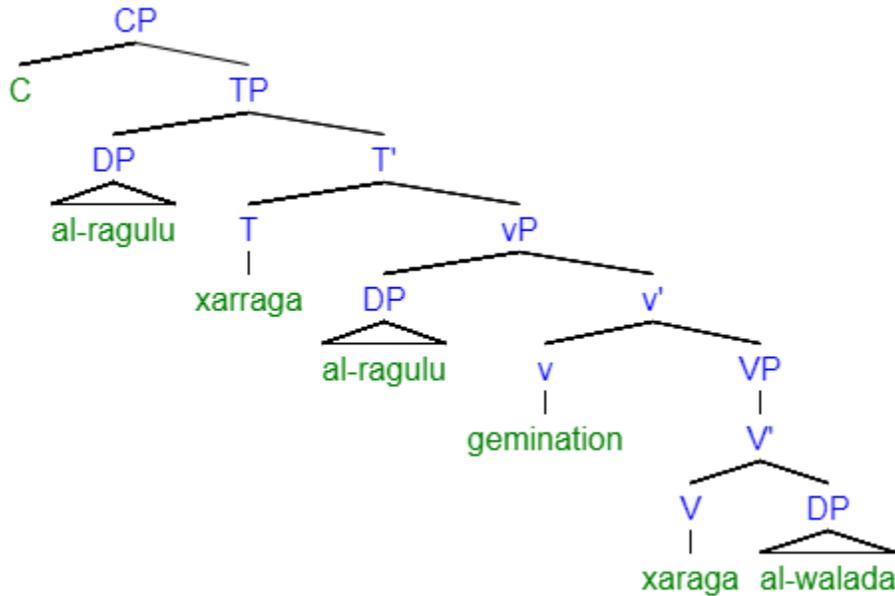


The structure in the tree above shows that the verb *roll* merges with its complement *down the hill* to form a V' constituent. That resulting V' merges with its subject to form the VP (the core). The causative light verb (v) is a strong affix, and it attracts the verb *roll* and the abstract causative, forming v' which then merges with the subject *they* to form the complex vP (the shell).

The VP-Split hypothesis (Larson 1988 and inter alia) captures the argument structure of the non- concatenative behavior of the Arabic verb as well as the concatenative behavior of the English verb. The VP in Arabic is split into the core VP which includes the base verb (الفعل المجرد), whereas the light vP (the outer shell) contains the affixes (المزيد) which determine the argument structure of the verb. The following tree diagram in (4) presents an example of such analysis.

- (6) (a) xarraga al-ragul-u al-walad-a
 make to go out the man-nom the boy-acc
 The man made the boy go out.

(b)

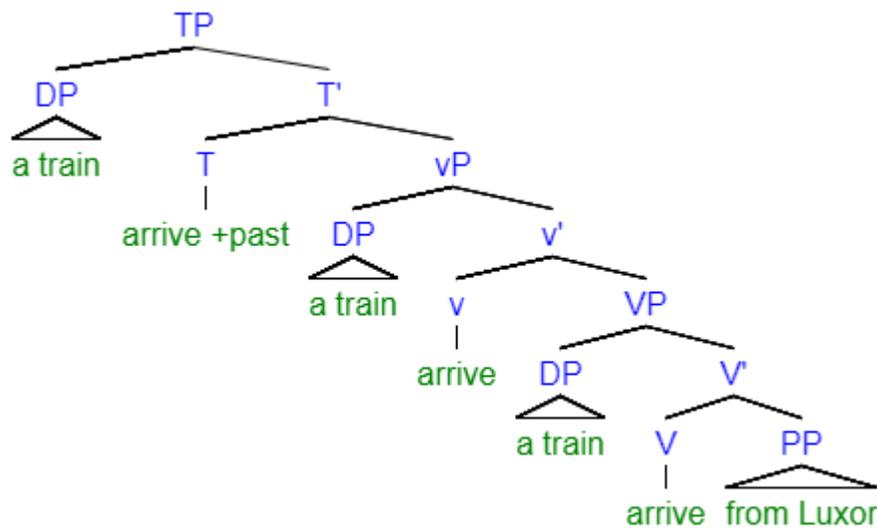


Unaccusativity

Perlmutter (1978) (also Burzio 1981 and inter alia) proposed in his Unaccusative Hypothesis that intransitive verbs like come and arrive, amongst others, are unaccusative predicates. The single argument of an unaccusative verb originates as the internal complement of the lexical V. As the unaccusative verb fails to assign accusative case to its complement, it gets raised to the Spec of the light v and gets the nominative case by being c-commanded by T. The VP split hypothesis provides a unified analysis for such structures. A well-established concept in the literature about the diagnostics of unaccusatives are illustrated in Edelstein (2020), as shown below.

(7)(a) A train arrived from Luxor

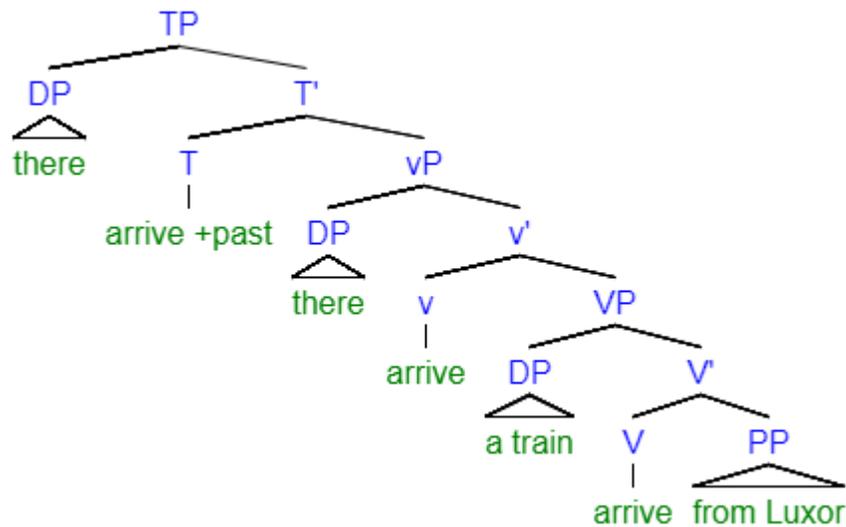
(b)



Another realization of unaccusative structures is when the DP theme argument of the verb remains in-situ and expletive 'there' is inserted in the Spec-v (which is with no external argument), resulting in the following sentence.

(8)(a) There arrived a train from Luxor

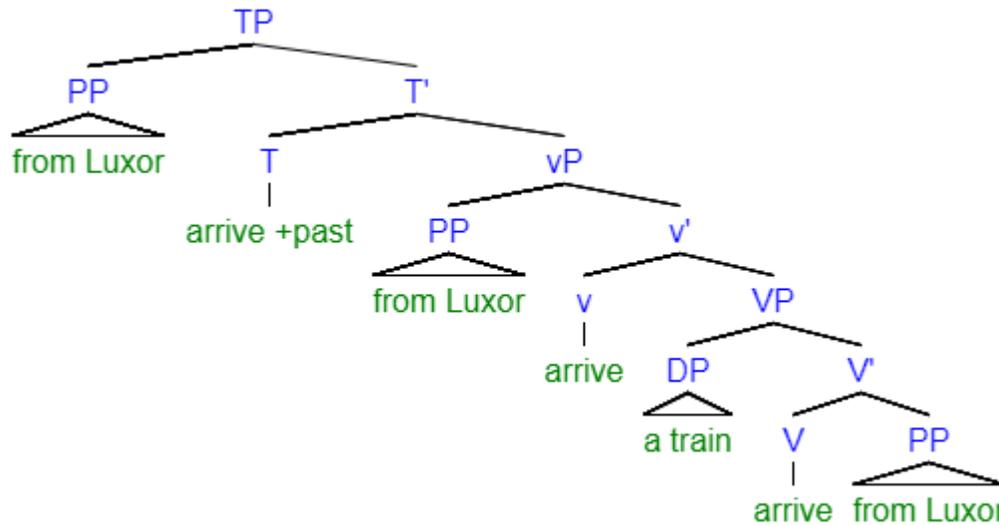
(b)



In addition, unaccusative verbs allow locative inversion constructions, where the PP locative argument is inserted in the Spec- TP position and the DP theme argument is kept in the complement position of the VP. This is exemplified in the following sentence.

(9)(a) From Luxor arrived a train.

(b)



Finally, as unaccusative verbs cannot specifically assign the agent theta role to their only DP argument, the usage of adverbs like '(un)deliberately' and '(un)intentionally' generates unmeaningful sentences, as in the following example.

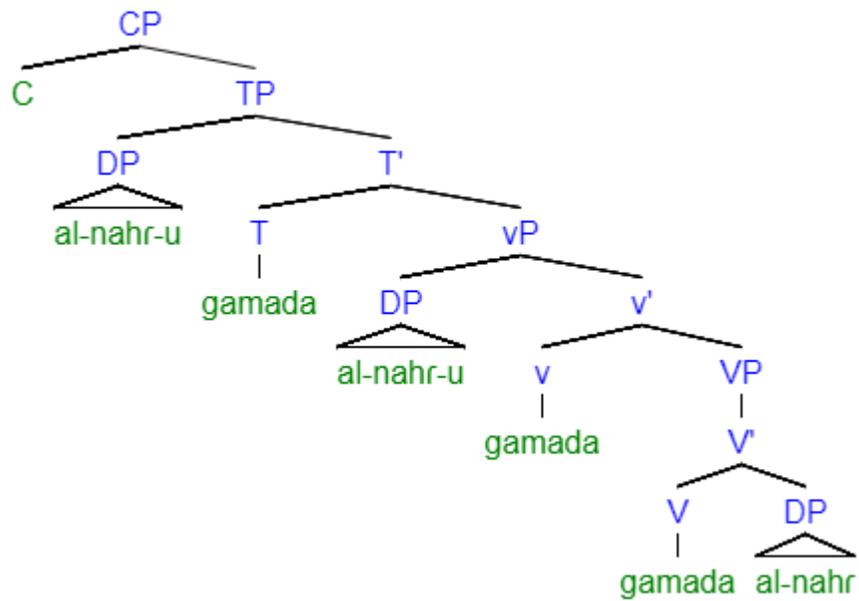
- (10) *A train deliberately arrived from Luxor.

Unaccusativity in Arabic Trilateral Verbs

1. Form 1 Variant A *faʕala* فَعَلَ

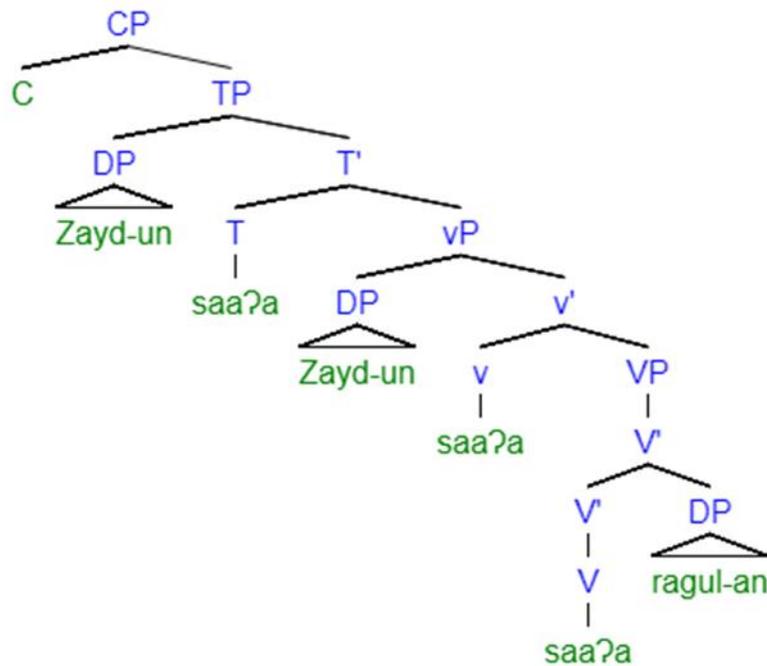
Whenever /a/ occurs as the second vowel in F1, it normally denotes a transitive verb. However, there are other cases where the verb is unergative, ditransitive, or unaccusative. The following examples in (7), (8) and (9) illustrate how F1 Variant A verbs behave as unaccusative predicates.

- (11) (a) gamada al-nahr-u
freeze the river-nom
The river froze.
- (b)



- (12) (a) saaʔa Zayd-un ragul-an
to be bad Zayd-nom man-acc
Zayd is bad as a man.

(b)



(13) "ساء مثلاً القوم الذين كذبوا بآياتنا"

saaʔa maṯal-an ʔal-qawm-u ʔallaḍi-in-a kaḍḍab-uu bi-ʔaayaatin-aa
 be evil example-acc the-people-nom who reject-they-nom with-signs-our-obl
Evil as an example are people who reject Our signs

(Al-Araf: Verse 177 (translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali))

The verbs *gamada* (to freeze), *saaʔa* (to be bad) in examples (11), (12) and (13) can be considered typical unaccusatives. Their single arguments, *al-nahr-u* (the-river-nom), *Zayd-un* (Zayd-nom), and *ʔal-qawm-u* (the-people-nom) respectively, originate as the complement of the lexical verb. Then, as the verb fails to assign the accusative case to its internal argument, it gets raised to the Spec of the vP to receive the nominative case from the c-commanding T. Furthermore, they allow ‘tamyiiz’/ resultative predicates, as *ragul-an* (man-acc) in (12) and *maṯal-an* (example-acc) in (13). A syntactic diagnostic of unaccusatives in Classical Arabic

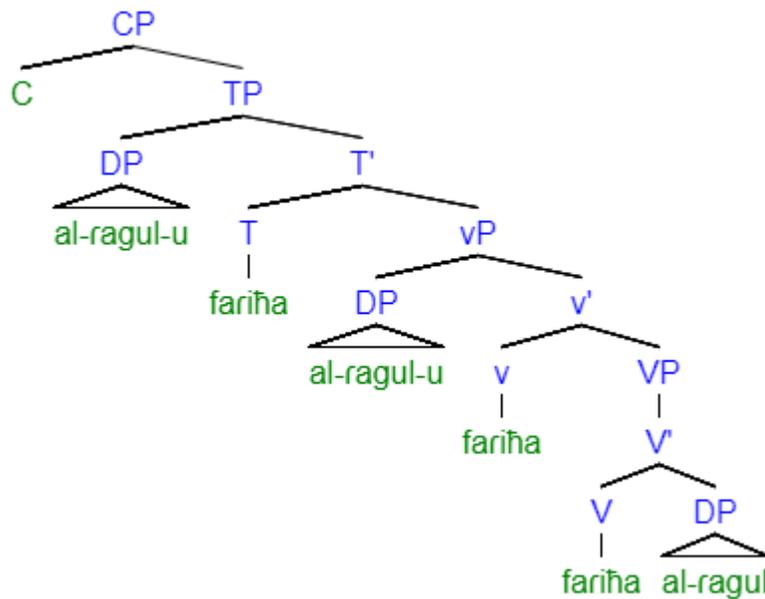
is that they allow a resultative predicate, which, unlike depictive predicates, is semantically linked to the main verb.

2. Form 1 Variant B *faṣila* فَعِلَ

In variant B, *faṣila*, there is a phonological alternation. Instead of the low front vowel /a/ in variant A *faṣala*, the high front vowel /i/ exists as the second intervening vowel. This vocalic change affects the argument structure of the verb. If the second vowel is /i/, the verb is generally a one- place predicate that indicates a state or condition, such as *fariḥa* (to be happy), *ḥazina* (to be sad), and *salima* (to be safe). Its only DP argument is assigned the θ -roles Patient or Theme, so it originates internally as the complement of the lexical V. Thus, verbs in F1 *Variant B* exhibit typical characteristics of unaccusatives. This is exemplified in sentence (14a) and its tree diagram presentation in (14b).

- (14) (a) *fariḥa* *al-ragul-u*
 to be happy the man-nom
 The man was happy.

(b)



Another diagnostic for unaccusativity in F1 *Variant B* verbs is the generation of unmeaningful sentences when used with the adjuncts *ʕamdan* and *qaṣdan*, which are the Arabic counterparts of 'deliberately' and 'intentionally', as illustrated in the example below.

- (15) *salima al-ragul-u ʕamdan.
to be safe the-man-nom deliberately
**The man was safe deliberately.*

3. Form 1 *Variant C faʕula* فَعُلَ

Invariably, the third version of F1, with the epenthetic vowel /u/, requires one argument only. Consider the following paradigm that exemplifies the third variant /u/.

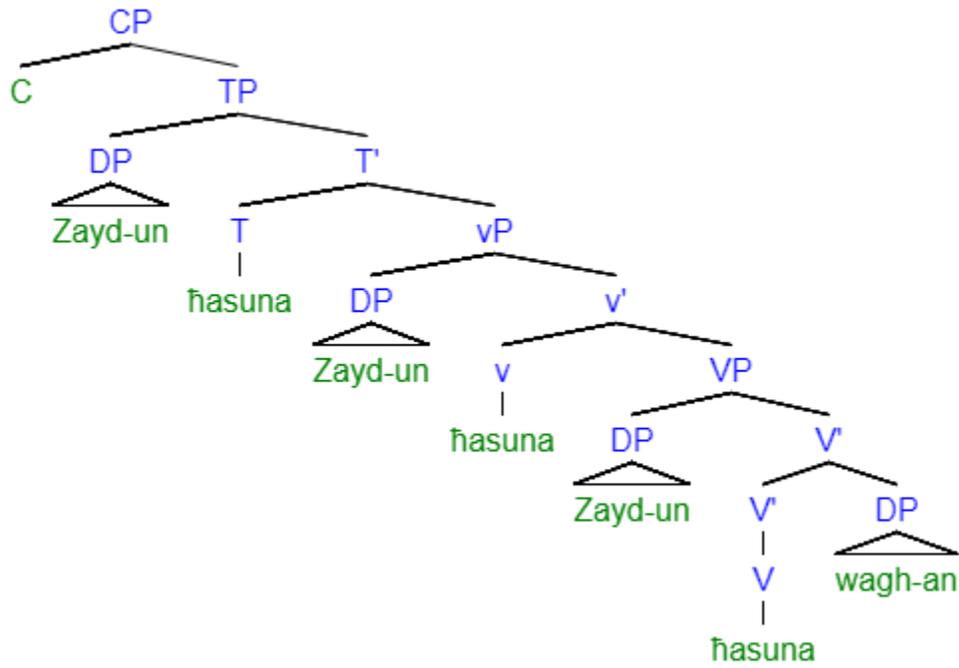
- (16) hasuna Zayd-un wagh-an
to be handsome Zayd-nom face-acc
Zayd was handsome.

- (17) *ħasuna* *wagh-u* *Zayd-in*
 to be handsome face-nom *Zayd-gen*
Zayd's face was handsome.

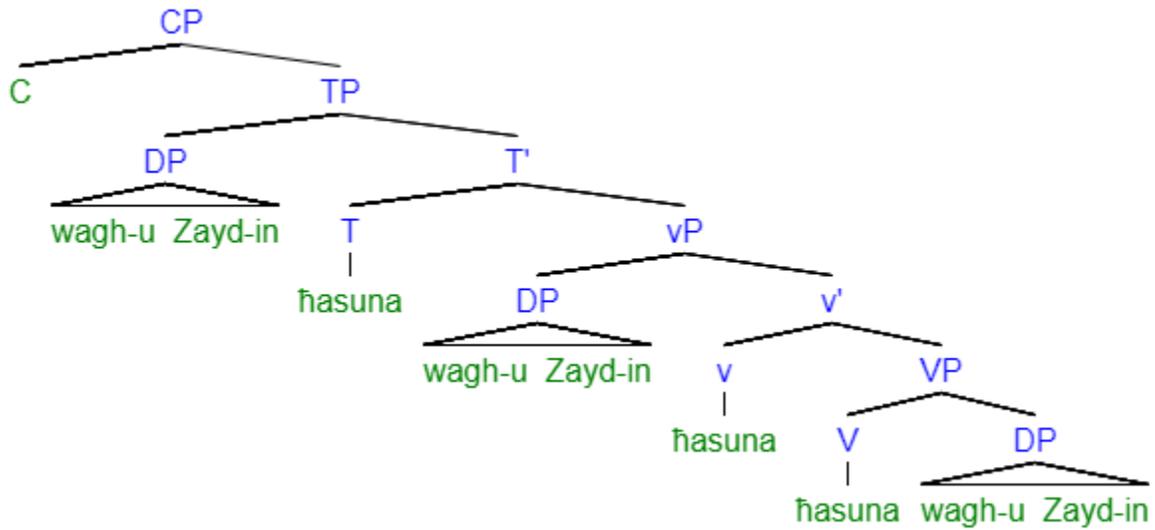
- (18) *ħasuna* *al-wagh-u*
 to be beautiful the face-nom
The face was handsome.

The verb *ħasuna* is a one- place predicate. The sentence in (15) is transformationally derived from the sentence in (16). The external argument of *ħasuna* is not *Zayd*, it is *wagh*. The genitive complement *Zayd* in (16) becomes the syntactic subject in (15), whereas the thematic subject in (16) *wagh* becomes ‘tamyiiz’/ resultative predicate in (15). In (17) the argument *al-wagh* is simply definite and as such the sentence is complete. Hence, it is said that the three sentences (15), (16) and (17) have the same argument structure despite their syntactic differences. This is shown in the following tree diagrams.

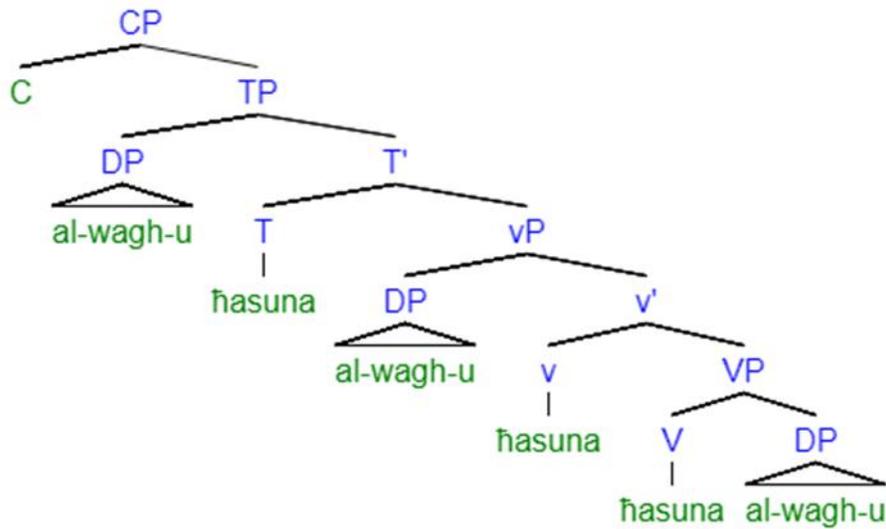
- (19)



(20)



(21)



Hence, it can be proposed that *faḥula* is an unaccusative verb. It matches the diagnostics of unaccusative predicates. First, it requires only one argument that is assigned the theta role theme. Its only argument originates as the complement of the lexical verb V, then it is raised to the subject position in order to be assigned

the nominative case. Second, the unaccusatives in variant /u/, similar to the unaccusatives in the other two variants of Form 1, allow tamiiz/ resultative predicates, as shown in the above examples. A resultative predicate is obligatory within the Θ -grid of the verb in F1 *Variant C*, but optional with the other variants of F1. This shows that there is a relationship between phonology and the Θ -grid of the verb. Consider the following verse from Qur'an.

(22) "كَبُرَ مَقْتاً عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ تَقُولُوا مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ"

kabura maqt-an çind-a ?allah-i ?an taquuluu maa laa tafçaluun
be great odious-acc for Allah-obl that say-you-nom which not do-you-nom
Grievously odious is it in the sight of Allah that ye say that which ye do not.

(As-Saff: Verse 1 (translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali))

maqt- an cannot be moved elsewhere in the sentence and this is one diagnostic of tamiiz/ resultative predicate; unlike depictive predicates which are mobile and are associated with the arguments of the verb. Furthermore, the semantic relation between the resultative predicate and the verb is very strong that in the translation of the verse it disappears because it is an inherent part of the semantics of the verb.

4. Form 4 Denominative Verbs *?aßala* أَفْعَلَ

As for denominative verbs (verbs derived from nouns), adding /?a/ to the noun creates a new argument. Thus, the argument structure of the resulting verb includes one argument. This is exemplified in a verb like *?aømara* (to bear fruit), which is derived from the noun *øamar* (fruits).

(23) ?aømarat al-ßagarat-u
to bear fruit the tree-nom

The tree bore fruit.

Furthermore, another group of denominatives shows the entering upon a period of time, getting into a state or condition, obtaining or having something or moving toward a place, as in the examples below.

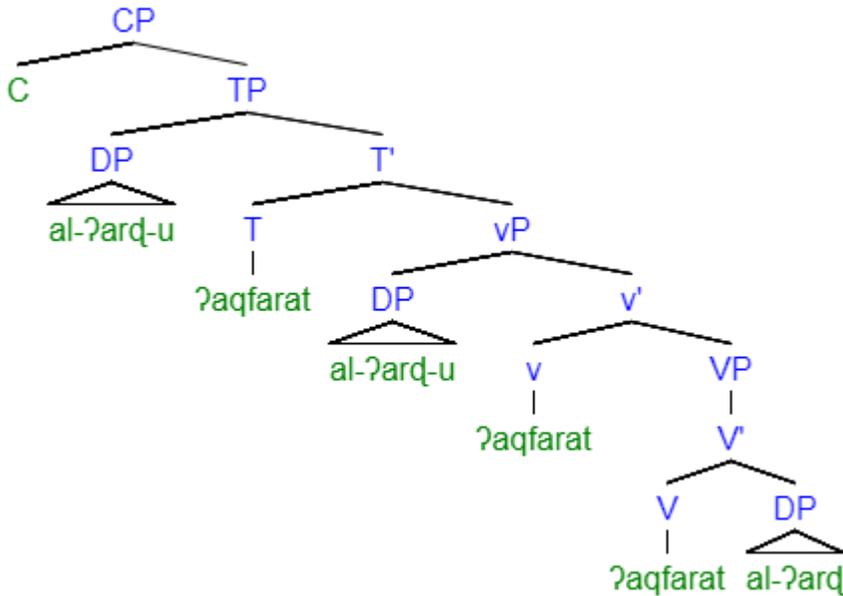
- (24) ʔaqfarat al-ʔarq-u
 to become desert-fem the-land-nom
The land became desert.

- (25) ʔahrama al-ragal-u
 enter the sacred land the-man-nom
The man entered the sacred land.

- (26) ʔazhara al-musafir-u
 enter upon the time of mid-day the-traveler-nom
The traveler entered upon the time of mid-day.

The representative verbs mentioned in the above sentences exhibit the characteristics of typical unaccusative predicates. These verbs have a single argument that is assigned a Patient or Theme θ -role. It originates as the internal argument of the lexical V, as exemplified in the following tree diagram of sentence (24).

(27)



Another evidence that denominative F4 verb is unaccusative is that it does not allow the usage of the adjuncts *ʕamdan* and *qaṣdan*, the Arabic counterparts of 'deliberately' and 'intentionally', as illustrated below.

- (28) *ʔaqfarat al-ʔarḍ-u ʕamdan
 become desert-fem the-land-nom deliberately
 **The land became desert deliberately.*

5. Form 9 *ʔifʕalla* اَفْعَلَّ

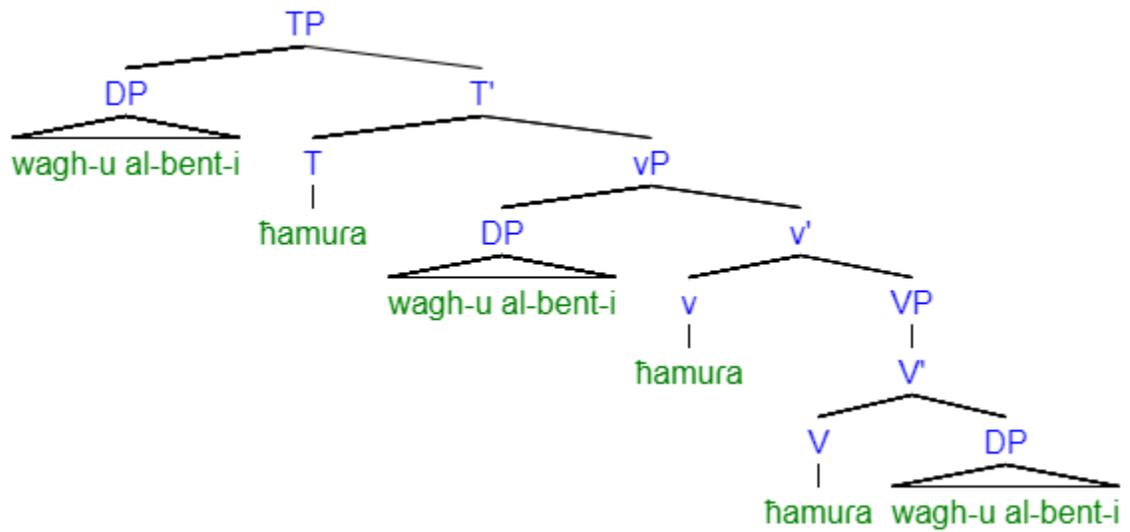
F9 is derived from the third variant in F1 (faʕula) by the gemination of the third radical. It mainly shows colors and defects and indicate intensiveness (Wright 1896) such as *ʔihmarra* (to be red) and *ʔiʕwagga* (to be crooked). Gemination, which usually affect the Θ -grid of the verb by augmenting the number of its arguments, here only signifies intensity. Consider the following paradigm.

(29) *ħamura* *wagh-u* *al-bent-i*
 to be red face-nom the girl-gen
The girl's face was red.

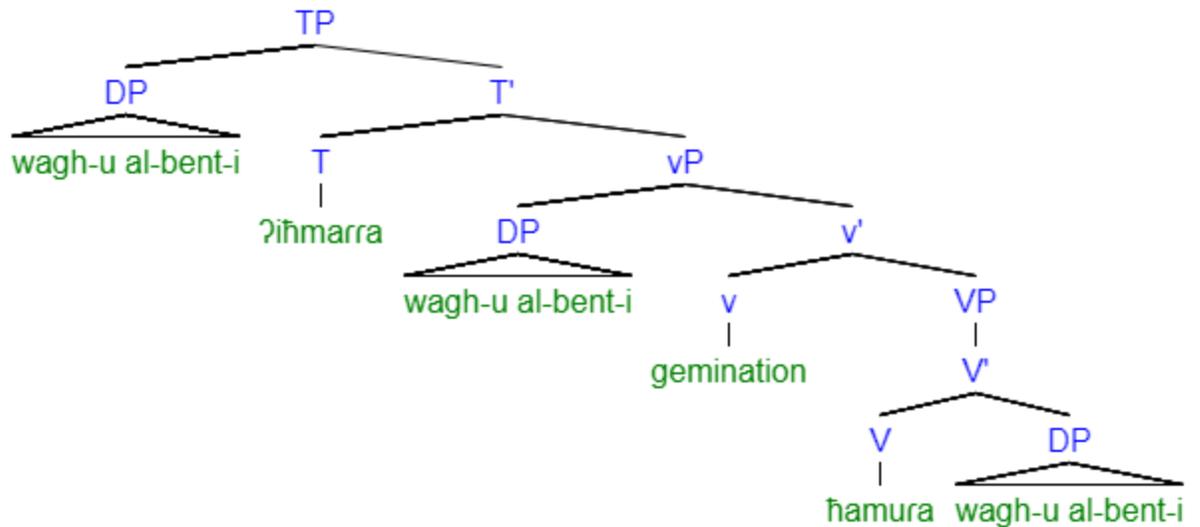
(30) *ʔihmarra* *wagh-u* *al-bent-i*
 to be red face-nom the girl-gen
The girl's face was red.

The F9 verb in sentence (30) (*ʔihmarra*) has the same argument structure as its F1 counterpart in sentence (29) (*ħamura*), and both can be captured by the following VP-Split trees (Larson 1988 and inter alia). The following trees in (31) and (32) represent a unified analysis for both sentences. The VP is split into the core VP which includes the base verb (*ħamura*) and its complement, whereas the light vP contains the causative morpheme. This morpheme is abstract in the sentence in example (31) but is morphologically realized by the gemination of the third radical in F9, as shown in the sentence in example (32).

(31)



(32)



As the verbs in F9 retain the same argument structure of their counterparts in F1 *Variant C*, they exhibit the characteristics of unaccusatives. They require a single argument that is assigned the Patient or Theme theta role, and that originates

internally in the complement position in the VP. They also allow resultative predicates, as illustrated below.

- (33) ʔihmarra-t al-bent-u wagh-an
 to be red-fem the-girl-nom face-acc
The girl's face was red.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper studies verb forms of the triliteral Arabic verb that display typical traits of unaccusative predicates. Through analyzing their argument structure, the three variants of Form 1 verbs, denominative Form 4 verbs and Form 9 verbs all match the diagnostics of unaccusative predicates. First, the verb requires a single argument that is assigned the Patient or Theme theta role, and that originates internally in the complement position in the VP. In addition, as unaccusative verbs cannot specifically assign the agent theta role to their only DP argument, the usage of adverbs like '(un)deliberately' and '(un)intentionally' generates unmeaningful sentences. Finally, unaccusatives allow resultative predicates. In order to analyze the argument structure of those various verb forms, this study made use of the VP-Split hypothesis, which provided a unified structural analysis of the verbs in both Classical Arabic and Modern English. Hence, this study also proves that argument structure is the same in all languages. Argument structure proves to be a universal property, and the surface structure varies across languages.

Tables of IPA Symbols Used in the Phonemic Transliteration of Classical Arabic:

Consonants

Symbol	Example	Symbol	Example
b	bint (girl)	ħ	ħuṣaan (horse)
t	tuffaaħah (apple)	ç	çayn (eye)
d	dub (bear)	ʃ	ʃams (sun)
k	kitab (book)	ʁ	yaalii (expensive)
g	gamal (camel)	x	xaruuf (sheep)
q	qalam (pencil)	h	hadiyyah (present)
ʔ	ʔarnab (rabbit)	z	zarf (envelop)
ṭ	ṭaaʔir (bird)	ʂ	ʂuurah (picture)
ḍ	ḍufḍaç (frog)	m	maktab (desk)
f	farawlah (strawberry)	n	nagm/ najm (star)
θ	θaçlab (fox)	r	ragul (man)
ð	ðayl (tail)	l	luçbah (toy)
z	zaraafah (giraffe)	y	yadd (hand)
s	subbuurah (board)	w	walad (boy)
j	jamal (camel)		

Table 1. Consonant phonemes

Vowels

Vowels					
i	short high front unrounded	a	short mid unrounded	u	short high back rounded

Table 2. Vowel phonemes

- Length of a vowel is indicated by doubling the vowel, as in (kaataba)
- Gemination is indicated by doubling the consonant letter, as in (kattaba)

Abbreviations

acc	Accusative case
compl	Complement
d	Dual
fem	Feminine
F1	Form 1 of the triliteral verb
F2	Form 2 of the triliteral verb
F3	Form 3 of the triliteral verb
F4	Form 4 of the triliteral verb
F5	Form 5 of the triliteral verb
F6	Form 6 of the triliteral verb
F7	Form 7 of the triliteral verb
F8	Form 8 of the triliteral verb
F9	Form 9 of the triliteral verb
gen	Genitive case
LF	Logical Form
masc	masculine
MP	Minimalist Program
nom	Nominative Case
pl	plural
P&P	Principles and Parameters
sing	singular
Spec	Specifier
UG	Universal Grammar
V	Verb
X	variable
Y	variable
Z	variable

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نظرية التحليل المقسم لجملة الفعل والأفعال غير الناصبة: دراسة مقارنة بين اللغة الإنجليزية الحديثة

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المستخلص :

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة وتحليل تصنيفات الفعل الثلاثي المجرد و المزيد التي تتصف بكونها مسند إليه غير ناصب. تقدم هذه الدراسة الأدلة التي تثبت أن كلا من التصنيف الأول من الفعل الثلاثي بأوزانه الثلاثة و الأفعال المشتقة من الأسم في التصنيف الرابع بالإضافة إلى التصنيف التاسع كلهم من نوع المسند إليه غير الناصب . و بناءً عليه فإنَّ هذه الدراسة تهدف إلى إثبات أنَّ التركيب الدلالي للفعل لا يتغير بين اللغتين الإنجليزية و العربية بالرغم من الاختلافات الجذرية في تصريف الفعل بين اللغتين لانتمائهما إلى أصول لغوية مختلفة (اللغات السامية و اللغات الهندوأوروبية) . بالإضافة لما سبق، تحاول هذه الدراسة إثبات أن نظرية التحليل المقسم لجملة الفعل (لارسن 1988) توفر تحليل تركيبى موحد للتركيب الدلالي للفعل غير الناصب وذلك في اللغة العربية الفصحى كما هو الحال في اللغة الإنجليزية. تتناول هذه الدراسة تحليل بنية الفعل الثلاثي المجرد والمزيد والتركيب الدلالي لهما طبقاً لنظرية تشومسكي (1981 و 1982 و 1991 و 1993).

الكلمات المفتاحية :

المسند إليه غير الناصب، الفعل الثلاثي في اللغة العربية الفصحى، نظرية التحليل المقسم لجملة الفعل، نظرية تشومسكي، نظرية الحد الأدنى