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The valencies of Stative Verbs in English and Modern Standard Arabic

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Abstract

This research is an attempt at understanding the semantico-syntactic valences of stative verbs in Modern Standard English (MSE) and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), in terms of their form, function, syntactic categories, and semantic categories. This research accounts for the similarities and differences in alternations between stative verbs in MSA and MSE, by comparing Levin's (1998) English verb alternation with Mousser (2013). This research also shows how the classification of English verbs, in terms of case frame, can help limit the effect of negative transfer. Similarly, understanding the types of possible alternations to a given syntactic construction can help reduce such an effect. Throughout this research, a contrastive analysis of case roles in MSE and MSA is conducted in an attempt to realize the subtle differences that hold between the two languages in terms of the semantico-syntactic valencies of stative verbs, as well as to give an accurate account of the number of alternations allowed by English stative verbs in relation to their Arabic semantic equivalents. In order to accomplish such a task, one must follow a systematic approach of linguistic analysis. First, one must specify the distinctive properties of every verb in a language. Second, one should account for what types and number of arguments i.e. case roles associated with each verb. Finally, one must group each verb according to its syntactic behavior, which is, for the most part, dictated by the denoted meaning of the verb. Such a comprehensive analysis results in an abundance of linguistic data. This data, when grouped together, forms a case lexicon that helps ESL/EFL learners understand the similarities and differences between his mother tongue and the target language.

Key Words: semantico-syntactic, valence, case frame, case Role, and stative verbs.

Essential conventions for reading transcribed Arabic forms.

Consonants

b	ب	Voiced bilabial plosive.
d	د	Voiced denti-alveolar plosive, non-emphatic.
f	ف	Voicless labio-dental fricative.
g	ج	Voiced velar plosive.
h	ه	Glottal fricative.
H	ح	Voiceless pharyngeal fricative.
k	ك	Voiceless velar plosive.
l	ل	Voiced denti-alveolar lateral.
m	م	Voiced bilabial nasal.
n	ن	Voiced denti-alveolar nasal.
q	ق	Voiceless uvular plosive.
r	ر	Voiced alveolar flap.
rr	ر ر	Voiced alveolar trill.
s	س	Voiceless denti-alveolar sulcal fricative, non-emphatic.
ʃ	ش	Voiceless palato-alveolar fricative.

t	ت	Voiceless denti-alveolar plosive, non-emphatic.
w	و	Labio-velar semi-vowel.
x	خ	Voiceless uvular fricative.
y	ی	Voiced palatal semi-vowel.
z	ز	Voiced denti-alveolar sulcal fricative.
ʔ	ء	Glottal plosive.
ʕ	ع	Voiced pharyngeal fricative.
ɣ	غ	Voiced uvular fricative.
j	چ	Voiced palato-alveolar affricate.
θ	ث	Voiceless dental fricative.
ð	ذ	Voiced dental fricative, non-emphatic.

Emphatic consonants

D (ض) , S (ص) , T (ط) , Z (ظ) are ‘emphatic’ consonants corresponding to ‘non-emphatic’ d, s, t, ð respectively. The emphatics are distinguished from the non-emphatic by the fact that the tongue in the articulation of the former is laterally expanded and its front part is low, whereas the lips are either neutral or slightly rounded and protruded.

Vowels	
i	Half-close to close front spread vowel, close when long or final.
u	Half-close back to central rounded vowel, close rounded when long or final.
a	Front open vowel, short and long.
ɑ	Back open vowel.
<p>Long vowels are indicated by (:)</p> <p>Geminated consonants are indicated by doubling the consonant letter.</p>	

Adapted from Ezzat, Ali (1972). *Aspects of language study*. Beirut: Beirut Arab University.

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Chapter one

1.1 Introduction

A proper linguistic study should deal not only with the syntactic aspects of a language but also with the semantic aspects of that language, as well. Therefore, this study deals with language from a semantico-syntactic perspective. This study sets out to compare the number of case frames and alternations permitted by English stative verbs and their semantic equivalents in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA).

Verbs hold a significant position in the study of language. The predicate of a sentence determines what sort of arguments are permitted in the structure in which they occur. The meaning of verbs determines what sort of nouns are allowed to serve as predicates, and which adverbs to modify them. They also specify what sort of preposition heads the preceding prepositional phrase. For instance, while the verbs ‘know and understand’ do not allow inanimate objects to function as their subject. Moreover, the verb ‘understand’ requires a human being i.e. experiencer in subject position, as in the sentence: *I helped him understand the problem*. The verb ‘know’, on the other hand, may allow an inanimate object to function as its subject, as in the sentence: *The dog knows his owners*.

The semantic denotation of a verb determines the syntactic structure in which it occurs. Therefore, verbs are the main element in any given construction. Verbs do not only constitute the proposition of a sentence, but they also indicate tense. Moreover, verbs and their modifying adverbs indicate the aspect of the sentence in which they occur.

1.2 Research Questions

This thesis attempts to analyze the form and function of stative verbs in English and Modern Standard Arabic as an attempt to answer the following questions:

- 1.2.1** How many types of stative verbs are there in English and Modern Standard Arabic?
- 1.2.2** What are the valencies of stative verbs in English and Modern Standard Arabic?
- 1.2.3** What types of alternations do stative verbs in English and Standard Arabic allow?
- 1.2.4** What are the similarities and differences between English and Modern Standard Arabic stative verbs in terms of the types and number of case roles allowed by each stative verb?
- 1.2.5** How far can a semantico-syntactic study of verbs help limit the effect of negative transfer?

1.3 Objectives of the study

First, the description of the semantico-syntactic aspects of stative verbs in English and Modern Standard Arabic. Throughout this research, a contrastive analysis pointing out the similarities and differences in terms of the verbal properties of stative verbs in English and Modern Standard Arabic will be conducted.

Second, the lexicographical implications of a semantico-syntactic study of the valencies of stative verbs in English and Modern Standard Arabic.

Third, the pedagogical implications of a semantico-syntactic study of the valencies of stative verbs in English and Modern Standard Arabic. This research shows how a semantico-syntactic study of language helps limit the effect of negative transfer and improve the process of second language learning.

1.4 Sources of data and Research Methodology

This study operates on the hypothesis that the behavior of a verb is determined by its meaning, which, in turn, determines not only the type and number of possible arguments, but also the order of the syntactic structure, in which a given verb is allowed to occur. Bloomfield (1933) regards the lexicon as an “appendix of the grammar, a list of basic irregularities” (p. 274).

Cook (1998) is considered one of the primary sources on which this research is based, especially his “revised case frame matrix” (p. 27) in which he describes the types and number of arguments required by verbs. The matrix consists of three verb types i.e. state verbs, process verbs, and action verbs. These verb types are sub-categorized according to the following domains: the basic, the experiencer, the benefactive, the locative, as well as the domain of time (p. 27).

This research also investigates the “case lexicon”. Cook also adds a new domain of time to the matrix and lists around 450 verbs in his “case lexicon” (Cook, 1998, pp. 235-259). This study attempts to compare and contrast the number of ‘case frames’ permitted by stative verb domains, presented in Cook (1998), and their semantic equivalent in Modern Standard Arabic.

Levin (1993) is a reference to previous research work that examines verb behavior and how verbs dictate certain syntactic structures. The author accounts for English verb groups and their syntactic behavior. The first part of the book discusses alternations. The second part of the book is concerned with the categorizations of English verbs according to the types of alternations they allow.

Mousser (2013) aims to classify Arabic verbs according to their alternations in order to accumulate an Arabic verb lexicon. In this regard, he states that “Arabic allows for multi-directional derivations which take as starting point an abstract root element assumed to carry a core semantic meaning. This meaning is present in different degrees in the derived forms” (p. 173). The author argues that

“the semantic kernel of the root is...a complex construct with more than one semantic element” (p. 173). The large coverage verb lexicon for Arabic operates on the assumption that diathesis alternations “are meaning preserving and can be identified cross-linguistically” (Mousser, 2013, abstract). The author examines Levin’s English verb classes and compares them with their corresponding Arabic verbs, as well as accounting for Arabic-specific alternations.

1.5 Definition of terms

- A. Stative Verbs:** are verbs that “describe a static situation in which there is no change” (Cook, 1998, p. 57).
- B. Valence:** the term refers to the number and types of arguments required by the meaning of the verb.
- C. Case Frames:** A case frame is “a configuration of one to three cases that are required by the meaning of the verb” (p. 20).
- D. Case Role:** A case role is a term used to describe “the semantic relations that link a predicate to its arguments” (Crystal, 2008, p. 428).
- E. Agent:** A thematic role that describes the doer of an action.
- F. Force:** A thematic role that describes the natural causes that lead to an action. It describes a doer that “does not act by will or volition” (Brinton & Brinton, 2010, p. 299).
- G. Instrumental:** The object or tool used to cause the action.
- H. Patient:** The person or entity affected by the action.
- I. Theme:** the person or entity that is present at the time of the action but is not affected by it.
- J. Experiencer:** The term refers to an "entity or person psychologically affected by the action or state expressed by the verb (Crystal, 2008, P.179).