Bridging Explicitness Gaps Between English and Arabic

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ملخص البحث

كثيرا ما يأخذ الباحثين المتخصصين بالدراسات المقارنة بين اللغتين الانكليزية والعربية بنظر الاعتبار إن اللغة العربية هي لغة كثيرة الجلاء وان اللغة الانكليزية هي لغة بطبيعتها تضمينية , على أن هذه الرؤية من الممكن أن تعود إلى أسباب اجتماعية ثقافية. إن هذا التمايز بين اللغتين لا يفترض فقط على مستوى المفردة أو المعنى ولكن يشمل أيضا المستويات النحوية وعلى وجه الخصوص مستوى مباني الجمل. تحاول الدراسة الحالية اختبار مشروعية هذا الجدل وتحاول أيضا تصغير ثغرة الجلاء اللغوي (الوضوح) هذه من خلال تقديم التحليل المعمّق لهذه الفرضية من اجل إماطة اللثام عن تلك الواجهات اللغوية التي كثيرا ما أغفلت وبالتالي جلب هاتين اللغتين إلى أرضيات مشتركة. على إن الإجراء الذي تبنته الدراسة يتضمن اختيار بعض الميادين التقابلية بين هاتين اللغتين ودراستها على مستوى التحليل اللغوي المصغر من اجل إثبات فرضيتها بان معظم هذه الثغرات بين هاتين اللغتين هي قابلة للردم. وقد توصلت الدراسة إلى بعض الاستنتاجات ومن بينها إن الثغرات المتعلقة بالنظام الصوتي للأصوات الصحيحة هي قابلة للردم جزئيا عند الأخذ بنظر الاعتبار حقيقة إن بعض الأصوات اللغوية الانكليزية قد تستعمل بأشكال صوتية متعددة غير مؤثرة على المعني (الفونكلي) بسبب تلك العملية الصوتية العالمية التي تسمى بالاندماج الصوتي وان هذا ينطبق كذلك على ثغرات الجلاء النحوية المتعلقة بالعدد النحوي والأسماء غير المعدودة والحالات الإعرابية ونظام تعاقب المفردات في الجمل والتي يمكن ردمها جزئيا مع بعض التفصيل.

ABSTRACT:

Researchers who are concerned with contrastive studies between English and Arabic often consider Arabic as a highly explicative language, whereas English as intrinsically implicative; a phenomenon which might relate to socio-cultural factors. This does not only take place at the lexical, i.e., semantic level, but at the grammatical, mainly the syntactic level too. The present study tries to test the validity of the above mentioned argument and minimize the explicitness gaps by offering deeper analysis to uncover the so long overlooked aspects which bring these two languages to some common grounds. The procedure to be adopted is to tackle some selected contrastive areas between the targeted languages on a micro-linguistic level of analysis. The study has reached some conclusions among which that the gap between English and Arabic concerning the consonant phonemic system is partially bridgeable because some English phonemes are used allophonically by means of the universal phonological process ‘assimilation’. Similarly, the syntactic gap between the two languages concerning number, namely that English distinguishes between singular and plural, while Arabic considers a third type, which is the dual, is also partially bridged by some English lexical items which have dual reference. The study suggests also that the availability of some invariable nouns in Arabic bridges the gap of the absence of the invariable nouns in Arabic. The syntactic gap concerning case between these two languages is also bridgeable by means of that process which maximizes the requirements of satisfying word order in Arabic, similar to that of English.

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Introduction

It is often argued by contrastivists that Arabic is a highly explicative language, whereas English is intrinsically implicative, a phenomenon which might relate to socio-cultural factors. This does not only take place at the lexical, i.e., semantic level, but at the grammatical, mainly the syntactic level too (see Hatim (١٩٩٧: xiv-xv)). The present study tries to test the validity of the above mentioned argument and minimize the explicitness gaps by offering deeper analysis to uncover the so long overlooked aspects which bring these two languages to some common grounds.

The procedure to be adopted is to tackle some selected contrastive areas between these languages on a micro-linguistic level of analysis. It is expected that the findings of this study will be of theoretical and practical significance to different fields of language inquiry, mainly to language teaching, translation and other pedagogical interests.

١. Criteria of Explicitness

It is suggested by Krzeszowski (١٩٧٤:٩٠) that a contrastive analysis study may take the form of a "comparison of particular equivalent system across languages", and such a comparison usually reveals one of the following aspects:

(a) an item X in a language L_i may be identical with an item Y in a language L_j in one or more than one respect; (b) an item X may be different from an equivalent item Y; (c) an item X may have no equivalent in L_j.

According to the above mentioned procedure, this type of comparison has pointed out that "the systems of number of nouns in French and English are in one respect identical in that both systems are based upon the fundamental dichotomy "oneness" vs. "more-than-oneness", and that the systems of numbers of English and Sanskrit are different because the latter distinguishes a trichotomy system of number, "oneness" vs. "twoness" vs. "more-than-twoness". An instance of the third case in which there is an absence of the equivalence in one of the languages compared is the system of number in English and that of Chinese; in the latter "nouns are not inflected for number".

The present study considers the first aspect of comparison, above mentioned, i.e., (a), as an absence of the explicitness gap between the targeted languages. A gap is assumed to occur where one of the rest two aspects, (b) and (c), is identified.

٢. Levels of Analysis

According to James (١٩٨٠:٦١, ٩٨-١٠٢), there are two ways of executing a contrastive analysis study: micro-linguistic or 'code oriented' contrastive analysis, and macro-linguistic one. The former is concerned with three main levels, 'phonology', 'lexis', and 'grammar'. This approach is taken to be 'traditional' and a 'controversial' domain. Any account of which runs the risk of appearing trivial or repeated, partially because it is considered as "well-explored" area of study. The second approach, i.e., the 'macro-linguistic' contrastive analysis, on the other hand, aims at achieving 'scientific' descriptions of how people of two languages communicate. It aims at incorporating socio-cultural settings within linguistics, and this widens the 'formal level' of analysis, which is done by the micro-linguistic approach, to include language forms larger than a sentence, i.e., text analysis, and widens the functional level of analysis by including discourse analysis.

To achieve the requirements of the present study and the space of coverage offered, it is limited to tackle some selected gaps between these languages on micro-linguistic level,

concentrating on aspects which are not well-explored. Tackling these aspects is viewed to agree with Zabrocki (١٩٧٤:١٠٠), who argues that deciding whether a theoretical contrastive analysis is fruitful or not is measured according to three criteria, and once a study achieves one of them, it will be within the scope of the benevolent recommended contrastive studies. A contrastive study is said to be so when it contributes to: (a) linguistic typology, (b) general linguistic theory, (c) grammatical descriptions of particular languages. The present study is hoped to contribute to these aspects, however in a limited form, particularly to the third one.

٢,١. Phonological Gaps

This section deals with some selected contrastive aspects at the phonological level between English and Arabic, which represent gaps of explicitness between them. They include phonemic and syllable structure gaps.

٢,١,١. Phonemic Gaps

EFL teachers often complain that the cause behind their students' inaccurate performance of some English phonemes is the absence of these phonemes in Arabic. The voiceless labial English phoneme /p/ is said to be of such case. That is to say, since Arabic does not employ this phoneme in its phonemic system, so Arab learners of English cannot easily differentiate between /p/, and /b/. Khalil (١٩٩٩:١٨) concludes that the gap between English and Arabic, as far as consonants are concerned, is partially limited to the absence of /p,v,g,č,ž/ (in addition, there are some Arabic phonemes are said to be absent in the phonemic system of English), and that although /p/ "does not occur in Classical Arabic, a /b/ is devoiced before a voiceless consonants, as in حبس [haps], and ابكى [ʼabkaa], and that the English /v/ is used in Arabic words like حفظ [hivð].

However, a closer reflection on the sound system of Arabic reveals that the voiceless labial /p/ is used in Arabic, although allophonically. This phoneme is not only used in the colloquial Iraqi Arabic. It is also used in Standard Arabic. Arabic speakers may try words like "ابتسام" , or even words used frequently in the Glorious Qur'an, which represent the most reliable instance of Standard Arabic, e.g., "ابتلى ", and "تبتم ".[١,٢]

The bilabial sound in these words, and many others, is voiceless, i.e., /p/. The cause of such use is a natural, and seems to be universal, phonological process which is 'assimilation'. The /b/ sound picks up the voiceless feature from the neighboring phonemes. (for a detailed account of 'assimilation' as a universal process see Schane (١٩٧٣:٥٠-٣)).

٢,١,٢. A Syllable Structure Gap

Consonant cluster is another assumed gap between English and Arabic. English is more explicit than Arabic in this regard, because, and according to Khalil (١٩٩٩:٢٣-٤), English makes use of initial clusters of up to three consonants, and final consonants of up to four ones. The phonology of Arabic, on the other hand, does not allow initial clusters,

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[١] This aspect, particularly the use of the phoneme /p/ in Standard Arabic, is suggested by Prof. Dr. Mageed Al-Mashta, in his Lectures in Semantics and Psycholinguistics of Ph.D. Course, Department of English, College of Education for Human Sciences, University of Babylon, ٢٠١٤-٢٠١٥.

[٢] The English phonemes /g,č,ž/ are commonly used in Iraqi Arabic, hence, a negative transference is not expected to occur between English and Arabic concerning these phonemes. The inaccurate performance by some students is better to be reduced to other causes.

but allows medial and final clusters of no more than two consonants, e.g., نهر and مهد. This aspect, he (ibid:٢٤) adds, makes the Arab learners of English face difficulty in pronouncing the English clusters. They are expected to insert vowels to minimize such clusters for easier pronunciation.

However, the present study argues that this gap is bridgeable to some extent, and this time the task of bridging the gap is English oriented, namely by the phonological processes offered by the phonology of English in 'insertion', 'deletion', and 'coalescence'. These processes affect the relative distribution of consonants and vowels within the word; any process which takes a more complex syllabic structure and reduces it to the CV pattern leads to a preferred syllable structure. The effect of such process is to break up clusters of consonants or sequences of vowels. For example, a cluster of two consonants could be deleted, a vowel could be inserted between the two consonants, or the two consonants could be coalesced into a single segment. As such, there are three main types of syllable structure processes: **deletion**, **insertion**, and **coalescence** (Schane, ١٩٧٣:٥٣).

Deletion may be either consonant or vowel deletion. In some r-less dialects of English, word final r is dropped before a consonant or in phrase final position, but not before a vowel, e.g., *father came, I saw father*, but *father arrived*. The distribution of the indefinite article also conforms to preferred syllable structure: *an apple, a banana* (ibid: ٥٣). As for vowel deletion, certain English morphemes terminating in a vowel drop the vowel before a suffix beginning with a vowel: *Mexico, Mexican* (derived from Mexico + an); *cello, cellist* (cello + ist) (ibid).

The **Insertion** process is also called "epenthesis". Consonants as well as vowels could be inserted in certain phonological environments. In some dialects of English, r is inserted whenever a word ending in a schwa is followed by a word beginning with a vowel, e.g., *the idea came, the idea-r- is good* (ibid:٥٤). Vowel insertion takes place in English when a schwa is inserted between final consonant-sonorant cluster, e.g., *central, center* [sēntər]; *cyclic, cycle* [sāykəl] (ibid).

Coalescence means two segments coalesce into one. Consonants as well as vowels may undergo this process. Two contiguous consonants are replaced by a single morpheme. Final t, d, s, and z and a following y are replaced by palato-alveolar fricative. This is particularly evident before the suffix –ion, e.g. relate, relation [rəlēyšən] ; evade, evasion [əvēyžən] (ibid:٥٤-٥).

The insertion of vowel often practiced by Arab learners of English and is not unpredictable according to this phonological perspective since those learners naturally tend to follow the universally preferable syllable structure. The English phonological processes 'deletion', 'insertion' and 'coalescence', could bridge a large amount of the phonological gap between the languages in question.

٢,٢. Syntactic Gaps

This section is devoted to bridge some explicitness gaps between English and Arabic on the syntactic level.

٢,٢,١. Number

The number system in English contrasts singular, referring to one, and plural, referring to more than one (Tallerman, ١٩٩٨:١٧). As for Arabic, the number system employs three kinds: singular (for one), dual (for two) and plural (for more than two). Types of number in Arabic are inflected when considering gender. Thus, Arabic is said to be more explicit than English

in this aspect. It is suggested by Al-Mas'udi (٢٠٠٣:٣٣) that "explicitness in Arabic number is far more illuminating".

The number gap between these two languages is too wide, yet the idea of dual is not totally absent in English, because according to Huddleson and Pullum (٢٠٠٢:٣٣٤), although the system of number of English contrasts only singular and plural, yet the feature dual is relevant when considering some items, e.g., 'both', and 'either'.

Another gap between these languages is that English includes what is called invariable nouns, which do not have number contrast and can be either singular, e.g., 'news', 'gold', 'music', etc.; or plural, e.g., 'scissors', 'cattle', 'the poor', etc. (Quirk et al., ١٩٨٥:٢٤٦-٨). Invariable nouns are also used in Arabic. They either used with plural reference, e.g., ناس، قوم 'people', جيش 'army', رهط 'tribe'. Others have singular reference, e.g., غبار 'dust', شجاعة 'courage' (Aziz, ١٩٨٩:١١٤); (الهاشمي, ٢٠٠٨:٦٨).

٢,٢,٢. Gender

The grammatical gender in English includes masculine, feminine and neuter. It concerns personal pronouns, where a distinction is drawn, like he, she, and it; possessive adjectives, e.g., his, her, and its and relative pronouns, where a distinction is done between 'who', and 'which' (Alexander, ١٩٨٨:٤٩-٥٠). As for Arabic, there are two genders: masculine and Feminine (Aziz, ١٩٨٩:١١٩).

The gap in this concern is that English is more explicit than Arabic. However, Al-Mas'udi (٢٠٠٣:٣٤-٥) points out that if we consider the subdivisions of the Arabic gender in terms of number and case, Arabic becomes more explicit than English.

٢,٢,٣. Tense

Theoretically, English is said to be more explicit than Arabic at different aspects of this level. One of these is 'tense' and its details in relation with the progressive and perfective aspects, as well as the ways of expressing future time. English offers more than eleven details of tenses, when considering the aspects and future time. (see (Quirk and Greenbaum, ١٩٧٣); (Murphy, ١٩٩٤); (Gramley and Patzd, ١٩٩٩); (Leech and Svatvik, ١٩٩٤); and (Alexander, ١٩٨٨).

As for Arabic, it is so long believed by traditional Arab grammarians to have two tenses, past and present. Yet, modern Arab linguistic research has proved that Arabic allows different ways of expressing the English tenses and aspects. Some of these opinions suggest that the real gap between these languages is the reverse of what was believed. (for detailed account of this gap, see Al-Mas'udi, Ma'youf, and Kadhim (٢٠١٣)).

٢,٢,٤. Case

Crystal (٢٠٠٣: ٦٣-٤) defines case as "a grammatical category used in the analyses of word classes (or their associated phrases) to identify the syntactic relationship between words in a sentence, through such contrasts as nominative, accusative, etc." He (ibid) adds that in English, the genitive case is the only one which is so marked, i.e., by morphological ending, e.g., boy's, or boys'. Yet, Huddleston and Pullum (٢٠٠٢:٤٥٥) state that case is to apply to "a system of inflectional forms of a noun that serve to mark the function of an NP relative to the construction containing it." They (ibid) identify three main cases in English, illustrated by the underlined pronouns in the following sentences:

i. I slept soundly. (nominative)
ii. Please help me. (accusative)

iii. Where is my bag? (genitive)

However, many contrastivists adopt Crystal's above mentioned opinion and think that English has two cases only, namely a 'common' case and a 'genitive' one (see Aziz, ١٩٨٩:١١١, ١٢٦).

Arabic, on the other hand, employs three cases, 'subjective', 'objective', and 'genitive' (ibid). This is an evidence that Arabic is more explicit than English, as for as case is concerned (see Al-Masiudi, ٢٠٠٣:٣٥). Case in Arabic often minimizes the obligation of satisfying the requirements of word order of nouns within sentences; the grammatical cases explicitly indicate the function of the noun regardless of the word order, e.g.,

رأى محمد عليا. (subjective case)

رأى عليا محمد. also (subjective case) (ibid).

Although this opinion widens the explicitness gap between these languages further; yet, the present study suggests that many Arabic nouns do not morphologically undergo case inflection, and in this way they keep to a restricted word order which would be the main tool of identifying the grammatical function of the noun; in the same way as the syntax of English imposes, e.g.,

رأى عيسى موسى (Subjective case)

رأى موسى عيسى (objective case)

Such nouns are identified as subjects or objects only by word order. The grammatical case has nothing to do with them because the phonology of Arabic does not allow the inflection of their endings.

٣. Conclusions

The study has reached the following conclusions:

١. The gap between English concerning the consonant phonemic system is partially bridgeable because the English phonemes /p, v/ are used allophonically by means of the universal phonological process 'assimilation'.

٢. The gap between the two languages concerning number, namely that English distinguishes between singular and plural, while Arabic considers a third type, which is the dual, is also partially bridged by some English lexical items which have dual reference, e.g., both, and either.

٣. The study suggests that the availability of some invariable nouns in Arabic, e.g., رهط ، قوم ،غبار ،شجاعة bridges the gap of the absence of the invariable nouns in Arabic.

٤. A syntactic gap concerning case between these two languages is bridgeable by means of that process which maximizes the requirements of satisfying word order in Arabic, similar to that of English.

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