The Investigation of Universals of Verb Semantics in Arabic

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Abstract

This paper investigates semantic universals, with reference to Arabic verbs. The verb plays a very vital role in the proposition of any sentence. The paper mainly applies the classification of situation types expressed by verbs, proposed by Robert Van Valin (2006) on Arabic verbs. Approximately 500 Arabic verbs have been analyzed and classified.

Key words: Arabic verbs, situation types, dynamic verbs, static verbs. Van Valin classification

الخلاصة

تبحث هذه الدراسة المسلمات، الدلالية مع الإشارة إلى الأفعال العربية. ان الفعل يلعب دورا جوهريا في اقتراح او بناء اية جملة ويعطي المعنى الدلالي لها . في هذه الدراسة تم تطبيق تصنيفات مواقع الافعال المبينـــة والمقترحة من قبل روبرت فان فالين في 2006 على الافعال العربية. تم حصر ما يقارب 500 فعل وتم تصنيف وتحليل العديد منها لاختيارها في التطبيق.

الكلمات الدالة: الأفعال العربية، مواقع الافعال في الجمل، الأفعال الحيوية، الأفعال ثابتة, تصنيفات فان فالين

1. Introduction

Most of the work on universals of human languages had concentrated on the phonological, morphological, and syntactic properties of languages, with much less attention being devoted to the semantic side of language (Van Valin, 2006).The verb has a vital role in the proposition of any sentence as considered by many linguists. With the respect to happening or non-happening, the verbs are classified into static and dynamic. A static verb means that the speaker views the situation as a steady state with no internal phases or changes. The dynamic verbs means that there is an event or a process with internal changes, a process means that there is a beginning, middle and end. The dynamic verbs are classified into number of type according to semantic distinctions durative / punctual and telic / atelic. One possible distinction within dynamic situation is between events and processes (Saeed, 2003).

This paper deals with semantic analysis of verbs in Arabic language. First, five hundred verbs in past tense are tested and classified into two major types, dynamic or static. Second, the data also tested whether they are causative or non-causative. Third, the findings and conclusion.

2.The dynamism testing of Arabic verbs

The essential universal verb classes are proposed by Vendler (1967). These classes are mainly four: a. states b. achievements c. accomplishments. d. activity. Then Smith (1997) proposed the fifth class, which is known as semelfactives. The distinctive features of these classes are [±static], [±dynamic], [±telic], and [±punctual]. This classification is further developed by Valin(2006), where he suggests the sixth class called " Active accomplishment" and proposed that any class above can be sub classified into causative and non causative.

The classes can be classified in terms of four features:[± static], [± dynamic], [± telic] and [± punctual]:

(1)	a. State	[+static]	[-dynamic]	[-telic]	[-punctual]
	b. Activity	[- static]	[+dynamic]	[-telic]	[-punctual]
	c. Achievement	[- static]	[-dynamic]	[+telic]	[+punctual]
	d. Semelfactive	[- static]	[±dynamic]	[-telic]	[+punctual]
	e. Accomplishment	[- static]	[-dynamic]	[+telic]	[-punctual]
	f. Active accomplishment	[- static]	[+dynamic]	[+telic]	[-punctual]

The progressive tense can be used to distinguish between static and dynamic verbs. While the static verbs (love, know, have, be tall and be dead) can not occur in progressive tense, the dynamic verbs can occur in progressive tense, for example:

(2) a. Nada learns English.
b. Nada is learning English.

Now the verb 'learn" is described as [+dynamic], because the use of the –ing form is possible which indicates the continuity of the action.

(3) a. John loves Marry
b. *John is loving Mary.

This asterisk means that the sentence is ungrammatical. The verb "love" does not come with –ing form, therefore it is described as [-dynamic].
Now the problem is: If anyone knows Arabic and translates the following sentences into Arabic, it will be only one sentence:

(4) a. Hawra studies English
b. *Hawra tadrus alenklizyia*
c. Hawra is studying English.
d. *Hawra tadrus alenklizyia*

As we notice, there is only one form to indicate both the simple present and the progressive tense "*tadrus*", then how is it possible to indicate the dynamism of verbs in Arabic language?

The answer is the verb is not enough to indicate the continuity of the action. The use of certain adverbs indicates the time of speaking and the time of action. By using one of adverbial phrases with the verb, we can indicate that the verb is continuous (is happening).

These phrases are: *alaan* "now", *halian* "at present", and *fi hathha alweqit* "in this time". Also using the verb *la yazal* or *ma zala* "continue or still" preceding any present verb. It is also necessary to mention that most of the static verbs have no imperative form; for example:

(5) a. *Know Arabic.
b. *Love this.

While in Arabic, the same verbs are possible in an imperative form:

(6) a. *e'rif nefsak.*
"know yourself".

b. *hib lakheek ma tuhibu linefsik*
"love to your brother whatever you love to yourself"

For these points mentioned above; the lack of -ing progressive form in Arabic, and the differences in the properties of static verbs in English with the same verbs in Arabic. It is necessary to limit some adverbs that indicate the continuity of action or a verb which has the same function when we use it preceding any other verb, e.g.:

(7) a. *Mohammed lazal eaqra'u aljerida*.
Mohammed still read the newspaper.
"Mohammed is reading the newspaper"
b. *Nada taqra'u aljerida.*
"Nada reads the newspaper"

It is clear to any speaker who knows Arabic that the use of the verb *lazala* "continue" before the main verb indicates that the activity is continuous at the time of speaking.

(8) a. *Nada tasm'au almousiqa.*
Nada hear the music
"Nada hears the music"
b. *Nada tasm'au almousiqa alaan*
Nada hear the muzic now.
"Nada is listening to the muzic now"

Both Arabic sentences have the same verb *tasma'au* "hear", but which indicates the continuity of the action with the use of the time adverb alaan"now". So that we can say that only from the adverb we can decide the progressivity of the verb.
All the five hundred verbs are tested according to this method. That is, by adding an adverbial phrase like *alaan* "now", *halian* "at present", and *fi hathha alweqit* "in this time", and by adding verb like *lazala* or *mazala* "continue" or "still".

These two phrases are used with every verb in the data. If the sentence is acceptable, the x will take [+dynamic]. and if the sentence is unacceptable, it will take [-dynamic].

2.1 [±static]

These verbs allow the speaker to view a situation as a steady state, with no internal phases or changes. Moreover, the speaker does not overtly focus on the beginning or end of the state. Even if the speaker uses the stative in the past. (Saeed, 2003), e.g.:

(9) *a. maata alrejulu.*
died the manNOM
"The man died"

More examples: *karaha* "hated", *baqiya* "remain", *xaafa* "scared", *ghadhaba* "be nervous", *fadhala* "prefer", *faqada* "lost", *eftaqara ela* "lacked".

2.2 [±dynamic]

One possible distinction within dynamic situation types is between events and processes. In events the speaker views the situation as a whole while in process we view the internal structure of a dynamic situation., e.g.:

(10) a. *enfajara alburkanu*.
blew up the volcanoNOM.
"The volcano blew up"

b. *thahaba alwaladu ila alhadiqati*
went the boyNOM to the gardenAccu.
"The boy went to the garden"

In a. the verb *enfajara* "blew up", is a dynamic verb refers to an event seen by the speaker as a whole, while in b the verb *thahaba* "went" is also a dynamic but refers to a process with internal phases.

More examples on event verbs: *wamadha* "flashed", l*ama'a* "shined", *a'at'a* "gave", *qa'ada* "sat down".

More examples on process verbs: *banaa* "build", *la'aba* "played", *darasa* "studied", *nashada* "sang", *t'aara* "flied" *gharada* "sang warble", *qafaza* "jumped", *qara'a* "read", *kataba* "write", *rabaha* "won", *nadhafa* "cleaned", *ghasala* "washed", *sharaba* "drank, *fahasa* "examined".

2.3 [±telic]

Telic verbs vs atelic verbs, refer to those processes, which are seen as having a natural completion. Such verbs are resultatives if they end to a successful conclusion The verbs may describe bounded (telic) or unbounded (atelic) processes, depending on the form of their complements, e.g.:

(11) a. umi t'abaxat alruza
my mother cooked the riceAccu.
"My mother cooked the rice"

b. umi tat'buxu bisur'a.
my mother cooks fast.
"My mother cooks fast"

In the first sentence the verb ends into a result. The speaker tells that his mother cooked a dish of rice, while in the second sentence the speaker informs that his mother is cooking fast, as we view that there is no result, therefore the first one is [+telic] and the second is [-telic] or atelic. In addition we can see that the verb in a. is a bounded process and in b. is a unbounded process.

More examples: *rasama surati* "paint my photo", *xayat'a thwba zafafiha* "stitched her wedding robe", *sana'a ka'kan* "baked a cake", *halaqa lehaitahu*"shaved his beard", *banaa baitan* "built a house", *kataba qasidatan* "wrote a poem",

2.4 [±punctual]

Punctual and durative are distinctions of dynamic sitaution types, durative verbs describe a situation or process which lasts for a period of time, while punctual describe an event that seems so instantanous that it involves virtually no time.(Saeed, 2003) This feature differentiates events with internal duration from those which lack it, e.g.:

(12) a. *Mariam t'araqat albaba.*
Mariam knockedAgr the doorAccu.
"Maraim knocked the door"

b. *Husain naama*
"Husain slept"

This is a comparison between the punctual verb t'araqa "knocked", and the durative verb naama "slept". If we compare the time of the first with that of the second, it will be so short. The speaker always does not focus on the internal structure of the punctual event.

More punctual examples: *a't'asa* "sneezed", *sa'ala* "coughed", *hadaqa* "gazed" , *wamadha* "flashed", *at'laqa alnar* "shoot", *bada'a* "started", *adraka* "realized", *mayaza* "rocognized", *lamaha* "glimpsed", *naqara* "tapped".

More durative examples: *qashara* "pealed", *safara* "travelled", *saaqa* "drove", *gharasa* "plant", *bathara* "strew up", *bahara* "sailed", *darrasa* "teach", *kalama* "talked", *qara'a* "read", *t'aba'a* "typed", *la'aba* "played", *daxana* "smoked", *fat'ara* "had breakfast", *thaaba* "melted"

3.An application of Arabic data on Valinain classifications:

The data testing has been done with respect to Valin (2006) suggestions, whether they are applicable to Arabic language or not. Valin suggested a causative class to every main class of the verbs:

(13) a. States *maradha alwaladu*
was sick the boyNom .
"The boy was sick"
more examples: *habba* "love", *a'arafa* "know",*karaha* "hate",*?amana* "believe",*lazala* "remain".

a1. Causative states *albardu marradha alwalada*
the coldNom caused to be sick the boyAccu
"The cold caused the boy to be sick"
more examples: *habbaba* "caused to love", *a'arrafa* "caused to know", *karraha* "caused to hate",

b. Achievement *albeitu tafajara*
the houseNom exploded
"The house exploded"
more examples: t*at'aqt'aqa* "pop", *tahat'ama* "shatter", *wajada* "find", *bada'a* "start", *rabaha* "win the race"

b1. Causative achievement *ala'duu fajjara albayta.*
the enemyNom exploded the houseAccu.
"the enemy exploded the house"
more examples: *t'aqt'aqa* "caused to pop", *hat't'ama*

	"caused to shatter", *badda'a* "caused to start", *rabbaha* "caused to win"
c. Semelfactive	*alwaladu a'atasa.* the boy Nom sneezed "The boy sneezed" more examples: *sa'ala* "coughed", *daqqa* "knocked", *wamadha* "flashed", *lamaha* "glimpsed", *naqara* "tapped"
c1. Causative semelfactives	*algubaru a'attasa alwalada* the dustNom sneenzed the boyAccu The dust caused the boy to sneeze " more examples: *wammadha* "flashed", *naqara* "tapped"
d. Accomplishment	*alma'u jamada* the waterNom freezed. "the water freezed" more examples: *thaba* "melt", *jaffa* "dry", *tashafa* "recover" *nama* "grew", *rasama baitan* "paint a house".
d1. Causative accomplishment	*althalajatu jammadat alma'a* the refrigeratorNom freezed the waterAccu "The refrigerator freezed the water" more examples: *thawwaba* "caused to melt", *jaffafa* "caused to dry", *shaffa* "caused to recover" *namma* "caused to grew", *rasamma baitan* "caused to paint a house".
e. Activity	*Duraid ta'alama Arabi* "Duraid learnt Arabi" more examples: *rakadha* "run", *sabaha* "swim". *saaqa* "drive", *darasa* "study", *dafa'a* "push", *ensahaba* "withdraw".
e1. Causative activity	*Duraid 'allama Bushra Arabi* Duraid caused to learn Bushra Arabi "Duraid caused Bushra Arabic" more examples: *rakkadha* "caused to run", *sabbaha* "caused to swim", *darrasa* "caused to study", *dafa'a* "caused to push"
f. Active accomplishment	*aljunudu mashuu ela alsahat* the soldiersNOM marched to the park "The soldiers marched to the park" more examples: *kataba qasidatan* "wrote a poem", *sharaba kuban min alhaleeb* "drank a cup of milk", *ghanna aughnaitan* "sang a song"
f1. Causative active accomplishment	*ala'refu mashshaa aljunuda ela alsahati* the sergeantNOM marched the solidersAccu to the park. "the sergeant marched the soldiers to the park" more examples: *kattaba qasidatan* "caused to write a poem", *sharraba kuban min alhaleeb* "caused to drink a cup of milk"

The sentence (a**)** is a simple sentence in past tense. It follows the SVO word order. *alwaladu* is the subject and has the morphological marker of nominative case which is called "*dhama*" and it is represented in English by the letter *u* due to its pronunciation.

In (a1) the *alwalada* ends with the accusative marker for singular which is called "*fatha*" and it is represented by the letter *a* due to its pronunciation. The verb is static, where there is only a state without any activity. The states describe the situations. All static verbs are atelic, the verb *maradhaa* "be sick" is static where there are no internal phases.

The verb *marradha* "caused to be sick" in (a1) is also static and simple past but it is the causative form. It means that *albardu* "the cold" is the reason behind the sickness.

It is clear from the two examples that in Arabic *maradha* "be sick" and *marradha* "caused to be sick" in (a) and (a1), are two different forms derived from root *mrdh* where the dh represent only one consonant letter.

In English, the same form used to indicate the causativity of the verb preceded by "cause to".

The given examples to express the dynamic verbs with its five types follow the same pattern. in x (b,c,d,e and f) the verb is non-causative and in x1(b1,c1,d1,e1 and f1) the verb is causative.

As it mentioned above in Arabic, there is a specific form for causativity. The form has a certain template; which is derived from the root that is easy to follow to get the form of any causative verb, e.g.

Root : *mrdh* *m, r,* and *dh* are three consonant letters

Template for simple past:

C	V	C	V	C	V
m	*a*	*r*	*a*	*dh*	*a*

Template for causative form:

C	V	C	C	V	C	V
m	*a*	*r*	*r*	*a*	*dh*	*a*

(14)

the root	past tense	causative form
mrdh	*maradha* "be sick"	*marradha* "caused to be sick"
fjr	*fajara* "exploded"	*fajjara* "caused to explode"
a'ts	*'tasa* "sneezed"	*a'attasa* "caused to sneeze"
jmd	*jamada* "freezed"	*jammada* "caused to freeze"
a'lm	*a'alama* "learnt"	*a'allama* "caused to learn"

a' represents one consonant letter named *ain* represented in IPA as /ʕ /

4. Conclusion

This paper has argued in favour of the basic insights of Van Valin (2006), which was formulated on a wide data of Arabic language. The English is used as a metalanguage and the language of comparison. Briefly, we can conclude that:

It is incapable to use the –ing form progressive test, which indicates the dynamism of any verb due to the lack of what represents this suffice. We suggest using certain adverbs

or the main verb preceded by another verb *la zala* or *mazala* "still". These two tests are successful with about 500 verbs of Arabic.(2)

Most of static verbs have imperative form in Arabic while that is impossible in most of the static verbs in English (2).

The causative verbs in Arabic follow a fixed template in derivation from the consonantal root. Most of roots certainly derived into both causative and non-causative forms, while many verbs cannot follow the rule because it will be unacceptable or give another different meaning far from the causativity. Native speaker will distinguish this easily, but the difficulty begins within the learners of Arabic as a second language. He will follow the rule to make the causative form with less sense of meaning.(3)

The fundamental distinctions tested by Arabic data. The major classes of action sort as suggested to be verb semantic universals is clearly applicable.

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