

Some Aspects of Ergativity in English and Arabic

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Abstract

The present study is a contrastive analysis of the notion of *Ergativity* in English¹ and Arabic². It attempts to discuss this phenomenon to find out the points of similarity and difference between the two languages in this particular linguistic area. It offers an explanation and a detailed description of the term and illustrates the various types and forms of verbs that can be handled under the headings *ergative verbs* and *non-ergative verbs* showing how the former differ from the latter. Additionally, it investigates the verbs which are used both transitively and intransitively in the two languages. All these types of verbs will be identified, classified, and analyzed according to the *Quirk grammar* - the approach to grammatical description pioneered by Randolph Quirk and his associates, and published in a series of reference grammars during the 1970s and 1980s, notably *A Grammar of Contemporary English* (1972) and its successor *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* in 1985. Reference, will, however, be made, wherever necessary, to the principles, techniques and terminology of other models of grammar. The method is, thus, more or less, eclectic. As far as ergativity in Arabic is concerned, the study adopts the model of grammatical description and classification pioneered by traditional Arab grammarians such as Siibawayhi, Ibn 'Aqil, and Mubarrid, and by modern Arab grammarians like Ghalaayini, 'Udhaymah, and 'Abbaas Hasan, among others. The conclusion part offers the main findings of the study.

Keywords: Ergative, English, Arabic, transitive, intransitive, contrastive analysis, passive

1. Introductory Remarks

The term *ergativity* in this study is used to refer to a two-part analysis of verbs which distinguish between *ergative verbs* and *non-ergative* (or *unergative*) verbs (Dixon 1979; Levin 1993; Radford 2004; Yang 1994). Ergative verbs exist in many of the world's languages, including English. In English, an ergative verb is defined as one which shows the relation that holds between, for example, *The boy rolled the ball into the hole*, where *the ball* is the direct object of the verb *rolled*, and *The ball rolled into the hole*, where, although *the ball* is now the subject, its semantic relation to the verb *rolled* is similar. An ergative verb is distinct from an unergative one. An unergative verb is either a straightforward transitive, i.e. a verb that expresses an action received by some person or thing (e.g. *We expect a good harvest*; *Our government must, above all, avoid involvement in the war*) and a straightforward intransitive, i.e. a verb which shows a state of being or an action which is not directed to an object, (e.g. *This beautiful orange flower blooms in November*; *The scars will disappear in a year or two*).

Similarly, in Arabic, verbs are either مطوع 'ergative' or 'reflexive' or unergative (either متعدي 'transitive' or لازم 'intransitive'). The sentences كسرت الولد الكوب *The boy broke the cup* and انكسر الكوب *The cup broke* constitute an ergative pair. In this pair, the subject of the intransitive use of انكسر is the same as the object of its transitive use كسرت and the doer of the action is thus said to appear as the 'ergative' subject. Non-ergative (or unergative) verbs, on the other hand, are those verbs which are either straightforward transitive, e.g. رقتني الحصان *The horse kicked me*, or straightforward intransitive, e.g. الحصان يرفس *The horse kicks*.

2. Literature Review

In English, the term *ergativity* has been tackled by very many grammarians and linguists. Dixon (1979) observes that "a language is said to show ergative characteristics if intransitive subject is treated in the same manner as transitive object, and differently from transitive subject" (pp.60-61). Keyser and Roeper (1984) distinguish between middle verbs, e.g. *sell* in *The eggs are selling well* (where an agent is assumed – *Someone is selling the eggs*) and ergative verbs, e.g. *break, drown, close* in ergative pairs like *Mary broke the vase/The vase broke*; *The woman drowned Peter/Peter drowned*; *Peter closed the door/The door closed*; *I boiled a pan of water/The pan boiled* to show how ergative constructions are derived.

Collins Cobuild (1990) and (1996) mention some of the features of an ergative verb; they state that an ergative verb is a special kind of verb which can be used in intransitive or transitive clauses in the same meaning, stating that there are certain areas of meaning of ergative verbs, e.g. verbs related to food and cooking, those describing physical movement, etc. Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999) define ergative verbs as a special type of verbs used to express spontaneous occurrence. Such verbs allow the object of a transitive clause to be a subject of an intransitive clause without any change in meaning. Ergative verbs in English include, for example, *drop, sink, open, increase, change*, etc. Downing and Locke (2006) regard verbs that can be used both transitively and intransitively as ergative verbs.

Crystal 2008 and Matthews 2007, among others, state that the term *ergative* (also known as *unaccusative* (Blake, 1990)) is used for intransitive verbs whose subjects originate as objects: *The boy bounced the ball over the wall/The ball bounced over the wall; John has stopped the car/The car has stopped.*

Khawalda (2011) investigates ergative verbs in Arabic and compares them with their counterparts in English. He examines the syntactic and semantic behavior of this special kind of verbs, showing how ergative verbs differ from both straightforward transitive verbs and straightforward intransitive ones. Beeston (1970) states that in Arabic, verbs are either ergative or unergative. Unergative verbs are either transitive or intransitive. A transitive verb may be monotransitive, i.e. taking only one object (أشترت كتاباً *I bought a book*), ditransitive, i.e. taking two objects - indirect object and direct object (أعطيت أخى كتاباً *I gave my brother a book*), or trebly transitive, i.e. taking three objects (أعلمت أبي القصة مَلْفَقَةً تاماً *I informed my father that the story was a complete fabrication*). A verb which does not take an object is an intransitive verb (مات المريض *The patient died*).

As far as أفعال المطاوعة *ergative* or *reflexive verbs* are concerned (Faasii Al-Fahrii, 1999:99-129), Arab grammarians talk about بناءة المطاوعة *Ergative Constructions* (or *inchoatives*). RaajiHii (1973) discusses how the object of the transitive verb becomes the subject of the intransitive verb in such pairs as كسرت الولد القلم *The boy broke the pen* and انكسر القلم *The pen broke*. He lists a number of ergative pairs of verb forms in Arabic, e.g. كسرت *to break*/تكسرت *to get broken = to break* (intransitive); شوى *to roast (meat)*/انشوى *to roast* (intransitive); (The meat) roasts); تدرج *to roll something*/تدرج *(something) rolls*, etc.

Siibawayhi (1982/IV) distinguishes between transitive and intransitive verbs in Arabic, observing that verbs may differ in أوزان FORMS, e.g. انكسر/انفعل *to break* (intransitive); تدرج/تفعل *to roll* (intransitive), etc. He also states that there are in Arabic two types of ergative verbs: morphological and lexical. He mentions some ergative verb forms, e.g. انكسر from انكسر (e.g. انكسر *to break* (intransitive) from كسر *to break* (transitive)); تفعل from فعل (e.g. تدرج *to roll* (intransitive) from درج *to roll* (transitive)), etc. 'Ishbiilii (1987) maintains that the term *ergative* is commonly applied to a particular kind of verb with which the same noun may have the function of being the subject of the verb when the verb is intransitive and of being the object of the verb when the verb is transitive.

Ghalaayiiii (1994) tackles the so-called ergative constructions and how a transitive verb can be made intransitive, in pairs like دق المدرس *The teacher rang the bell* and دق الجرس *The bell rang*. Wohaibi (1994) states that there is a wide variety of ergative constructions in Arabic. He maintains that there are different points of view by different scholars about the notion of ergative constructions. He mentions that there are two types of ergative constructions: morphological and lexical. Morphological ergative constructions are subdivide into primary forms, e.g. انفعل and secondary forms, e.g. افتعل, etc. Wright (1996) discusses the Arabic verb forms and how verbs are classified into three categories: transitive, intransitive or both transitive and intransitive. He points out that in Arabic, الفعل المطاوع *the ergative verb* has different أوزان forms and supports his explanation with suitable examples. Hamiid's (2010) study is devoted to the study of the ergative form افتعل in the holy Qur'an where this form serves certain purposes, e.g. warning, intimidation, etc.

3. Ergativity in English

3.1 Unergative Verbs

The verb is the cornerstone of any sentence since it refers to what the subject of the sentence has done and what happened to the object. Tipping (1961) states that "a verb is a word by means of which something is said about somebody or something" (p.138). Eckersley and Eckersley (1980) define the verb as "a word for saying something about some person or thing" (p.143). Dykes (2007) states that the word 'verb' is a Latin word 'verbum' which means 'word'; verbs are "doing, being or having words" (p.41), while Schachter and Shopen (2007) point out that the verb is one of the parts of speech that is found in every sentence, defining verbs as "words that express actions, processes, and the like" (p.9).

An unergative verb in English can be divided into two types, *transitive* and *intransitive*, depending on whether or not it takes an object. A transitive verb is a one that expresses an action that passes over to an object, e.g. *The cat caught the mouse; I hit the ball; Sam ate an apple; Sam loves Mary*. In contrast, an intransitive verb is one which expresses an action that does not pass over an object, e.g. *The cat jumps; The mother screamed; Sam sings/talks/walked/travels*. Collins Cobuild (1990) states that "if an action or event involved only one person or thing, you mention only the performer of the action (the subject) and the action (the verb)" (p.129) (cf. Keyser and Roeper, 1984). According to Quirk, Leech & Svartvik (1985) there are three classes of English verb:

1. Intransitive verbs: these occur in S-V sentences and no obligatory elements follow them, e.g. *laugh, travel, sleep*, etc.
2. Transitive verbs: these are followed by an object and occur in S-V-O, S-V-OC and S-V-O-Adv sentences, e.g. *enjoy, read, hit*, etc.
3. A copular (or link(ing)) verb is a verb which links a subject to a predicate complement, for example: *The sun is a star; he looks afraid*. The following verbs can also be used copulatively: *appear, feel, grow, look, prove, remain, resemble, sound, stay, smell, taste, turn*. These are variously called copulative, equative, intensive, link, linking verbs.

Additionally, they show that transitive verbs can be classified as follows:

- a. Monotransitive verbs take one object (S-V-O): *John hit Sarah. / Mary bought a shirt.*
- b. Ditransitive verbs are followed by two objects (S-V-DO-IO): *I gave Mary a book/Jill gave John the gift.*
- c. Complex transitive verbs are followed by an object and an object complement (S-V- DO- OC): *I have proved her wrong/a fool/I find the idea crazy*, or an adverb (S-V- DO -A) *I put the book on the table.*

There are also verbs which “may be used transitively in one sentence, and intransitively in another” (Tipping, 1961, p.139):

(1)

- a. She *read* a story to the children.
- b. She *read* to the children.

(2)

- a. Make sure there's no traffic before you *cross* the road.
- b. Make sure there's no traffic before you *cross*.

(3)

- a. They *won* the match.
- b. They just *won*.

(4)

- a. She *lighted* the fire.
- b. The fire won't *light*.

Crystal (2008) points out that verbs are classified into transitive verbs (which refer to verbs that take an object), as in, *she saw the cat*, and intransitive verbs (which cannot take an object, for example), e.g. *Jack arrived*. He adds a third type, namely the verbs that are both transitive and intransitive, stating that “many verbs can have both a transitive and intransitive use (cf. *we went a mile* vs *we went*) and in some languages this distinction is marked MORPHOLOGICALLY” (p.494).

3.2 Ergative Verbs

Ergative verbs can be found in many languages, including English. Radford (2009) asserts that ergative verbs are verbs like *break* which occur in pairs like *Someone broke the window* and *The window broke*, where *the window* seems to play the same semantic/thematic role in both sentences, in spite of being the complement (i.e. the direct object) of *broke* in the former sentence and the subject of *broke* in the latter. So, too, Downing and Locke (2006) and Dryer (2007) demonstrate that when the object of a transitive clause and the subject of an intransitive one are the same such a case is known as an ergative alternation or an ergative pair. Fillmore (1968) and Kilby (1984) point out that ergative verbs occur both transitively and intransitively, the subject of the intransitive being the same as the object of the transitive, e.g. verbs like *break, disperse, melt, open, roll, turn, etc.*, as in:

(5)

- a. The wind dispersed the clouds.
- b. The clouds dispersed

(6)

- a. The sun melted the snow.
- b. The snow melted.

In the light of the discussion above, the question that may be posed here is: *What is an ergative verb?*

An ergative verb is one that has the following features:

- It has two patterns: (i) S-Vt -DO: *We sank the boat*; (ii) S-Vi : *The boat sank*;
- Only one of these two patterns has a noun phrase following the verb: S -Vt -O: *We sank the boat*.
- The person or thing which is indicated by the noun phrase may also be indicated by the subject of the other pattern: (*The boat sank*).

4. Ergativity in Arabic

There are three parts of speech in Arabic, viz. the *noun*, the *verb*, and the *particle* (to which there is no fourth). The verb is one of the essential elements in the Arabic verbal sentence since Arabic is a V-S-O language (Wright/I 1996; Siibawayhi, 1982/IV; ‘Udhaymah, 1999). There are two types of sentences in Arabic: the nominal sentence *الجملة الاسمية* and the verbal sentence *الجملة الفعلية*. Balim and Istrabadi (2008) state that in Arabic “verbs express an action (or sometimes a process or a state) in the sentence” (p.4). Mubaarak (1992) states that the verb is a word which indicates meaning by itself and paired by time. So, if it indicates a complete event, it is then in the past, like *دَرَسَ (he) studied, كَتَبَ (he) wrote*. If, on the other hand, it indicates a present and future event, it is in the present, like *يَدْرُسُ (he) studies, يَكْتُبُ (he) writes*. The so-called imperative mood refers to the form of the verb used in imperative sentences, like *اَكْتُبْ write!*

4.1 Unergative Verbs

Zawaawii (1900) and Ibn ‘Aqil (1999/II), among others, state that a transitive verb needs an object and it may take this object either directly, that is, without a preposition, or indirectly, i.e. by means of a preposition. By contrast, an intransitive verb is a verb which does

not require an object and it takes a subject only. Dahdah (1981) mentions that a transitive verb is a verb that passes over a subject to an object to complete the meaning; the pattern is VSO, e.g. كَتَبَ أَحْمَدُ الدَّرْسَ (cf. أحمد كتَبَ الدرسَ Ahmed wrote the lesson). Ryding (2005) points out that the term Arab grammarians use for 'transitive verbs' is أفعال مُتَعَدِّيَّة, in which case "the action of the verb extends beyond the agent and all the way to the object".

Ibn Ya'ish (n.d.) mentions that there are three types of transitive verb:

(i) transitive verbs with one object (i.e. monotransitive) e.g. ضَرَبْتُ أَحْمَدَ I hit Ahmed ; (ii) Transitive verbs with two objects (i.e. ditransitive or doubly transitive), e.g. وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ (الأعراف/85) (and do not cheat people out of their rights); عَلِمْتُ أَحْمَدَ شَجَاعاً I knew that Ahmed is courageous; (iii) transitive verbs with three objects (i.e. trebly transitive), for example, أَعْلَمْتُ أَحْمَدَ عَلِيًّا شَجَاعاً I informed Ali that Ahmed is courageous. An intransitive verb is a verb that does not require an object to complete its meaning; it indicates complete action without being accompanied by a direct object (Dahdah, 1981; Hadeedi, 1988; Siibawayhi, 1988/I), e.g. مَاتَ زَيْدٌ Zaid died. Thunaybaat (2009) observes that some verbs are used transitively and intransitively: غَاضَ to (cause to) become shorter, smaller, less; جَاءَ to come; ; دَخَلَ to enter رَجَعَ to return; بَدَأَ to start; أَتَى to come; وَصَلَ to reach, arrive at, get to, e.g.

(7)

a. غَاضَ الْمَاءُ

b. The water has become less. (= it has receded.)

(8)

a. غَاضَ اللَّهُ الْمَاءَ

b. God has caused the water to become less/to recede.)

(9)

a. جَاءَ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ

b. God's victory has come.

(10)

a. جَاءَنَا نَصْرُ اللَّهِ

b. God's victory has come to us.

4.2 Ergative Verbs

The term مطاوعة/reflexivity (Fassi al-Fahrii 1999: 99-129) Brockelmann 1977:110; Saamarra'ii, 1983) is generally employed by Arab grammarians to designate the relationship holding between, for example, فَتَحَ الطَّالِبُ الشَّبَّاكَ The student opened the window and انْفَتَحَ الشَّبَّاكُ The window opened. In such pairs the object of a transitive verb فَتَحَ opened becomes the subject (=Agent) of a corresponding intransitive verb, with the result that a new subject is introduced as the agent (or cause) of the action referred to. (cf. Dahdah, 1981; 'Ishbilii, 1987/I; Hamiid, 2010; Ibn 'Aqil, 1999/II; 'Udhaymah, 1999).

It is argued in this study that three types of ergative constructions may be observed in Arabic: syntactic, morpho-syntactic, and lexical, as shown below.

4.2.1 Syntactic Ergative Constructions

In syntactic ergative constructions, the object of the transitive verb becomes the subject of the intransitive verb with no change in the form of the verb, (cf. Khawalda, 2011; Wohaibi, 1994), for instance:

(11)

a. غَلَتِ الْأُمُّ الْحَلِيبَ

b. The mother boiled the milk.

c. غَلَى الْحَلِيبُ

d. The milk boiled.

(12)

a. هَمَرَتِ الطَّالِبَةُ الْمَاءَ

b. The student poured out the water.

c) هَمَرَ الْمَاءُ

d. The water was poured out.

(13)

a. فَسَخَ الْقَاضِي الْعَقْدَ

b. The judge nullified the contract.

c. فَسَخَ العَقْدُ

d. The contact is invalid; it has no legal effect.

(14)

a. شَاعَتِ الطَّالِبَةُ الخَبْرَ.

b. The student spread the news.

c. شَاعَ الخَبْرُ.

d. The news spread.

(15)

a. فَلَّتِ الولدُ الكلبَ.

b. The boy let the dog loose.

c. فَلَّتِ الكلبُ.

d. The dog got loose.

It should be noticed here that the form of the object noun phrase changes (by inflection) to show the new function it has when it becomes the subject of the intransitive verb in the ergative pair. In (على الحليب), for instance, the noun phrase الحليب is in the nominative case because it is the subject of the verb. The transitive verb على and the intransitive verb على in the pair have the same وزن form, namely فَعَلَ; they are exactly alike.

4.2.2 Morpho-syntactic Ergative Constructions

In this type of ergative construction, although the transitive verb and the intransitive verb have two different أوزان 'forms', both verbs are derived from the same lexical root. That is, a set of consonants in a specific order which embody a broad lexical meaning, such as ف- ح- ك- ش- ر- reveal, ك- س- ر- break. So فَتَحَ becomes انْفَتَحَ, كَشَفَ becomes انْكَشَفَ, كَسَرَ becomes انْكَسَرَ. (Siibawayhi, 1982/IV; 'Udhaymah, 1999). Quite often prefixation, the process of adding a prefix, changes a transitive verb to an intransitive one in an ergative pair. The following are examples of morpho-syntactic ergative pairs:

إفْتَعَلَ → فَعَلَ

(16)

a. حَرَقْتُ الدارَ.

b. I burned the house.

c. اخْتَرَقَتِ الدارُ.

d. The house burned.

انْفَعَلَ → فَعَلَ

(17)

a. كَسَرَ الولدُ القَدْحَ.

b. The boy broke the glass.

c. انْكَسَرَ القَدْحُ.

d. The glass broke. (=The glass was broken.)

(18)

a. Fatimah is cooking the meat.

b. فاطمةُ تطبخُ اللحمَ.

c. The meat is cooking.

d. اللحمُ ينطبخُ.

(19)

a. قَطَعَ زيدُ الحبلَ.

b. Zaid severed the rope.

c. انْقَطَعَ الحبلُ.

d. The rope severed.

(20)

a. قلبتُ الزورقَ.

b. I capsized the boat.

c. انقلب الزورقُ

d. The boat capsized.

تَفَعَّلَ → فَعَّلَ

(21)

a. The boy has torn his shirt.

b. مَرَّقَ الولدُ قميصَهُ

c. The boy's shirt has torn.

d. تَمَرَّقَ قميصُ الولدِ

(22)

a. حَرَكَ الرَّجُلُ الصَّخْرَةَ

b. The man moved the stone.

c. تحركتِ الصخرةُ

d. The stone moved.

(23)

a. جمعَ زيدٌ الحشدَ حوله

b. Zaid gathered the crowd round him.

c. تَجَمَّعَ الحشدُ حولَ زيدٍ

d. The crowd gathered round Zaid.

Similarly, when someone curdles (يُخَنَّرُ) a liquid, or when it curdles (يَتَخَنَّرُ), it gets thicker and develops lumps, i.e. فَعَّلَ - خَنَّرَ (transitive) becomes تَخَنَّرَ - تَفَعَّلَ (intransitive).

فَعَّلَ → أَفَعَّلَ

(24)

a. أَخْرَجَ المَعْلَمُ الطَّالِبَ مِنَ الصَّفِّ

b. The teacher threw the student out of the class.

c. خَرَجَ الطَّالِبُ مِنَ الصَّفِّ

d. The student left the class quickly.

(25) ادْخَلْتُ زَيْدًا العَرْفَةَ فَدَخَلَ

a. *I forced Zaid to enter the room, so he entered/came into (the room).

b. =I forced Zaid to enter the room, so he entered/came into the room.

Compare:

(26)

a. ادْخَلْتُ زَيْدًا العَرْفَةَ

b. I forced Zaid to enter the room.

c. دَخَلَ زَيْدٌ العَرْفَةَ

d. Zaid came into/entered the room.

e. دَخَلَ زَيْدٌ إِلَى العَرْفَةِ

f. Zaid came into the room.

تَفَعَّلَ → فَعَّلَ

(27)

a. دَخَّرَجَ الولدُ الكُرَةَ نحوَ الحفرةِ

b. The boy rolled the ball into the hole.

c. تَدَحَّرَجَتِ الكُرَةُ نحوَ الحفرةِ

d. The ball rolled into the hole.

انْفَعَلَ → أَفْعَلَ

(28)

- a. أَعْلَقَ عَلَيَّ الشَّبَاكُ
b. Ali closed the window.
c. انْفَعَلَ الشَّبَاكُ
d. The window closed.

انْفَعَلَ → أَفْعَلَ

(29)

- a. أَطْفَأَ الْوَلَدُ الْأَضْوَاءَ
b. The boy switched off the lights.
c. انْطَفَأَتِ الْأَضْوَاءُ
d. The lights went out/ were switched off.

انْفَعَلَ → فُعِلَ

(30)

- a. فَجَّرَ إرهابيون قنابلَ في المنتزه
b. Terrorists have exploded bombs in the park.
c. انفجرت قنابل في المنتزه
d. Bobs (were) exploded in the park.

تَفَعَّلَ → فَعَلَ

(31)

- a. كَسَرَ أَخِي الْكَاسَ
b. My brother smashed the glass.
c. تَكَسَّرَ الْكَاسُ
d. The glass smashed.

افْتَعَلَ → أَفْعَلَ

(32)

- a. اسْمَعْتُ الطِّفْلَ الْأَغْنِيَةَ
b. I made the child hear the song.
c. اسْتَمَعَ الطِّفْلُ لِلْأَغْنِيَةِ
d. The child listened to the song.

Two points are worth noting here:

(i) The form of the verb changes from one وزن *form* to another to show that it is ergatively used, for example, حَرَقَ (فَعَلَ) becomes احترق (انْفَعَلَ);

(ii) the form of the object noun phrase changes (by inflection) to show the new function it has when it becomes the subject of the intransitive verb in the ergative pair. In (احترقت الدار), for instance, the noun phrase الدار (*the house*) is in the nominative case because it is the subject of the verb, whereas it is in the accusative case in حرقت الدار because it has the function of being the object of the transitive verb (حَرَقْتُ).

Now we may consider the following examples, where فَعَلَ (transitive) becomes فُعِلَ (intransitive):

فُعِلَ → فَعَلَ

(33)

- a. كَحَلَّتْ الْبِنْتُ عَيْنَهَا
b. The girl smeared her eyelids with kohl.
c. كَجَلَّتْ عَيْنُ الْبِنْتِ
d. The girl's eyelids are darkened with kohl.

(34)

- a. تَلَمَّتِ البِنْتُ الإِنَاءَ فَتَلَّمِ .
 b. The girl broke the edge of the plate.
 c. تَلَّمِ الإِنَاءُ .
 d. The edge of the plate broke.
 (35)

- a. خَزَنَ مَرَضِي مَحْجِدًا .
 b. My sickness made Mohammed sad.
 c. خَزَنَ مُحَمَّدٌ (لِمَرَضِي) .
 d. Mohammed felt sad (about my sickness).

Here, too, the object noun phrase of a transitive verb 'becomes' the subject noun phrase of a corresponding intransitive verb and a new ergative subject is introduced as the *performer* (or *doer*) of the action referred to. Besides, the transitive verb changes its *form* from *وزن* *form* from *فَعَلَ* to intransitive *فَعِلَ*, i.e. there is a change of the vowel of the second syllable of the stem or base. This process may be referred as *Internal Vocalic Change*.

4.2.3 Lexical Ergative Constructions

In a lexical ergative construction, the transitive verb and the intransitive verb are in fact two lexical units with a shared meaning, (Faasii Al-Fahrrii 1999: 99; RaajiHii, 1973; Siibawayhi 1982/IV), for instance:

- (36)
 a. طَرَدَتِ الشُّرْطَةُ المُنْتَظَاهِرِينَ مِنَ المَبَانِي العَامَّةِ، فَخَرَجُوا .
 b. The police expelled the demonstrators from public buildings, so they left public buildings.

- (36)
 c. طَرَدَتِ الشُّرْطَةُ المُنْتَظَاهِرِينَ مِنَ المَبَانِي العَامَّةِ .
 d. The police expelled the demonstrators from public buildings.
 e. خَرَجَ المُنْتَظَاهِرُونَ مِنَ المَبَانِي العَامَّةِ .
 f. The demonstrators left public buildings/were forced to leave public buildings.

but not :

- *طَرَدَتِ الشُّرْطَةُ المُنْتَظَاهِرِينَ مِنَ المَبَانِي العَامَّةِ ، فَانْطَرَدُوا .
 (37)

- a. طَرَدْتُ أَخِي فَذَهَبَ .
 b. I fired my brother, so he went away.

but not:

- (37)
 c. *طَرَدْتُ أَخِي فَانْطَرَدَ/ اطرَدَ .
 d. I fired him so he went away.

- (38)
 a. أَعْطَيْتُ الشَّحَّاذَ نَقُودًا فَأَخَذَ .
 b. I gave the beggar some money, so he took it.

but not:

- (38)
 c. *أَعْطَيْتُ الشَّحَّاذَ نَقُودًا فَانْعَطَى .
 (39)

- a. كَلَّمْتُ أَخِي فَاسْتَمَعَ .
 b. I talked to brother, so he listened (to me).

but not:

- c. *كَلَّمْتُهُ فَانْكَلَمَ .

5. Ergativity in English and Arabic: A Comparison

The present section aims at making a comparison between English and Arabic in the area of ergativity to pinpoint the similarities and differences between these two languages insofar as this phenomenon is concerned. The comparison is based on the analyses carried out in sections (3) and (4) of the notion of ergativity in English and Arabic, respectively.

5.1 Transitivity

We have seen that the term *transitivity*, a central term in the grammatical analysis of clause/sentence, is used to refer to the verb's relationship to dependent elements of structure. The study has shown that in both languages the verb is considered to be the central and most important element in the sentence. The finite verb indicates tense (past or present) in both languages, e.g.

English

(40)

- a. Daniel Defoe *wrote* the book.
- b. He *is writing* about his summer vacation.
- c. He *will write* about his summer vacation.

Arabic

(41)

- a. أرسل علي الرسالة الى أحمد البارحة.
- b. Ali sent the letter to Ahmad yesterday.
- c. يُرسل علي الرسالة الى أحمد الآن.
- d. Ali is sending the letter to Ahmad now.
- e. سيرسل علي الرسالة الى أحمد غداً.
- f. Ali will send the letter to Ahmad tomorrow.

We have seen that the two main members of the category *transitivity* are *transitive* and *intransitive* (both are to be distinguished from copular verbs, e.g. *be a pilot*, *seemed easy*, *turn cold*, etc.). In both languages, a transitive verb must take an object:

(42).

- a. Sophia hates *spinach*.
- b. صوفيا تكره السبانخ.

(43)

- a. Mary saw *the dog*.
- b. شاهدت ماري الكلب.

An intransitive verb, on the other hand, has a subject but no object:

(44)

- a. *The guests* arrived.
- b. وصل الضيوف.

(45)

- a. *The river rises in Turkey*.
- b. ينبع النهر من تركيا.

(46)

- a. *The children* danced.
- b. رقص الأطفال.

In both languages, quite often the same verb may be used transitively or intransitively:

English

(47)

- a. The driver stopped the car and got out quickly.
- b. My watch has stopped.

(48)

a. Drink up your tea quickly before it gets cold.

b. Drink up quickly.

(49)

a. Customers are welcome to browse.

b. Customers are welcome to browse the books/the goods etc.

Arabic

(50)

a. كنتُ ألقُ عندما دقَّ جرسُ البابِ.

b. I was shaving when the doorbell rang.

c. كنتُ ألقُ لِحيتي عندما دقَّ جرسُ البابِ.

d. I was shaving my beard (off) when the doorbell rang.

(51)

a. لا تنبُتُ (تنمو) أشجارُ النخيلِ في أوروبا.

b. Palm trees don't grow in Europe.

c. المزارعون يُنبِتون أشجارَ النخيلِ في العراقِ.

d. Farmers grow palm trees in Iraq.

The analysis has shown that there are, in both English and Arabic, monotransitive and ditransitive verbs. A monotransitive verb is one that requires an object to complete the meaning, while a ditransitive verb takes an indirect object and a direct object. Arabic has a third type of transitive verbs, namely the trebly transitive, i.e. a verb that takes three objects, e.g. أعلمُ *to notify*, أرى *to show*, أخبرُ *to give information*, أنبأُ *to warn*, حدّثُ *to recount*, خبّرُ *to inform*, نبأُ *to announce*. There are no transitive verbs that take three objects in English. However, English and Arabic both have complex transitive verbs, taking an object and a complement or an adverbial in a *Subject-Verb-Direct Object-Adverb* pattern:

English

(52)

a. I like fish. (Monotransitive)

b. I gave my wife flowers. (Ditransitive)

c. =I gave flowers to my wife. (Ditransitive)

d. They made him leader. (Complex transitive)

Arabic

53a.	سَرَقَ اللصُّ المالَ	Monotransitive
b.	The thief stole the money.	(S-V-O)
54a.	أعطيتُ البنتَ ثوباً	Ditransitive
b.	I gave the girl a dress.	(S-V-Od-Oi)
55a.	وضعتُ المزهريّةَ على المنضدةِ	Complex transitive
b.	I placed the vase on the table.	(S-V-Od-Oc)
56a.	خبّرتُهم مجدداً شجاعاً	Trebly transitive
b.	I informed them that Mohammad is brave.	(S-V-O ¹ -O ² -O ³)

5.2 Ergative Verbs

5.2.1 Syntactic Ergative Constructions

In both languages the term *ergative*/مطووع is used for verbs whose subjects originate as objects. The term designates a particular kind of verb with which the same noun phrase has the function of being the object when the verb is transitive and of being the subject when the verb is intransitive. For example, in English the verb *break* in *The vase broke* is an ergative verb, *the vase* being understood in the same

way as it is in *Mary broke the vase*, where it is an object. Similarly, Arabic employs the term مطاوع for the syntactic relationship that holds between the pairs of sentences below, where the same verb is used transitively and intransitively: فَعْل/فَعَلْ

(57)

- a. غلى الولد الحليب
 b. The boy boiled the milk.
 c. غلى الحليب
 d. The milk boiled.

(58)

- a. فلت الطفل العصفور
 b. The child freed the bird from its cage.
 c. فلت العصفور
 d. The bird escaped from its cage.

(59)

- a. كسف الله الشمس
 b. God eclipsed the sun.
 c. كسفت الشمس
 d. The sun was eclipsed; there was an eclipse of the sun.

(60)

- a. فغر الرجل فاه
 b. The man opened his mouth wide.
 c. فغر فوه
 d. The man's mouth is wide open.

(61)

- a. دلغ الولد لسانه
 b. The boy stuck out his tongue.
 c. دلغ لسان الولد
 d. The boy's tongue stuck out.

This type of ergativity is referred to as syntactic ergativity, which may be shown as follows, taking the form فَعْل as an example:

Ergative Pair

(62) a.	غلى	فَعْل
	الولد	N1 Subject/Agent (Nominative)
	الحليب	N ² Direct Object/Goal (Accusative)
		→
(62) b.	غلى	فَعْل
	الحليب	N ² Subject/Goal (Nominative)

In these examples, where we talk of a particular kind of verb with which the same noun phrase can be used as the object (e.g. الحليب *the milk*/ accusative) when the verb is transitive and as the subject (الحليب *the milk*/ nominative) when the verb is intransitive. The point to be emphasized here is that in an Arabic ergative pair of sentences, the direct object of the transitive verb is seen as having its object function usurped by the intransitive pair, so that the ex-object (in the accusative case) is put in the nominative case. Besides the verb غلى in both sentences has the same form, namely فَعْل. The same syntactic relationship may be observed in the following pairs of sentences in English:

(63)

- a. The cold weather *froze* firefighters' hoses.
 b. Firefighters' hoses *froze*.

(64)

- a. Ford broke the glass.

b. The glass broke.

5.2.2 Morpho-syntactic Ergative Constructions

In Arabic, but not in English, there are other ways of using a verb 'ergatively'. We have referred to these as morpho-syntactic processes. These include the following patterns:

فَعَلَ → اِفْتَعَلَ

(65)

a. حَرَقْتُ الدَّارَ

b. I burned the house.

c. اِحْتَرَقَتِ الدَّارُ

d. The house burned.

فَعَلَ → اِنْفَعَلَ

(66)

a. Ali broke the chair.

b. كَسَرَ عَلِيُّ الكُرْسِيَّ

c. The chair broke.

d. اِنكسَرَ الكُرْسِيُّ

فَعَلَ → اِنْفَعَلَ

(67)

a. قَطَعَ زَيْدٌ الحَبْلَ

b. Zaid cut the rope.

c. اِنقَطَعَ الحَبْلُ

d. The rope was cut.

فَعَلَ → تَفَعَّلَ:

(68)

a. The boy has torn his shirt.

b. مَرَّقَ الوَلَدُ قَمِيصَهُ

c. The boy's shirt has torn.

d. تَمَرَّقَ قَمِيصُ الوَلَدِ

(69)

a. اَخْرَجَ المَعْلَمُ الطَّالِبَ مِنَ الصَّفِّ

b. The teacher threw the student out of the class.

c. خَرَجَ الطَّالِبُ مِنَ الصَّفِّ

d. The student left the class quickly.

(تَفَعَّلَ) → (فَعَلَ)

(70)

a. دَخَرَجَ الطِّفْلُ الكُرَةَ

b. The child rolled the ball.

c. تَدَخَرَجَتِ الكُرَةُ

d. The ball rolled.

اِنْفَعَلَ → اَفْعَلَ

(71)

a. اَطْفَأَ الوَلَدُ الاضواءَ

b. The boy switched off the lights.

c. اِنطَفَأَتِ الاضواءُ

d. The lights went out/ were switched off.

إِنْفَعَلَ → فَعَلَ

(72)

a. فَجَّرَ إرهابي قنبلة في الشارع

b. A terrorist exploded a bomb in the street.

c. انفجرت قنبلة في الشارع

d. A bomb exploded in the street.

تَفَعَّلَ → فَعَلَ

(74)

a. هشم الانفجار زجاج النافذة

b. The explosion smashed the window glass.

c. تهشم زجاج النافذة

d. The window glass smashed.

فَعَلَ → فَعَلَ

(75)

a. فطخ أخي القضيب الفولاذي

b. My brother flattened the steel rod.

c. فطخ القضيب الفولاذي

d. The steel rod became flat.

(76)

a. خرب العامل البيت

b. The worker destroyed the house.

c. خرب البيت

d. The house got/was destroyed.

Compare:

e. خرب (=خرب) العامل البيت

f. The worker destroyed the house.

The above examples clearly show that, in both English and Arabic, the subject of the intransitive use of the verb is the same as the object of its transitive use, and the agent of the action is thus said to appear as the 'ergative' subject. In each case, the ergative verb (*broke/كسر* for example) has its object, *the chair/ الكرسي* as its subject without changing its meaning. To be more exact, in the two languages an ergative construction is seen when the same noun phrase can be used as the object when the verb is transitive and as the subject when the verb is intransitive. It should be noticed, however, that while the relationship that holds between, for example, *The explosion smashed the window glass* and *The window glass smashed* is a syntactic one, it is morpho-syntactic in the corresponding Arabic sentences *هشم الانفجار* *هشم الانفجار* and *تهشم زجاج النافذة*, where *هشم* becomes *تهشم* and *زجاج النافذة* (accusative) becomes *زجاج النافذة* (nominative).

It may be mentioned here that in Arabic, but not in English, the term *ergative* is sometimes applied to sentence pairs such (77a) and (77b) below, where both verbs are transitive, and where the same noun is used as the object of the transitive verb *عَلَّمَ* (*to teach*) and as the subject of the transitive verb *تَعَلَّمَ* (*to learn*):

(77)

a. عَلَّمَ ولدي الفرنسية فتعلمها

b. I taught my son French, so he learned it.

Sentence (77a) is synonymous with sentences (77c) and (77e) below:

c. عَلَّمَ ولدي الفرنسية

d. I taught my son French.

e. تَعَلَّمَ ولدي الفرنسية

f. My son learned French.

5.2.3 Lexical Ergativity

As has been mentioned above, lexical ambiguity in Arabic is a type of irregular ergativity in which there is a complete change in the shape of the intransitive (ergative) verb, i.e. using a completely unrelated ergative form:

(78)

a. طَرَدَ المعلمُ زيداً فخرجَ

b. The teacher dismissed Zaid and he (=Zaid) left (the room).

But not

c. *طَرَدَ المعلمُ زيداً فانطرد/فاطرد

6. Conclusions

Following Levin (1993) and Radford (2004), among others, we have handled the notion of *ergativity* under two headings, namely ergative verbs and *non-ergative* (or *unergative*) verbs. The findings of the study may be taken in support of the claim made by scholars that there are language universals, i.e. linguistic features which are common to all human languages. The contrastive analysis carried out in this study has revealed the following:

SIMILARITIES

The similarities between English and Arabic in the area of ergativity may be stated as follows:

1. In English and Arabic, the verb is considered to be the heart of the sentence.
2. In both languages, the main members of the category *transitivity* are transitive (including monotonative, ditransitive, complex transitive) and intransitive (including pseudo-intransitive, e.g. *The ice breaks easily*). Quite often the same verb may be used transitively and intransitively:

(79)

1. أَقْرَأُ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ

Read: In the Name of your Lord who **created**.

2. خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ

Created man from a clot.

3. أَقْرَأُ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ

Read: And your Lord is the Most Generous.

4. الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ

He who **taught** by the pen.

5. عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

Taught man what he never knew. (العلق/1-5)

(80)

a. Ali started his lecture at 9:00.

b. بَدَأَ عَلِيٌّ مَحَاضِرَتَهُ فِي السَّاعَةِ التَّاسِعَةِ

c. The lesson started early.

d. بَدَأَ الدَّرْسُ مُبَكَّرًا

3. In English and Arabic, the term *ergative*/مطوع is employed by grammarians and linguists for the *syntactic* relationship which holds between, for example:

(81)

a. The teacher rang the bell.

b. دَقَّ المعلمُ الجرسَ

c. The bell rang.

d. دَقَّ الجرسُ

4. In the two languages, there are several types of sentences which are both semantically and syntactically like the passive:

(82)

a. The waves sank the ship.

b. أغرقت الأمواج السفينة

- c. The ship sank.
 d. غرقت السفينةُ
 e. The ship was sunk.
 f. أُغرقت السفينةُ

(83)

- a. The wind moved the curtain.
 b. حرَّكَتِ الرِّيحُ السِّتَارَةَ
 c. The curtain moved.
 d. تحرَّكَتِ السِّتَارَةُ
 e. The curtain was moved.
 f. حُرِّكَتِ السِّتَارَةُ

(84)

- a. The boy broke the vase.
 b. كَسَرَ الولدُ المزهريَّةَ
 c. The vase broke.
 d. انكسرتِ المزهريَّةُ
 e. The vase was broken.
 f. كُسرَتِ المزهريَّةُ

DIFFERENCES

The study has also shown that there are points of difference between the two languages in the area of ergative verbs. These may be stated as follows:

1. As far as transitivity is concerned, the marked difference between the two languages in this area is that Arabic, unlike English, is in possession of the so-called trebly transitive verbs like *أنبأ* (*to warn*), *خَبَّرَ* (*to inform*), *أَعْلَمَ* (*to notify*).

(85)

- a. أخبرْتُ أبي زيدَ صادقاً
 b. I informed my father that Zaid was honest.

2. Of great interest to the study of the morphology and syntax of Arabic are the multiple ways in which an ergative verb can be derived from a basic verb root. In Arabic, the term *مطاوع* also applies to examples like the ones in (86) below, where, although the affected object of a transitive clause is, too, the same as the affected subject of the corresponding intransitive clause, the transitive verb and the intransitive verb in the ergative pair have two different 'forms' "أوزان". By contrast, the transitive and intransitive verbs in the corresponding English sentences are the same, namely *dispersed* and *dispersed*:

(86)

- a. أَقشَعَتِ الرِّيحُ السَّحَابَ
 b. The wind dispersed the clouds.
 c. أَقشَعُ السَّحَابُ
 d. The clouds dispersed.

The type of relationship which holds between (86a) and (86c) is a morpho-syntactic one. To be more exact, in each of the pairs of sentences above, the direct object of the transitive verb is seen as having its object function usurped by the intransitive verb, so that the ex-object (in the accusative case) is put in the nominative case. By contrast, the type of relationship which holds between (86b) and (86d) is syntactic. A morpho-syntactic relationship could also be observed in pairs of sentences such as (87a) and (87c) below, where the transitive verb is made intransitive by changing the internal vowel of the transitive verb, namely *فَعَّلَ* → *فَعِلَ*

(87)

- a. خَرَّبَ العَامِلُ البَيْتَ
 b. The worker destroyed the house.
 c. خَرِبَ البَيْتُ
 d. The house got destroyed.

In (87b) and (87d) on the other hand, the relationship that holds between the two sentences is syntactic.

3. Sometimes a verb, in Arabic, is *lexically* ergative, i.e. there is a complete change in the shape of the intransitive verb of an ergative pair, i.e. using a completely unrelated intransitive verb. This type of relationship could be observed between (88a) and (88c) below:

(88)

a. كَلَّمَ الأبُّ ابْنَهُ

b. The father *talked to* his son.

c. استمع الابن إلى أبيه

d. The son *listened to* his father.

We may claim here that in pairs of sentences such as (88b) and (88d), (88b) is the paraphrase of (88d) just as (88d) is the paraphrase of (88b).

Endnotes

¹ *English* is used in the present study to refer to Standard British English. It is that variety of English which is, more or less, understood all over the English-speaking world, and which is normally used by educated people, and taught to non-native speakers learning the language (Abercrombie, 1966). It is chosen here because it is the form of English which is taught as a subject in schools in Iraq.

² *Arabic* in this work is used to refer to both: Classical Arabic - the language in which the holy Qur'an was revealed and through which the Islamic faith finds expression, and Modern Standard Arabic (also known as Modern Literary Arabic) - the language which, throughout the whole Arabic-speaking world is (i) found in the prose of books, newspapers, periodicals and letters; (ii) employed in formal public address, over radio and television and in religious ceremonies;

(iii) taught in schools and taught to non-native speakers when they learn the language as a foreign language, and (iv) described in dictionaries and grammars. Although it is called Arabic, it no longer has any necessary connection with the Arab homeland. It is a universal form of Arabic, being exactly the same wherever it may be spoken or written. (Aniis 1973; FrayHah 1955; Hassaan 1958; Stetkevych 1970; Taymuur 1956 and Toma 1969; Watson 2002).

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Alphabetical order ignores ' (الهمزة) , and ' (العين) .

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جوانب من ظاهرة التعدي واللزوم في اللغتين الإنكليزية والعربية**جوانب من ظاهرة التعدي واللزوم في اللغتين الإنكليزية والعربية**

الدراسة الحالية تحليل مقارن لظاهرة التعدي واللزوم في اللغتين الإنكليزية والعربية، في محاولة لتحديد أوجه التشابه والاختلاف بينهما في هذا الجانب اللغوي. تعرض الدراسة شرحاً عن الأفعال المطاوعة والأفعال غير المطاوعة (مُتَعَدِيَةٌ أو لازمة) مبيّنة الاختلاف بينهما، كما تقدّم وصفاً تفصيلياً لهذه الظاهرة، ولبناءات المطاوعة وأوزان الفعل المطاوع. بالإضافة إلى ذلك تعنى الدراسة بالأفعال التي تُسْتَعَدَمُ مُتَعَدِيَةٌ مرةً ولزامة مرةً أخرى. ينتهي البحث بعرض النتائج التي توصلت إليها الدراسة. اعتمدت هذه الدراسة – في جانبها الإنكليزي – المنهج التحليلي الذي جاء به راندولف كوبرك و زملاؤه في سلسلة كتب النحو التي صدرت خلال عقدي السبعينيات والثمانينيات، وبخاصة كتاب قواعد اللغة الإنكليزية المعاصرة (1972) و كتاب القواعد الشاملة للغة الإنكليزية (1985) ، كما اتخذت الدراسة – في قسمها العربي – المنهج التحليلي الوصفي الذي جاء به علماء النحو العربي، القدامى و المحدثون، في وصف ظاهرة التعدي واللزوم في اللغة العربية، مثل سيبويه و ابن عقيل و المبرد و الغلابيني و عضيمة و عباس حسن، وغيرهم.

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