

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE STRUCTURAL LINGUISTICS APPLIED TO THE NOMINAL SENTENCE IN ARABIC

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Abstract

The article analyzes the diverse results obtained in the syntactic analysis of the nominal sentence in Arabic according to the methods of structural linguistics from two different perspectives: the Arab way and the European-American way. By using the technique of the contrastive analysis, the study provides interesting data about the similarities and the differences between Arabic and English in relation to the nominal sentence when the morphosyntactic principles of structural linguistics are applied.

Keywords: Structural linguistics applied to Arabic, morphosyntactic analysis techniques, the nominal sentence in Arabic, contrastive analysis, generative grammar

Introduction

What all languages have in common is the structural principle and what distinguishes them is the adaptation of this principle. Both the difference as the similarity are due to the form and not to the substance (Hjelmslev, 1968).

The renowned French linguist André Martinet, the creator of the theory of double articulation of language, said that, when moving from one language to another do not change only the words and the forms but also the choice of relations expressed (Martinet, 1959).

The functionality derived from the new structural linguistic tendencies prevails today as morphosyntactic analysis technique in all languages (Chomsky, 1957). And of course, the Arabic language is no exception. The mixture of influences existing from an important grammatical tradition, initiated mainly by Sibawayhi (Al-Hadithi, 1965; Humbert, 1995), and a new linguistic current, the structural or functional, imported from West (Chomsky, 1965), has resulted among the Arabs in an interesting syntactic view of language that is similar, in some ways, but different, in others, to that of the European and American linguists.

This paper focuses on some of these topics applied to the nominal sentence in Arabic (Massignon, 1954).

In Logic sentence is called to the expression of the relationship between two concepts: subject and predicate (Cohen, 1970). The sentence consists of a number of units organized by the nominal syntagma and the verbal syntagma or predicate, understanding as syntagma "minimal functional unit", i.e., it is a syntactic unit which can be simple or complex and in which we can distinguish the nucleus and the adjacent elements. The nucleus of a nominal syntagma is the noun, and that of a verbal syntagma is the verb (Tesnière, 1959). The nominal syntagma can act as subject, attribute or complements whereas the verbal syntagma acts as the predicate. The simple sentence consists of only one nexus subject / predicate and can be nominal and verbal (El-Shishiny, 2011).

In Arabic it is meant by simple nominal sentence the one that has not verb explicitly.. It is roughly equivalent to the attributive sentences and some circumstantial phrases in present time, etc. (Wright, 1967)

For example:

<i>Arabic</i>	<i>English</i>
هذا الولد ذكي جداً	This child is very clever
a) Nominal Syntagma (Subject): هذا الولد	This child
b) Nominal Predicate (Attribute): ذكي جداً	[is] very clever
الولد في البيت	The child is in the house
a) Nominal Syntagma (Subject): الولد	
b) Nominal Predicate (Circumstantial Predicate): في البيت [is] in the house	

The simple nominal sentence may be preceded by a particle *إن* (*inna*, certainly) which requires put the subject in accusative case.

For example:

<i>Arabic</i>	<i>English</i>
هذا الولد ذكي جداً	This child is very clever
إن هذا الولد ذكي جداً	Certainly this child is very clever
a) Nominal Syntagma (Subject): إن هذا الولد	Certainly this child
b) Nominal Predicate (Attribute): ذكي جداً	[is] very clever

On the other hand, in Arabic it is meant by simple verbal sentence the one that has verb explicitly and in addition the verb is placed at the beginning of the phrase.

For example:

<i>Arabic</i>	<i>English</i>
يكتب المعلم في الدفتر	The teacher writes in the notebook
a) Nominal Syntagma (Subject): المعلم	The teacher
b) Verbal Syntagma (Verbal Predicate)	
b1) Verb: يكتب	writes
b2) Circumstantial Complement: في الدفتر	in the notebook

The compound sentence is one that consists of more than one nexus subject / predicate, and it can be juxtaposed, coordinated and subordinated.

For example:

<i>Arabic</i>	<i>English</i>
يدرس التلميذ ليتعلم	The pupil studies to learn
a) Nominal Syntagma (Subject): التلميذ	The pupil
b) Verbal Syntagma (Verbal Predicate): يدرس ليتعلم	studies to learn
b1) Verb: يدرس	studies
b2) Final Subordinate Clause: ليتعلم	to learn

The nominal sentence in Arabic

Let us remember that in the Western grammatical analysis it is meant by nominal sentence in Arabic the one that has not verb explicitly. It is roughly equivalent to the attributive sentences and some circumstantial phrases in present time.

But, the Arab linguists have another concept of this kind of sentences inherited from the historical grammatical tradition resulting from a descriptive point of view (Bakir, 1984; Al-Fasi, 1985; Al-Mutawwakil, 1986). Forthem, a nominal sentence is one that begins with:

1) a name, beech or no a verb

For example:

<i>Arabic</i>	<i>English</i>
هذا الولد ذكي جداً	This child is very clever
الولد في البيت	The child is in the house
□ ان هذا الولد ؟	Who is this child?
المعلم يكتب في الدفتر	The teacher writes in the notebook

Its elements are two: *mubtada* ' (□بتدا) and *khavar* (خير).

Let us see the previous four examples:

هذا الولد ذكي جداً	(This child is very clever)
<i>mubtada</i> ': هذا الولد	(This child)
<i>khavar</i> : ذكي جداً	([is] very clever)
الولد في البيت	(The child is in the house)
<i>mubtada</i> ': الولد	(The child)
<i>khavar</i> : في البيت	([is] in the house)
□ ان هذا الولد ؟	(Who is this child?)
<i>mubtada</i> ': ان	(Who)
<i>khavar</i> : هذا الولد	([is] this child?)
المعلم يكتب في الدفتر	(The teacher writes in the notebook)
<i>mubtada</i> ': المعلم	(The teacher)
<i>khavar</i> : يكتب في الدفتر	(writes in the notebook)

2) the particle *إِنَّ* (*inna*, certainly) or its "sisters": *أَنَّ* (*anna*)، *كَانَ* (*ka'anna*)، *لَعَلَّ* (*la'alla*)، *لَيْتَ* (*layta*) and *لَكِنَّ* (*lākinna*). In these cases, the subject is in accusative.

For example:

<i>Arabic</i>	<i>English</i>
<i>إِنَّ هَذَا الْوَلَدَ ذَكِيًّا جَدًّا</i>	Certainly this child is very clever
<i>إِنَّ الْوَلَدَ فِي الْبَيْتِ</i>	Certainly the child is in the house
<i>إِنَّ الْمَعَلَّمَ يَكْتُبُ فِي الدَّفْتَرِ</i>	Certainly the teacher writes in the notebook

Its elements are two: *ism inna* (or *ism anna*, *ism ka'anna*, *ism la'alla*, *ism layta* and *ism lākinna*) (اسم *لَيْتَ*, اسم *لَعَلَّ*, اسم *كَانَ*, اسم *أَنَّ*, or *أَنَاسِم*) and *khavar inna* (or *khavar anna*, *khavar ka'anna*, *khavar la'alla*, *khavar layta* and *khavar lākinna* (*إِنَّ*, *خَبِيرَ* *أَنَّ*, or *خَبِيرَ* *كَانَ*, *خَبِيرَ* *لَعَلَّ*, *خَبِيرَ* *لَكِنَّ* and *خَبِيرَ* *لَيْتَ*).

Let us see the previous three examples:

<i>إِنَّ هَذَا الْوَلَدَ ذَكِيًّا جَدًّا</i>	(Certainly this child is very clever)
particle <i>inna</i>	(Certainly)
<i>ism inna: هَذَا الْوَلَدَ</i>	(this child)
<i>khavar inna: ذَكِيًّا جَدًّا</i>	([is] very clever)
<i>إِنَّ الْوَلَدَ فِي الْبَيْتِ</i>	(Certainly the child is in the house)
particle <i>inna</i>	(Certainly)
<i>ism inna: الْوَلَدَ</i>	(the child)
<i>khavar inna: فِي الْبَيْتِ</i>	([is] in the house)
<i>إِنَّ الْمَعَلَّمَ يَكْتُبُ فِي الدَّفْتَرِ</i>	(Certainly the teacher writes in the notebook)
particle <i>inna</i>	(Certainly)
<i>ism inna: الْمَعَلَّمَ</i>	(the teacher)
<i>khavar inna: يَكْتُبُ فِي الْكِتَابِ</i>	(writes in the book)

3) the copulative verb *كَانَ* (*kāna*) or its "sisters": *لَيْسَ* (*laysa*) ، *أَصْبَحَ* (*asbaha*) ، *أَضْحَى* (*adhà*) ، *أَمْسَى* (*amsà*) ، etc.

For example:

<i>Arabic</i>	<i>English</i>
<i>كَانَ هَذَا الْوَلَدَ ذَكِيًّا جَدًّا</i>	This child was very clever
<i>كَانَ الْوَلَدَ فِي الْبَيْتِ</i>	The child was in the house
<i>كَانَ الْمَعَلَّمَ يَكْتُبُ فِي الدَّفْتَرِ</i>	The teacher wrote in the notebook

Its elements are two: *ism kāna* (or *ism laysa*, *ism mā-zāla*, *ism mā-dāma*, *ism zalla*, *ism sāra*, *ism asbaha*, *ism bāta*, *ism mā-fati'a*, *ism mā-bariha*, *ism adhà*, *ism amsà*, etc.) and *khavar kāna* (or *khavar laysa*, *khavar mā-zāla*, *khavar mā-dāma*, *khavar zalla*, *khavar sāra*, *khavar asbaha*, *khavar bāta*, *khavar mā-fati'a*, *khavar mā-bariha*, *khavar adhà*, *khavar amsà*, etc.)

Let us see the previous three examples:

كان هذا الولدُ أذكياً جداً	(This child was very clever)
<i>ism kāna</i> : هذا الولدُ	(This child)
copulative or attributive verb: كان	(was)
<i>khavar kāna</i> : ذكياً جداً	(very clever)
كان الولدُ في البيت	(The child was in the house)
<i>ism kāna</i> : الولدُ	(The child)
copulative or attributive verb: كان	(was)
<i>khavar kāna</i> : في البيت	(in the house)
كان المعلمُ يكتب في الدفتر	(The teacher wrote in the notebook)
<i>ism kāna</i> : المعلمُ	(The teacher)
copulative or attributive verb: كان	(was)
<i>khavar kāna</i> : يكتب في الدفتر	(writes in the notebook)

On the other hand, for the Arab linguists a verbal sentence is one that begins with a verb.

For example:

<i>Arabic</i>	<i>English</i>
يكتب □ معلمٌ في الدفتر	The teacher writes in the notebook
تذهب البنات إلى المدرسة	The girls go to the school
Its elements are فاعل	(subject), فعل (verb) and □ تتمات
(complements).	

Let us see the previous two examples:

يكتب المعلم في الدفتر	(The teacher writes in the notebook)
verb: يكتب	(writes)
subject: المعلم	(The teacher)
circumstantial complement: في الدفتر	(in the notebook)
تذهب البنات إلى المدرسة	(The girls go to the school)
verb: تذهب	(go)
subject: البنات	(The girls)
circumstantial complement: إلى المدرسة	(to the school)

Analysis and results

Considering these theoretical issues and taking into account these principles (Bull, 1965), when structural methods are applied we find different syntactic analysis to which will be referred hereinafter as A (Western way) and B (Arabic way) (Arvide Cambra, 2000).

If we contrast (Di Pietro, 1971), for instance, Arabic and English, among other results, it may be that we find a simple verbal sentence according to A and a compound nominal sentence according to B:

1) When the phrase begins with the subject

For example:

المعلمُ يكتب في الدفتر	(The teacher writes in the notebook)
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A) It is a simple verbal sentence, because there is an only verb, regardless it starts with the subject

subject: **المُعَلِّمُ** (The teacher)
 verb: **يكتب** (writes)
 circumstantial complement: **في الدفتر** (in the notebook)

B) It is a compound nominal sentence. It is nominal because it begins with a name, and it is compound because the *khabar* is a simple verbal phrase

mubtada': **المُعَلِّمُ** (The teacher)
 khabar* (simple verbal sentence): **يكتب في الكتاب
 verb: **يكتب (writes)
 circumstantial complement: **في الدفتر (in the notebook)

2) When the phrase begins with the particle **إِنَّ** (*inna*) or some of its "sisters" in certain cases.

For example:

إِنَّ المُعَلِّمَ يكتب في الدفتر (Certainly the teacher writes in the notebook)

A) It is a simple verbal sentence, because there is an only verb, regardless it starts with a particle (*inna*) which requires put the subject in accusative.

subject: **المُعَلِّمَ** (The teacher)
 verb: **يكتب** (writes)
 circumstantial complement: **في الدفتر** (in the notebook)

B) It is a compound nominal sentence. It is a nominal sentence because begin with the particle **إِنَّ** (*inna*) and it is compound because the *khabar inna* is a simple verbal phrase

particle *inna* (Certainly)
ism inna: **المُعَلِّمَ** (the teacher)
 khabar inna* (simple verbal sentence): **يكتب في الدفتر
 verb: **يكتب (writes)
 circumstantial complement: **في الدفتر (in the notebook)

3) When the sentence begins with the copulative verb **كان** (*kāna*), or some of its "sisters", by being used as an auxiliary verb in the pluperfect and other times of the past.

For example:

كان المُعَلِّمُ قد كتب في الدفتر (The teacher had written in the notebook)

A) It is a simple verbal sentence because there is an only verb in pluperfect time.

subject: **المُعَلِّمُ** (The teacher)
 verb: **كتب** (had written)
 circumstantial complement: **في الدفتر** (in the notebook)

B) It is a compound nominal sentence. It is compound because beging with the copulative verb كان (*kāna*), and it is compound because the *khabarkanāna* is a simple verbal phrase

	verb copulative: كان	
	<i>ism kāna</i> : المعلم	(The teacher)
* <i>khabar kāna</i> (simple verbal sentence):	قد كتب في الدفتر	
	**verb: كتب	(had written)
**circumstantial complement:	في الدفتر	(in the notebook)

Conclusion

The Arabic language is the same object of study in both analysis and research techniques but the descriptions are significantly different because they are based on distinct theories. The vision that every people has the world through language is different (Delacroix, 1930), but there are also similarities in it since there are many essential features of human language that are common to man of any society and time: the *linguisticuniversals* (Greenberg, 1973). There are features common to all languages even if they differ (Chomsky, 1968).

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