

Non-derivational approach to ditransitive constructions in MSA

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In 2002, Harley adopted the non-derivational approach in analyzing English double objects construction (DOC) and double complement (DC). This paper aims to apply the same approach to Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) ditransitive structures. The following is an example of such a structure in MSA:

- (1) a. ʔaʕta al-muʕlam-u al-taalib-a kitaab-an
Gave-3ms the-teacher-nom the-student-acc book-acc
‘The teacher gave the student a book’
- b. ʔaʕta al-muʕlam-u kitaab-an li al-taalib-i
Gave3ms the-teacher-nom book-acc Dat prep the-student-gen
‘The teacher gave a book to the student’

In this paper, I argue for Harley’s non-derivational approach to DOC and DC in MSA. Harley proposes that DOC and DC constructions have different underlying representations. The DOC construction has an abstract verb head CAUSE which takes a prepositional possessive structure headed by an abstract possessive preposition, *Phave*. The DC has the same CAUSE head but here it takes a prepositional locative structure headed by an abstract locative preposition, *Ploc*.

The paper shows that Harley’s approach can be applied to MSA DC and DOC constructions without any problems. I applied the same analyses used in Harley’s paper for English DC and DOC which include animacy restriction, the inability of idioms to shift from a DOC to DC, and the asymmetric c-command relationships. The results of my analysis support the use of this approach in MSA.

Keywords: Syntax, Ditransitive constructions, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), and Non-derivational approach.

1 Introduction

The paper is divided into four sections. First, I will provide a brief overview of MSA ditransitive structure. Second, I will present the main point of Harley’s approach. Third, I will discuss the applicability of her approach to MSA. Finally,

I will conclude by summarizing my findings and offer suggestions for further research.

2 MSA Ditransitive Structure

MSA is the formal official standard form of Arabic for all Arab countries. It is used as a major medium of communication for public speaking and broadcasting. It is a mark of prestige, education, and social standing. MSA enjoys a great deal of freedom in word order because its rich inflectional morphology allows permutations of its constituents: SVO, VOS, OVS, and VSO. However, the basic word order is VSO (Ryding, 2009). For the analysis of DC and DOC, word order is important for two issues: case marking and asymmetric relationships. Ditransitive structures usually appear in two word orders: SVO or VSO. Thus, the ditransitive verb, in addition to having a subject, takes two objects: direct and indirect object. They follow the verb or any mentioned subject according to the sentence word order.

The underlying order of direct and indirect object in Arabic is similar to English. Barss and Lasnik (1986) observed the asymmetric relationships in English DOC as exemplified in (1):

- (1) a. John gave Mary a letter.
 DP1 DP2
 b.* John gave a letter Mary
 DP2 DP1

The direct object (a letter) is always in the domain of the indirect object (Mary). That is, DP1 (indirect object) c-commands DP2 (direct object) but not vice versa; since a is in the domain of b, then b must be c-commanded by a. The same condition exists in Arabic as in (2).

- (2) a. Mohammed-un ʔaʕta al-taalib-a kitaab-an
 Mohammed-nom gave-3ms the student-acc (DP1) book-acc (DP2)
 ‘Mohammed gave the student a book’
 b. * Mohammed-un ʔaʕta kitaab-an al-taalib-a
 Mohammed-nom gave-3ms book-acc (NP2) the student-acc (NP1)

This asymmetric relationship is supported by the use of anaphors where the anaphors must be c-commanded by their antecedents in both MSA and English.

- (3) a. I showed Mary herself.
 b. * I showed herself Mary.

- (4) a. ʔaray-t-u Mohammed-an nafsah.
 Showed-I-nom Mohammed-acc himself.
 b. *ʔaray-t-u nafsah Mohammed-an
 Showed-I-nom himself Mohammed-acc.
 “I showed Mohammed himself”

It is also important to understand the case marking system in MSA. There are three cases in Arabic: nominative, accusative, and genitive. Table 1 shows the case markers and the grammatical conditions associated with each case. (I included only the grammatical conditions that will show up in the data of this paper. There are many different markers for other grammatical conditions.)

Table 1.

The markers and the grammatical conditions associated with each case in MSA (S= singular).

Cases	Grammatical conditions	
	Definite noun (S)	Indefinite noun (S)
Nominative	-u	-un
Accusative	-a	-an
Genitive	-i	-in

3 Theoretical Background

The English ditransitive structure has been approached by two major analyses: a) derivational analysis of the DC and DOC structure (Larson, 1988) and b) non-derivational analysis (Pesetsky, 1995; Harley, 2002). Larson (1988) proposed a derivational approach in accounting for the English ditransitive structure. He assumes that the DOC is derived from a DC construction by a process similar to that of the passive formation.

However, Larson’s approach has been found to violate some of basic views of syntactic theory, such as case assignment and the unshiftable of idioms. Harley pointed out that idioms should freely shift in both the structure of DC and DOC the way they do in a passive structure. However, it is obviously not the case as we see in example (5):

- (5) a. Mary took Felix to task.
 ‘Mary upbraided Felix’.
 b. *Mary took task Felix.

The same problem seems to appear in MSA DOC. Example (6) provides evidence that the dative structure cannot be transformed into a DOC. The

idiomatic expression (alxbz-a li alxbaz-i) cannot shift from a DC to a DOC with the same idiomatic interpretation. (6) b is actually grammatically acceptable, yet the interpretation is quite different.

- (6) a. ʔaʕta alxbz-a li alxbaz-i (DC)
 Gave-3ms the bread-acc Dat-to baker-gen
 ‘To leave the things for the people who know better’
 b. ʔaʕta alxbaz-a alxbz-a (DOC)
 Gave-3ms the baker-acc the bread-acc
 ‘He gave the baker the bread’ (non-idiomatic interpretation)

Case assignment is another problem in Larson’s approach. Larson had to justify how case is assigned to the direct object while it is in an adjunct position (i.e. a caseless position). He argues that the indirect object gets the accusative case directly from the verb after the movement of the verb up in the VP shell. The direct object receives inherent case from the verb that results from “V” reanalysis. Jackendoff (1999) criticized Larson for complicating the theory by adding extra structure. In MSA, Larson’s analysis seems to be also problematic with regards to case assignment. Case assignment in MSA is slightly different from SVO languages in general. DPs are assigned case whenever a case assigner is available, otherwise, a default nominative case is assigned to them (Ouhalla, 1994):

- (7) a. Mohammed-un Kateeb-un
 Mohammed-nom writer-nom
 b. Mohammed-un kana kateeb-an
 Mohammed-nom was writer-acc

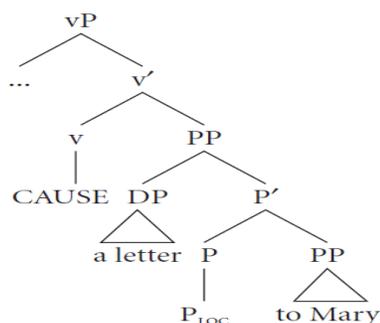
Another problem for Larson in MSA is the fact that not all ditransitive verbs allow both constructions (DO and DC). For example:

- (8) a. xala alnas-u al- batʔal-a ʔsad-an
 thought-3ms people-nom the hero-acc lion-acc
 ‘The people thought the hero a lion’
 b.* xala alnas-u al-ʔsad-a li batʔal-i
 ‘The people thought the lion is for the hero’

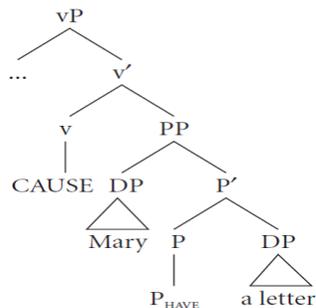
Harely’s non-derivational approach seems to provide more convincing evidence for MSA ditransitive structures. Harley proposes that DOC and DC constructions have different underlying representations. The DOC has an abstract verb head CAUSE which takes a prepositional possessive structure headed by an abstract possessive preposition, *Phave*. The DC has the same CAUSE head but here it takes a prepositional locative structure headed by an abstract locative

preposition, *Ploc*. The prepositional head (*Phave* & *Ploc*) is raised to the little *v* CAUSE and spelled out as a ditransitive verb like *send* and *give*. For theta-role assignment, the indirect object encodes the meaning of the possessor and the direct object encodes the meaning of the possessee in DOC. On the other hand, the indirect object encodes the meaning of location and the direct object encodes the meaning of the locatee in the DC construction as shown in (9).

(9) a) DC structure



b) DO structure



(Harely, 2002)

Harley's different theta-roles are supported by the animacy constraint observed in the DOC but not in the DC construction. The DC structure can shift into a DOC if the P complement is animate. However, if the complement is inanimate then it is impossible for the shifting process to occur because the possessor is required to be animate in the DOC structure as shown in (10). Therefore, only animate DPs are allowed to occur as the goal of a DOC. On the other hand, such a restriction does not exist for the location goal of a DC.

- (10) a. I sent a letter to Sue/ Boston. (DC)
 b. I sent *Boston/Sue a letter. (DOC)

Another argument that supports Harley's proposal is the syntactic asymmetries in the c-command of the direct and indirect object in DC and DOC structure. Harley's approach in fact solves a problem with the asymmetries observed by Larson's derivational approach. Larson assumed the same theta roles for the direct object and indirect object in both the DC and DOC. Harley's different theta-roles for each construction helps to solve the problem of theta-roles of the direct and indirect object in c-commanding relationships. In DOC, the indirect object (the possessor, goal) c-commands the direct object (the possessee, theme). In the DC construction, the indirect object (the locatee, theme) c-commands the direct object (the location, goal). Harely uses anaphors to test the syntactic asymmetries of the direct and indirect object in DC and DOC.

In anaphoric ditransitive structure, the first object is found to be the antecedent of the second object as demonstrated in (5). The non-derivational approach of Harley successfully accounted for these c-commanding facts in DC and DOC.

Furthermore, Harley's approach is found to be also successful in accounting for ditransitive idioms. It shows that idioms cannot freely shift between the DC and DOC as shown in (11). Harley maintains the theory of idiom-as-constituent which states that idiomatic elements form part of one constituent at some point in the derivation. At this point, all the non-idiomatic expressions are excluded from this single constituency. Accordingly, she postulated two types of idioms in the ditransitive structure: P_{HAVE} + theme and P_{LOC} + goal idioms. In DOC, the idiomatic force is established at the P_{HAVE} level (P_{HAVE} + theme) before moving the P_{HAVE} to the v CAUSE. The same happens for DC structure, where the idiomatic force is established at the P_{LOC} level (P_{LOC} + goal). Apparently, the abstract preposition in DC and DOC is different. Therefore, idioms cannot freely shift between DC and DOC.

- (11) a. I sent the salesman to the devil.
b. *I sent the devil the salesman.

Harley's approach is very interesting in accounting for other languages like Korean (Kim, 2008) and Spanish (Bleam, 2003). In the next section, I will apply this non-derivational approach to the MSA ditransitive structure.

4 Harley's Non-derivational Approach in MSA

Harley's approach seems to be applicable to the MSA ditransitive structure. To prove this claim, I will use the same analyses used by Harley for the English DC and DOC. Specifically, I will consider the animacy constraint, the asymmetric c-commanding relationships, and the unshiftability of idioms.

4.1 Animacy Constraint

MSA provides a counterexample of the English ditransitive structure in terms of animacy constraint. Example (12) shows that animacy constraint is applicable in DO structure but not in the DC structure. This animacy constraint is actually supported by the fact that P_{HAVE} encodes possessive relations for which the possessor needs to be animate whereas; P_{LOC} encodes locative relations which does not require any animacy restriction.

- (12) a. Wahaba al-sultan-u al-shaṣer-a /* al-s²andooq-a hadiat-an
gave-3ms the-sultan-nom the-poet-acc/* the -box-acc gift-acc
'Alsultan gave the poet a gift'

- b. wahaba al-sultan-u hadiat-an li al-shaʕer-i / al-sʔandooq-i
gave-3ms the - sultan-nom gift-acc Dat-to the-poet-gen/ the -box-gen

4.2 The Asymmetric c-commanding Relationships

Harley's analysis of the asymmetric c-commanding relationships is found to be applicable in MSA ditransitive structure. She clearly demonstrated the syntactic asymmetries between the direct and indirect object in DC and DOC by the use of anaphors. As discussed in the previous section, the standard syntax theory of anaphors states that anaphors must be c-commanded by their antecedents. In the ditransitive structure, Harley argues that the first object is always the antecedent while the anaphora is the second object. This is exemplified in (3) for DOC. Also, the same restriction is found to be applied in an MSA DC structure as shown in (13).

- (13) a. ʔaxaʕa al-feloos-a li nafsah (DC)
took-3ms covert subject the-money-acc Dat-to himself
'He took the money for himself'
b. *ʔaxaʕa nafsah li al-feloos-i
took-3ms covert subject himself Dat-to the-money-gen

4.3 The Unshiftable of Idioms

Another argument presented by Harley to support her non-derivational approach is the unshiftable of idioms from DC to DOC and vice versa. She accounted for this fact by proposing two types of idioms in the ditransitive structure: P_{HAVE} + theme and P_{LOC} + goal idioms. The fact that the abstract preposition is different in each structure explains this unshiftable of idioms. This analysis seems to perfectly fit with the MSA ditransitive idioms data as shown in (14). In (14 a) the P_{HAVE} is forming an idiomatic constituent with the theme (Moqafa-h) at the P level while in (14 b) the P_{LOC} is forming an idiomatic constituent with the goal (li ʕayoona-ha). For the unshiftable of idioms, examples (6), (15), and (16) provide sufficient evidence of the existence of the same fact in the MSA ditransitive structure.

- (14) a. ʔara-na Mohammed-an Moqafa-h¹ (DO)
Showed-us Mohammed-acc back-acc- his
'to be relieved because someone you do not like left'

¹ The accusative marker (an) is not apparent here because the possessive (ha) is attached to the object.

- b. ʔaʕtʔa al-ʕbaht-a li ʕayoona-ha
 gave-3ms covert S the-toy-acc Dat-to eyes-acc-her
- (15) a. Yazaid al-tʔain-a balat-an (DOC)
 Add-3ms,covert S the- mud-acc wetness-acc
 ‘To add water to already wet mud’
- b. *Yazaid al-balat-a li tʔaian-i (DC)
 Add-3ms, covert S the- wetness-acc Dat-to mud-gen
- (16) a. Mashy-na shawt-an batail-an (DOC)
 Walked-we match-acc wrong-acc
 ‘We chose to participate in the wrong place’
- b. *Mashy-na batail-an li shawt-i (DC)
 Walked-we wrong-acc Dat-to match-gen

In sum, the above discussion of the animacy constraint, the asymmetric c-commanding relationships, and the unshiftability of idioms in the MSA ditransitive structure seems to be compatible with Harley’s non-derivational approach. It provides another piece of evidence of the ability of this approach to cross-linguistically account for the ditransitive structure in languages other than English.

5 Conclusion

The goal of the paper is successfully achieved by arriving at the conclusion that Harley’s non-derivational approach fits perfectly with the MSA ditransitive data. In writing this paper, I discovered that MSA ditransitive structure has been rarely researched. This in fact suggests a need for more research to be conducted in this context.

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