

The Notion of Governor in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) And English: a Contrastive Perspective

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Abstract. This paper deals with the notion of syntactic governors in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and English. More strictly, it deals with the types of governors that assign structural cases to their governees. It does not deal, however, with such notions as governing domain, barriers or notions that are relevant to Binding Theory or Control. The data investigated are wide-ranging. It includes all types of lexical governors in Arabic that assign structural cases; consequently, it contains many different structures.

I. Theoretical Background

The notion of government appeared in the linguistic literature in the late seventies and early eighties with the publication of some technical papers on Government and Binding (GB); see for example Chomsky's "*On binding*" (OB), 1980 and *Lectures on Government and Binding* (LGB), 1981. The notion of government is defined as "a particular structural relationship which may hold between two nodes in a tree. It plays a crucial role in GB in the assignment of case and in containing the distribution of empty categories"[1 , p. 120] .

According to the notion of government every governee should have a governor, i.e., case assigner; consequently, NPs are classified as follows:

<u>Position</u>	<u>Case</u>	<u>Case assigner</u>
subject of tensed clause	nominative	tensed VP
possessive NP in NP	genitive	noun
object of verb	accusative	verb
object of preposition	oblique/accusative	preposition [2, p. 229]

We notice that the accusative case assigners are [-N] categories. In fact this position is suggested in Chomsky [3, p. 170]. We find the same conclusion in a more recent reference: "In chapter 2, section 7, we pointed out that the ability of a category to assign case has sometimes been related to the presence of the feature [-N]. Prepositions and verbs are [-N], nouns and adjectives are [+N]" [4, p. 146].

A similar view is expressed in another reference: "the case assigners share certain properties. First, none are phrasal elements. Second, they are either lexical (V and P) or tense, which may not be lexical, in a strict sense, but is not phrasal. Third, each is the head of the phrase that most immediately contains the NP that assigns case, at least if it is legitimate to regard tense as the head of a tensed sentence, as has been suggested. Observe, however, that not all heads are case-assigners because (in most languages) N and A can not assign accusative case" [2, p.230]. In fact, we are interested in case assigners in both languages.

2. Case Assigners

2.1 Nominative Case Assigners

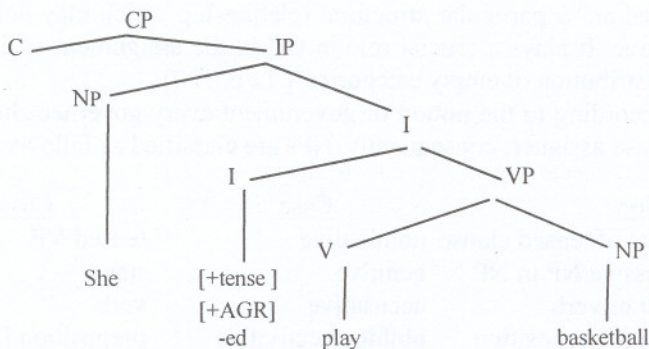
2.1.1. English Nominative Case Assigner

In English, the nominative case assigner is the INFL of finite clauses; "In finite clauses, INFL is [+ tense, + AGR]. In none-finite clauses, INFL has the feature specification [- tense, -AGR]. This enables us to associate the occurrence of nominative case with INFL of a finite clause, which is marked for [+ tense] and [+ AGR]. We leave it open here whether it is tense or AGR that is responsible for the nominative case" [4, p. 147]. This stand, in fact, is well documented in the literature; an example is the following:

(1) She played basketball.

which is assigned the following tree structure according to the framework adopted in [4] :

(2)



According to the notion of government in which the governor is I containing

[+AGR] and [+tense] and the relevant maximal projection is IP; then IP dominates both the I and the governed node [NP, IP]; she, thus assigned nominative case. This type of analysis is standard in the literature with slightly different versions of the notion of government, i.e., how it is formulated in syntactic terms.

2.1.2. Arabic Nominative Case Assigners

Arabic is a better example than English for the treatment of case assignment because it enjoys a rich morphological system that shows morphological cases quite clearly. We would like to stress two points before dealing with case assignment in Arabic.

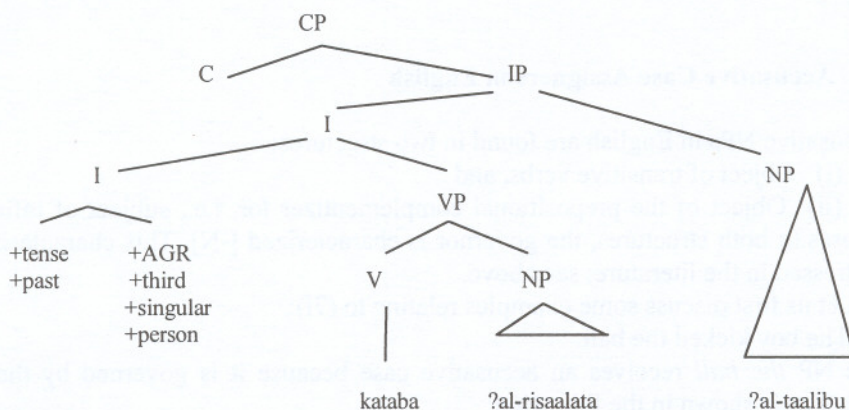
- (3) (i) Modern Standard Arabic enjoys a VOS word order. For a comprehensive syntactic analysis of this approach, see [5-7].
- (ii) Case assignment takes place at S-structure. We follow, in this, Chomsky: "We assume that case assignment takes place at S-structure [3, p. 94].

Nominative noun phrases in Arabic fall into two types of sentences: (a) nominal sentences, and (b) verbal ones. (For case assignment in both, see [7]. For our purpose now, it suffices to say that the subject of a finite clause in Arabic is nominative as in the following:

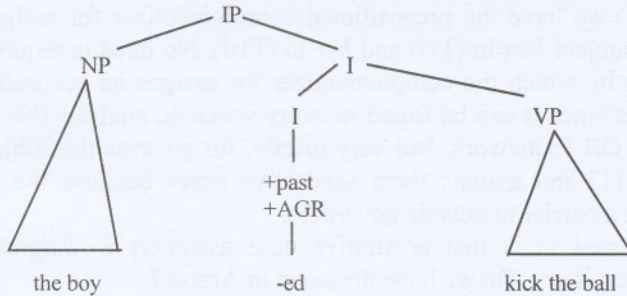
- (4) katab-a ?al-taalib-u ?al-risaalat-a
 write-past the student-nom the letter-acc
 the student wrote the letter.

The S-structure of (4) could be the following:

(5)



(9)

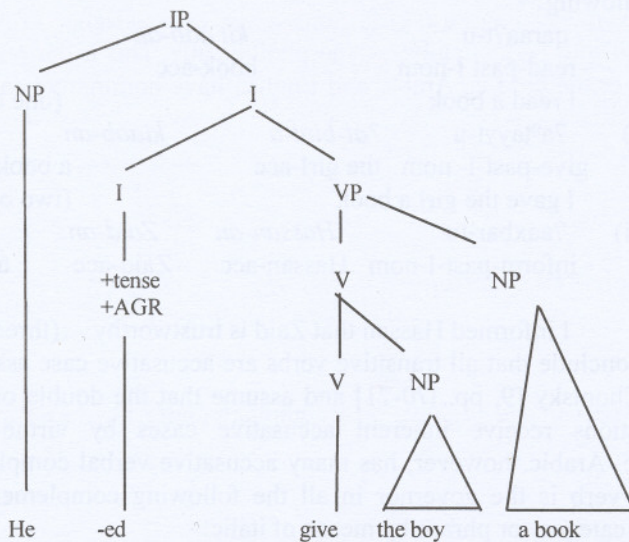


However we have a class of verbs in English that subcategorizes for two objects as in the following:

(10) He gave *the boy* a book.

In (10), both *the boy* and a *book* are assigned accusative cases. The NP *the boy* is assigned an accusative case through government and adjacency, whereas the NP *a book* receives an inherent accusative case by virtue of the projection principle. The projection principle can be stated very simply as: "lexical information is syntactically represented" [4, p. 177] for more explanation. (10) can be given the following D-S- and LE structure:

(11)



Let us give some examples relating to (7ii):

(11) (i) *For him* to read the book is surprising

beat-past-he-nom-he-acc beating-acc

He *beat* him *violently, strongly, fiercely*

The italics are the relevant categories.

- (ii) *Adverbs of time and place* (?al-maf^uul fiih)

labith-tu °inda-hum sanat-an kaamilat-an

stay-past-I-nom with-them-acc year-acc whole-acc-a

I *stayed* with them *a whole year* [10,p. 393]

- (iii) *The object of result* (?al-maf^u uul lahu) (to express aim or result)

qum-tu ?ihtraam-an la-hu-

stand-past-I-nom honour-acc to-he-obli

I *stood up* to *honour* him(in honour of him) [10,p. 394]

- (iv) ?al-Haal: "This is a peculiarly Arabic construction which is used to describe the condition or circumstance obtaining at the time when the action of the main verb takes place" [10,p.394].

daxala ?al-masijida waaqifa-an

enter-past-he-nom the mosque-acc standing-acc

He *entered* the mosque *standing*.

- (v) ?al-tamyyiiz, with the meaning of "in regard to"

Ahmad-u ?akthar-u °ilm-an min

Zaid-in

Ahmad-nom more than-nom *knowledge-acc* from Zaid-obli

Ahmad is greater in knowledge than Zaid.

- (vi) *The comitative object* (?al-maf^uul ma°ahu) , "An accusative NP preceded by wa/and denoting concomitance which itself is preceded by sentence containing a verb or its equivalent. [8,p. 256]

Sirtu wa-?al-bahr-a

Walk-past-I-nom and the sea-acc

I *walked along the seafront*.

We assume that the verb is the case assigner in all the sentences in (13). Arabic, however, has some other accusative case assigners which cannot be classified as pure verbs on syntactic, semantic or even morphological bases. We divide them into two groups: the group of particles and the [+N,+V] lexical items

2.3.2. The Group of Particles

This group includes the following:

- (14) (i) ?inna (and its type of other particles, e.g., ka?inna, laakinna etc)

?inna ?al-kitaab-a maqruu?-un

truly the book-acc readable-nom

(truly) *the book* is readable.

- (ii) laa (not) "in the construction of لا لنفي الجنس, that is after the لا which

denies absolutely the class or species in the place or circumstances defined in the sentence (Generic *laa*). This accusative has no nunation, e.g:

laa rajula fii ?al-bayyit-i
 not man-acc in the house-obl
 there is *not a man* in the house. [10,p. 396]

(iii) *The NP after ?illaa (except)*

qaam-a ?al-jamii-u ?illa ?al-malika
 stand-past the all-nom except the king-acc
 all stood *except the king*

The occurrence of the accusative NP in (I 4iii) is conditioned by some rules which are not relevant to our discussion; the interested reader may refer to [10, pp. 448-49].

(iv) When *the NP after the vocative particle ʔ is defined by a genitive:*

yaa ?aamiir-a ?al-mu?miniin-a
 O prince-acc the believers-gen
O prince of the believers [10, p. 397]

(v) We have a group of particles that share similar syntactic properties including accusative case assignment. This group include: *maa, laa, laata, ?in*, e.g:

(a) *maa Ahmad-u qaa?im-an*
 not Ahmad-nom standing-acc
 Ahmad is not standing

(b) *laa khayyir-u daa?i°-an*
 not good deed-nom wasted-acc
No good deed is wasted (lost)

(c) *?in ?al-khayyir-u daa?i°-an*
 the good deed-nom wasted-acc
 The good deed is not lost (wasted) [8, pp. 129-35]

We notice that in all the examples in (14) we have a particle that assigns an accusative case to an adjacent NP at S-structure or perhaps at D-structure.

2.3.3. The [+N,+V] Lexical items

This group includes the following:

(15) (i) *?al-masdar المصدر (the participle)*

qiraa?at-u ?al-kitaab-I talab-an li-?al-najaahi-i ?amr-un mufiid-un
 reading- nom the book-gen for the succes-acc something-nom
 useful-nom Reading the book for success is (something) useful.

(ii) ?ismu?al-fa^oaili (active participle) اسم الفاعل

Mohammad-un ° aamil-un talab-an li-?almaal-i
 Mohammad-nom working-nom for-acc to wealth-obli
 Mohammad is working for wealth (to get wealth)

(iii) ?ismu ?al-maf^ouul (اسم المفعول)

?aax-ii muhtaram-un ?ikraam-an li-?aab-ii
 brother-nom-my-gen respected-nom in respect-acc of father-obli-my-
 gen My brother is respected for (the sake) of my father

(iv) ?ismu ?al-f^oili (اسم الفعل):

sahin ?ijlaal-an li-?alqur?aan-i
 be silent in respect-acc of the Qura'n
 Be silent in respect of the Qura'n [8, p.238]

(v) SyyiaYu ?al-mubaalayaṭi صيغ المبالغة (exaggeration forms):

huwa miqdaam-un fii ?al-harbi talabaan li- ?alshahaadat-i
 he-nom courageous-nom in the war-obli for-acc for martyrdom- obli
 He fights bravely looking for martyrdom. [8.p.238]

(vi) ?al-sifatu ?al-mushbahati bi-?al? fi^oli الصفة المشبهة بالفعل (the

adjective which is like a verb):

raa?yyit-u ?al-khatiib-a ?al-balii/ a ?al-qawl-a
 see-past-I-nom the speaker-acc the eloquent-acc the speech-acc
 I saw the eloquent speaker.

All case assigners in this group are characterized [+N,+V]. This point should be taken into consideration when characterizing the accusative syntactic governors.

2.4 Genitive Case Assignment

2.4.1 Genitive Case Assignment in English

“Chomsky distinguishes two types of case assignment: structural case assignment, which depends solely on government, a configurational property, and inherent case assignment, which is dependent on two conditions: (i) theta role assignment and (ii) government. [10, p. 164].

Inherent case condition

If A is an inherent case assigner, then A assigns case to an NP if and only if A theta marks the [9, p. 195]

Genitive case is marked in three structures in English i.e.:

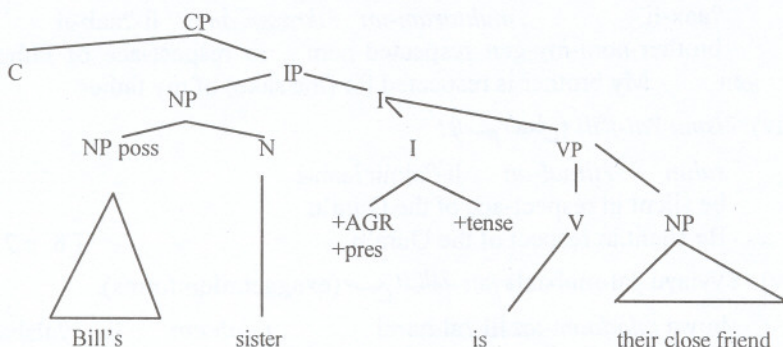
- (16) (i) Pre-nominal position
 (ii) Complement of some nouns
 (iii) Complement of some adjectives

A possible example representing (16i) is the following:

(17) Bill's sister is their close friend.

The D-S-and LF structure of (17) could be the following:

(18)



It is assumed that "there is an element *poss* in the specifier position of the NPs which is able to assign genitive to NP in that position . [3, p. 163].

As far as (16ii) and (16iii) are concerned, we can give the following examples:

- (19) (i) Mrs. Clinton is envious of Miss Monica Lewinsky
 (ii) Mrs. Clinton's envy of Miss Monica Lewinsky

According to Chomsky [9, p.194] and Haegeman [4, p.165] the genitive case assignment is carried as follows: " . . . nouns assign genitive case inherently and that rather than assigning structural case, as we implied previously, *of* is the overt reflex of an inherent genitive case. In English an inherent genitive in the complement of NP or AP is realized by means of a preposition *of* which assigns accusative case. There is thus a mismatch between the abstract genitive case assigned inherently by nouns, and the overt realization by means of a preposition which assigns accusative" [4, p. 165].

2.4.2 Genitive Case Assignment in Arabic

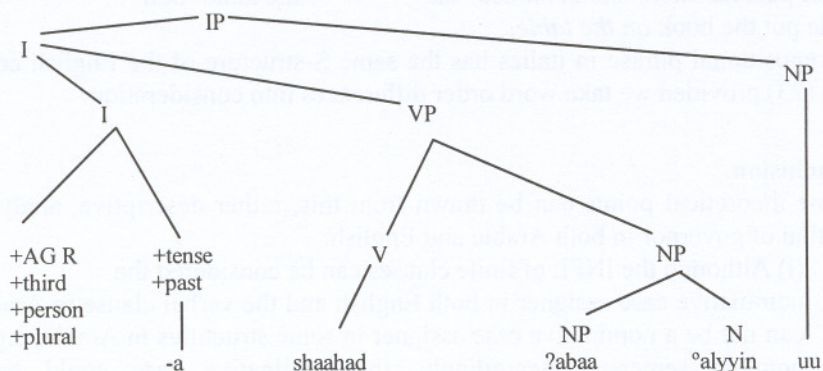
In fact Arabic has just one genitive structure which is equal to (16i) above:

- (22) Shaahad-uu ?aab-aa °alyy-in
 See-past-they-nom father-acc Ali-gen

They saw Ali's father.

The D-S-and LF structure of (22) is as follows:

(22)



3. Oblique Case

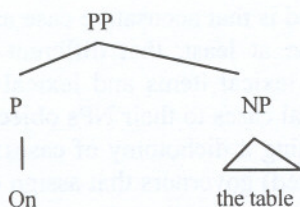
3.1 Oblique Case in English

It is assumed in English that all types of prepositions assign case to their object provided that they govern them. I prefer to call this case oblique rather than accusative to distinguish it from the accusative assigned by the transitive verbs. Another reason is that the oblique case ending in Arabic is quite different from the accusative ending morphologically.

(22) He put the book *on the table*

In (22) the preposition *on* governs the NP *the table* and assigns it an oblique case. The tree structure of the PP is as follows:

(23)



3.2. Oblique Case in Arabic

In fact, Arabic does not differ at all from English in the assignment of oblique case; an example is the following:

- (24) wada°-a ?al-kitaab-a °alaa ?al-taawilat-i
 put-past-he- nom the book-acc on the table -obli
 He put the book *on the table*.

The prepositional phrase in italics has the same S-structure of the English counter part in (23) provided we take word order differences into consideration.

4. Conclusion

Some theoretical points can be drawn from this, rather descriptive, analysis of the notion of governor in both Arabic and English:

- (25) (i) Although the INFL of finite clauses can be considered the nominative case assigner in both English and the verbal clause in Arabic, it can not be a nominative case assigner in some structures in Arabic, e.g., the nominal sentence. Accordingly, the nominative case could be the unmarked case in Arabic. If this assumption is correct, it has wide ranging effects on the analysis of case assignment in Arabic and possibly on English.
- (ii) Although the accusative case assigners in English are just the *transitive* verb and the prepositional complementizer *for*, Arabic has a large number of accusative case assigners including transitive verbs, some types of particles and even [+V,+N] lexical items. The question is why is this discrepancy between English and Arabic in this respect? We suggest also that verbs assign accusative case to their NPs or S complements rather than assuming two different cases: structural and inherent. This will be in harmony with the projection principle and the selection restrictions.
- (iii) Although a [+N] lexical governor can assign genitive case to its complement in English provided that some conditions are met, this feature can assign accusative case in Arabic if coupled with [+V].
- (iv) Genitive as well as oblique cases are assigned in similar if not identical ways in both Arabic and English

The important point this paper has revealed is that accusative case assigners cannot be transitive verbs only. It seems, to me at least, that different languages use different ways to assign cases including lexical items and lexical particles. And verbs should be allowed to assign structural cases to their NPs objects according to the projection principle rather than assuming a dichotomy of cases: structural and inherent. In fact Arabic uses unseen (deleted) governors that assign cases. This last type of governors is not discussed in this paper.

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مفهوم العامل في اللغة العربية القياسية واللغة الإنجليزية: وجهة نظر تقابلية

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المملكة العربية السعودية

ملخص البحث. يُعالج هذا البحث مفهوم العامل النحوي (التركيب) في اللغة العربية واللغة الإنجليزية. وبدقة أكبر، إنه يناقش معظم أنواع العامل اللفظي التي تَعين حالة إعرابية لمعومها. إلا أن البحث لا يتعامل مع المفاهيم المتعلقة بمجال العائق أو مفاهيم العمل المتعلقة بنظرية الربط والضبط. يغطي البحث مادة واسعة ومتشعبة، وبالتالي فإنه يضم معظم أنواع العامل اللفظي (المعجمي) في العربية التي تَعين حالة لمعومها بما في ذلك حالة الرفع والنصب والجر، بالإضافة بما يقابلها في الإنجليزية.