A Contrastive Study of Basic Sentence Patterns in English and Arabic

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1.   Introduction

A sentence is a complete unit of meaning. In speech, sentences may convey a meaning through intonation, gesture, facial expression, etc. Such devices are not available in written texts, so sentences have to be structured and punctuated. Whether spoken or written, certain sentences are irregular, i.e. not full sentences if they do not contain a finite verb:

(1)   **All right!**

(2)   **Want any help?**, (Alexander, 1997:2).

Sentences in both English and Arabic are classified into **simple**, **compound** and **complex**. Generally speaking, those containing of a single clause are simple sentences:

(3)   ضحك الطفل   **The child laughed.**

The combination of two or more co-ordinate clauses forms a compound sentence in which each clause remains independent:

(4)   حضرت الاجتماع وناقشت الموضوع **I attended the meeting and discussed the subject**.

The combination of two clauses, one of which is subordinate to the other, is called a complex sentence:

(5)   أذا جاء الشتاء هاجرت هذه الطيور الى الجنوب **When winter comes, these birds migrate to the south,** (Aziz, 1989:211-22).

Grammarians made no sharp distinction between a **sentence** and a **clause**. When the sentence has a finite verb, i.e. one clause, and is mainly composed of a subject and a predicate, it is called a simple sentence:

(6)   **He stayed there.**

 A clause is defined as "a unit that can be analyzed into the elements **(S)ubject**, **(V)erb**, **(O)bject**, **(C)omplement** and **(A)dverbial**", (Quirk et al., 1972:342).

The elements **S V O C A** are of clause structure rather than elements of sentence structure. Thus, a clause could quite often be a full sentence:

(7)   **I hurried home.**

2.   Sentence Patterns

Sentence patterning is a process of choice by which the speaker thinks of the meaning of a certain idea he intends to express and then chooses and arranges an appropriate pattern. Simple sentences, the domain of this study, are patterned with certain obligatory elements as to form basic patterns. Any discussion of such patterns depends on a clear understanding of many terms such as: **transitive** and **intransitive** verbs **object** and **complement**. A transitive verb (**Tr**) is usually followed by one or two objects and, in some cases, allows an object complement (**Co**) to follow the first object:

(8)   We **considered** (Tr) **him** (O) **a hero** (Co).

Verbs that do not allow objects are termed intransitive (**In**). Some intransitive verbs can be followed by a **subject complement** (**Cs**) or Adverbial (**A**). Such verbs are called intensive (**Int**) and all other verbs are **extensive** (**Ext**):

(9)   He **is** (Int) **fine** (Cs) /**outside** (A).

The object can either be **direct** (**Od**) or **indirect** (**Oi**). The direct object refers to a person or thing affected by the action of the verb and must always be present if an indirect object is present in the sentence. The indirect object precedes the direct object and refers to a person who receives the action; loosely termed as recipient:

(10)   He gave **her** (Oi) **a book** (Od).

Complements are either nouns or adjectives. The two kinds of complement are illustrated in examples (8) and (9) above. The Object complement "hero" in (8) has a straightforward relation to the object "him"; both have the same referent. A similar relation exists between the subject complement and the subject in (9), (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973:16)It is worth mentioning that the order of elements in English, unlike Arabic, is relatively fixed in the sense that the grammatical functions are defined by position imposing constraints on the shuffling of word order.Muir (1972:97) argues that it is not the order of the elements in English that is fixed but that it is taken to be the most normal. He adds that we can regard this as neutral or unmarked and contrast other permitted sequences against the norm. On the other hand, the Arabic language in which the grammatical functions are marked inflectionally permits greater freedom in positioning of elements.

3.   The Structure of Simple Sentences in English

Simple sentences in English consist of the basic elements: **S V O C** and **A**. Each simple sentence has at least two obligatory elements: a **subject** (**S**) and a **predicate**, i.e. a **verb** (**V**) or **verb phrase** (**VP**):

(11)   **A. John** (S) **arrived**. (V)

                                    B. He (S) **will arrive**. (VP)

The subject can be a one-word noun or pronoun as in (11) or a sequence of several words as in:

(12)   **What you did** is good.   (noun clause)
(13)   **To tell the truth** is better for you.   (to-infinitive phrase)
(14)   **Telling the truth** is better for you.   (present participle phrase)
(15)   **In the morning** is suitable.   (prepositional phrase)
(16)   **The rich** must help the poor.   (an adjective with an article)
(17)   **All the active workers in the factory** will be rewarded. (noun phrase)

The predicate may comprise the verb alone as in (11.A) above or the verb and one or more of the basic elements mentioned before as in (8), (9) and (10).

3.1   The Basic Sentence Patterns in English

The English normal word order S V O C A can be distributed among the basic sentences presented by some grammarians like: Roberts (1956:72-75), Stageberg (1981:197-214) and Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:191-200).

1.   **Roberts' Model (1956)**

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Roberts (1956:72-5) gives four basic patterns[1] depending on the form of the main sentence elements:

P1: NOUN   VERB   **Birds sings**
P2: NOUN   VERB   ADJECTIVE   **Birds are beautiful**
P3: NOUN   LINKING   VERB   NOUN   **Canaries are birds**
P4: NOUN   VERB   NOUN   **Canaries eat worms**

All the four patterns can be expanded and modified in many ways:

18.   Birds sing **beautifully**.   (P1)
19.   **The** birds are **sometimes** beautiful.   (P2)
20.   **Those** canaries are **my** birds.   (P3)
21.   **My** canaries ate **some** worms.   (P4)

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(1)   The abbreviation (P) will be used to stand for "pattern" and (Ps) for "patterns".

Verbs used in both (Ps 2 and 3) are linking verbs, though not mentioned in (P2). Roberts states that two groups of linking verbs are the only ones that can be used in (P3). They include: Be (is, am, are, was, were) and (seem, appear, look, taste, feel, grow, etc.Using liking verbs in (P3) makes both nouns have the same referent and makes (P3) different from (P4), in which the verb is one like: (eat, see, assist, like, etc) and hence, the two nouns have different referents.It is worth noting that Roberts' model does not account for a basic pattern where the verb is transitive having two obligatory objects or an object followed by an object complement as in Stageberg's model (Ps 8 and 9) below. Furthermore, Roberts' model gives no basic pattern where the verb is a (be) form followed by an obligatory adverbial as in (P2) below.

2. Stageberg's Model (1981)

Nine basic patterns are given by Stageberg (1981:197-214):

P 1   N be Aj   **John is busy**
P 2   N be Av   **The girl is outside**
P 3   N¹ be N¹   **She is a student**
P 4   N LV Aj   **She looks young**
P 5   N¹ LV N¹   **My brother becomes a doctor**
P 6   N In V (=intransitive verb)   **Girls smile**
P 7   N¹ Tr V (= transitive verb) N²   **The girl bought a dress**
P 8   N¹ Tr V N² N³   **My mother bought him a car**
P 9   N¹ Tr V N² plus:

a) N²   **They chose her a model)**
b) Aj   **They considered her brilliant)**
c) Pronoun   **I thought the caller you)**
d) A (place)   **We supposed him upstairs)**
e) V present participle   **I imagined her eating)**
f) V past participle   **I believed him seated)**
g) Prep. phrase   **We considered her in the way)**
h) Inf. phrase (to be)   **We thought him to be fine)**

In his model, Stageberg refers to sentence elements by their forms, i.e. **N** for **noun**, **V** for **verb**, **Aj** for **adjective**, **Av** for **adverb** and so on. When more than one noun is included in the pattern, superscripts are used to show that they have the same referent as in (P3) or different referents as in (P7).Stageberg assigns "**grammatical meaning**" to sentences, a meaning added to the sentences by virtue of a particular position in a particular pattern. In all the patterns, the subject is usually in the first position which is occupied by an N. The grammatical meaning of the subject differs in each pattern:

"the performer of the action" in (Ps 6, 7, 8, 9),
"that which is described", in (Ps 1, 4),
"that about which an assertion is made" in (P2) and
"that which is identified" in (Ps 3,5).

Similarly, the verb or predicator has different grammatical meanings:
"may be described as" in (Ps 1, 4),
"that which asserts an action or state" in (Ps 2, 6, 7, 8, 9) and
"be identified or classified as" in (Ps 3, 5).

In the first three patterns, the verb is a (be) form followed by either an adjective functioning as a Cs, to which the grammatical meaning of "that which identifies the subject is assigned" as in (P1), or an adverb as in (P2) or a second N^1 functions as a Cs as in (P3).

Stageberg distinguishes certain verbs as (become, appear, feel, grow, seem, remain, continue, look, stay and make) referring to them as "linking verbs" since they link between the N (subject) and the Aj (subject complement) in (P4) and between N^1 (subject) and the second N^1 (Cs) in (P5). A distinction is also drawn between intransitive verbs in (P6) and transitive verbs in (Ps 7, 8, 9). Intransitive verbs can be modified by adverbs but not by nouns or pronouns as in:

(22)   They finished (In V) **late** (A).   (P6)
(23)   They finished (Tr V) the **game** (N).   (P7)

In (Ps 7, 8 and 9), the transitive verb is followed by N^2 which has a different referent from N^1 and hence it functions as the (Od). The grammatical meaning of this object is "undergoer of the action" or "that affected by the verb". (P8) consists of another noun, i.e. N^3 which functions as a second object (**Oi**) having the grammatical meaning of "beneficiary of the action of the verb". The Oi can be replaced by a **prepositional phrase** with (to, for, etc), as in:

(24)   The teacher gave **me** (Oi) this book (Od) ↔ The teacher gave this book **to me**.

Both N^2 (Oi) and N^3 (Od) can be replaced by pronouns when the Od is placed first; thus sentence (24) can be:

(25)   The teacher gave **it** (Od) to **me** (Oi).

But not:* The teacher gave **me it**.

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Passive transformation is possible whenever the verb is transitive. In (P8), the first or the second object can be made the subject of the passive sentence. The example above can be:

(26) **I** was given this book.
(27) **This book** was given to me.

In addition to N¹ (subject) and N² (Od), (P9) consists of another element that can be one of the eight elements motioned above, i.e. N², Aj, pronoun, Av (place), V present participle, V past participle, Prep. phrase or Inf. phrase (to be). The second N² has the same referent as N² the (Od), hence it functions as (Co) having the grammatical meaning of "completer of the Od".

In this pattern, a very small group of verbs can be used as (think, consider, regard, imagine, suppose, choose, etc).

3. Quirk's Model (1973)

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:191-200) suggest a model in which seven patterns are presented:

P1: S V C   **Mary is kind/ a nurse**
  S V_{intens} Cs

P2: S V A   **Mary is here /in the house**
  (S V_{intens} $A_{(place}$

P3: S V   **The child was laughing**
  S $V_{intrans}$

P4: S V O   **She caught the ball**
  S $V_{monotrans}$ Od

P5: S V O C   **We proved him wrong/a fool**
  S $V_{complex\ trans}$ Od   Co

P6: S V O A   **I put the plate on the table**
  (S $V_{complex\ trans}$ Od $A_{(place}$

P7: S V O O   **She gave me a present**
  S $V_{ditrans}$ Oi   Od

Unlike Stageberg, Quirk and Greenbaum refer to sentence elements by their functions, i.e. (S) for a noun functions as "subject", (O) for a noun functions as "object" and so on. Verbs are categorized into "intensive" and "extensive". When the latter are not followed by objects, they are called "intransitives".

Transitive verbs are categorized according to what follows the verb into: **monotransitive** (followed by one object), **ditransitive** (followed by Oi and Od) and **complex transitive** verbs (followed by Od plus Co or A).

In certain cases, the Od or Co may be considered as optional:

(28) He is eating ─ He is eating an apple. (P4)
(29) He made her career ─ He made her career a success. (P5)
(30)   He is teaching ─ He is teaching English. (P4);
          (He is teaching the boys English. (P7

The verbs "eat" in (28) and "teach" in (30) are transformed from the transitive to the intransitive category.The last position in (P1) and (P4) is occupied by adverbials of place. This position can also be occupied by other adverbs of time and manner:

(31)   The exam will be **tomorrow**.   (A time)
(32)   We treated him **kindly**.   (A manner)

But only adverbs of place can go with all subjects. That is why (A place) is used in (P2) and (P6).

It is to be noted that most of the patterns can be expanded by optional adverbials. Examples are:

(33)   **(Sometimes)** she sings **(beautifully).** (P3)
(34)   She **(kindly)** sent us some presents.   (P7)

English prefers to avoid the **SV pattern,** expanding it by optional adverbials as in (33) or using equivalent patterns as alternatives:

(35)   The baby is sleeping. (SV) ↔ The baby is asleep. (S V Cs)

Quirk and Greenbaum term the relation between the S and Cs as in (P1) and the O and Co as in (P5) as an "intensive relation". They also assign **semantic functions** to the subject stating that it can be:

1. Agentive (performer of the action),
2. Instrumental (inanimate subject),
3. Affected (with intransitive and intensive verbs),
4. Recipient (with stative verbs as **have**, **see**, **possess**, etc.).

The following examples show these functions respectively:

(36)   **John** opened the door.
(37)   **The key** opened the door.
(38)   **John** fell down/ The pencil was on the table.
(39)   **He** has a new car.

The subject may express place "**locative**", time "**temporal**", or an event "**eventive**" with abstract nouns permitting intensive complementation with adverbials:

(40)   **The bus** holds many people.
(41)   **Today** is a holy day.
(42)   **The concert** is next week

4.   The Structure of Simple Sentences in Arabic

In Arabic, simple sentences are classified into **verbal** جملة فعلية and non-verbal. A non-verbal sentence is called **nominal** جملة اسمية since it begins with a noun functioning as "subject". The verb in verbal sentences usually precedes the subject but when it follows the subject, the sentence turns into a nominal one. The difference between a verbal and nominal sentence is that the former relates an act or event, whereas the latter gives a description of a person or thing:

(43)   جاء زيد   (Lit. came Zayd).
(44)   زيد جاء   Zayd came, (Wright, 1967:251-2).

Like English, simple sentences in Arabic have the basic elements: **V S O C A**.

The subject and predicate are obligatory parts followed by one or more of the other elements.A subject as defined by Wright (Ibid) is that upon which the attribute leans, or by which it is supported; a predicate is that which is supported by the "subject", the attribute. The former is termed by native grammarians as المسند إليه; the latter as المسند and the act of leaning one thing against another is that of attribution الإسناد.

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In verbal sentences, the verb is either intransitive "فعل لازم" or transitive "فعل متعدي". Transitive verbs are classified into:

(a) those that pass on (to an object) through themselves الأفعال المتعدية بأنفسها like بلغ (**to reach, to arrive**) :

(45) بلغ الناس الخبر The news reached people.

(b) those that pass on (to an object) through something else than themselves, i.e. through a preposition الأفعال المتعدية بغيرها like قدر(**to have power**, **to be able**) :

(46) قدر زيد على شيء Zayd was able to do something

Another classification of transitive verbs puts them into:

1. **Verbs of the heart**الأفعال القلبية which are subgrouped into:

(a) **Verbs of certainty** أفعال اليقين as رأى (**to see**, **know**, **think**); علم (**to know**); وجد (**to find**, **perceive**); درى (**to know**); تعلم (**to learn**, **know**) and جعل (**to believe**, **think**).

(b) **Verbs of doubt or preponderance**أفعال الشك أو الرجحان as خال (**to think**, **imagine**); ظن (**to think**, **believe**); حسب (**to think**, **suppose**, **reckon**); زعم (**to think, deem**); عد (**to count**, **reckon**); حجا (**to think**, **opine**) and هب (**to suppose**, **think**).

2. **Verbs of transformation** include: صير (**to make**); جعل (**to make**); إتخذ (**to take**); ترك (**to leave**); وهب (**to give**) and رد (**to turn**), (Wright, ibid; Hassan, 1975: 10).

The Arabic language is generally described as having a relatively free order in the sense that certain elements can be transposed from their normal slots in the sentence. Arab grammarians term this linguistic phenomenon as fronting **and deferment** التقديم والتأخير. Verbal and nominal sentences are affected by this process; thus sentences (43) and (44) are semantically identical but they are syntactically different.

The subject of a nominal sentence is termed as **inchoative** المبتدأ and the predicate as **enunciative** الخبر. They are also called the **topic** and **comment**. Wright states that since nominal sentences have no verbs, they are considered as timeless.

The topic is, in most cases, definite as in (47). When indefinite, it may be preceded by prepositional phrases as in (48) or adverbials as in (49) or followed by adjectives as in (50):

(47) الطفل ذكي The child is clever.

(48) في الحديقة زهور كثيرة In the garden, there are many flowers.

(49) بين الأشجار بئر Among the trees, there is a well.

(50) عمل طيب يفيدك A good deed benefits you.

Both sentences (48) and (49) have the topic deferred and the comment fronted.
The topic can also be a pronoun, demonstrative pronoun or infinitival phrase as the following examples show respectively:

(51) أنت شجاع You are brave.

(52) هذا رجل This is a man.

(53) إن تصوموا خير لكم It is good for you to fast.

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The comment, on the other hand, is expressed by an indefinite noun as in (52)
or an adjective as in (51). It can also be a phrase (prepositional or adverbial) as in (48)
and (49) and, in some cases, a nominal or verbal phrase can function as a comment:

(54) الحديقة **أزهارها كثيرة**   The garden has many flowers.
(55) العلم **يفيد الجميع**   Science benefits all people, (Hassan, 1975:400; Ibn Aqeel,
1964:205-18).

The Basic Sentence Patterns in Arabic

To set a model of sentence patterns in Arabic is a complicated matter. There is a
great deal of overlapping between one pattern and another. Furthermore, the process
of "fronting and deferment" shows a relative freedom of word order in the Arabic
structure.

Quirk and Greenbaum's model is used to set an equivalent model of basic
sentence patterns in Arabic since Arabic is a parsing language depending on the
function of elements.

Aziz (1989:198) suggests eight basic patterns in Arabic:

Nominal Patterns:

P1: S C	الجندي شجاع	**The soldier is brave.**
P2: S A	الرجل في الدار	**The man is in the house.**

Verbal Patterns:

P3: V S A	يأتي علي عند المساء	**Ali comes in the evening.**
P4: V S	حضر المعلم	**The teacher came.**
P5: V S O	كسر زيد النافذة	**Zayd has broken the window.**
P6: V S O C	ظن الرجل زيدا صادقا	**The man thought Zayd truthful.**
P7: V S O O	أعطى المعلم التلميذ جائزة	**The teacher gave the pupil a prize.**
P8: V S O O O	أبلغ علي الناس زيدا صادقا	**Ali has informed people that Zayd was truthful.**

Apart from the patterns given by Aziz (Ibid), the Arabic structure contains
other verbal patterns that should be accounted for here:

P9: V S C	يعمل الطبيب مخلصا	The doctor works faithfully.
P10: V S O A	أعتقد الرجل زيدا في الدار	The man thought Zayd in the house.

The first two patterns are nominal consisting of a topic and a verb whose
function as comment. (See 2.3)
All other patterns are verbal. The verb in (Ps 3, 4, and 9) is intransitive and all
other verbal patterns have transitive verbs. The adverbial is an obligatory element in
(P3); whereas it is optional in (P4):

(56) حضر المعلم (إلى المدرسة)   The teacher came (to school).

There are a number of objects in Arabic that can be placed in the objective case to realize the element (O) in some of the above patterns. One of them is the ordinary object in (P5) similar to that of English in (P4). Others are: **the object of specification** التمييز, **the cognate object** المفعول المطلق, **the circumstantial object** الحال, and **the** المفعول معه **the object of accompaniment** , **the object of purpose** المفعول لأجله **and the** المفعول فيه **object of exception** الاستثناء. Furthermore, there is **the object accompaniment** which is equivalent to certain adverbials in English.As in English, passive transformation is possible in Arabic only when the ordinary object is present:

(57) كتب محمد الرسالة   Mohammed has written the letter.

كتبت الرسالة   The letter has been written.

In sentences containing two objects as in (P7), unlike English, only one passive transformation is possible in which the object referring to person becomes the subject of the passive sentence:

(58) أعطى علي زيدا كتابا   Ali gave Zayd a book.

أعطي زيدا كتابا   Zayd was given a book.

The following passive sentence is not permitted in Arabic unless a preposition is used before the second object.

(59) *أعطي كتاب زيد   A book was given to Zayd.

أعطي كتاب إلى زيد

Some transitive verbs can take three objects[1]. Such verbs belong to "the verbs of the heart" mentioned in (2.3). The third object is either an adjective as in (P8) or a noun as in:

(60) أعلمتك الإحسان خيرا   I told you that charity is good.

In fact, the second and third objects are originally a topic and comment:

الإحسان خير

Hassan (1975: 55-8) argues that these verbs are namely أعلم (of علم) "**to let**", **know** أرى (of رأى), "**to make think**, **know**, **see**", أخبر (of خبر)" and "**to make know**", أبلغ (of بلغ) "**to inform**".

He adds that they take a third object only when they are preceded by what is termed **hamzah of transitiveness** همزة التعدية represented by the Arabic letter أ before verbs. On the other hand, native grammarians argue that

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1. Aziz (1989:198) states that the third object is considered as (Co) since it has the same referent as the second object. Thus, the pattern is set as: V S O O C.

all the verbs of the heart should be treated analogically by adding the "hamzah" before them.

In (P9), the verb is followed by an adjective functioning as (Cs) having the same referent as the (S). This (Cs) is termed by Arab grammarians as circumstantial accusative حال. When the (Cs) is a noun, it is termed the **object of specification** تمييز:

(61) يعمل الرجل حارسا **.** The man is a guard.

5.   **Comparison between the Basic Patterns in English and Arabic**

(a)   The linguistic phenomenon of "fronting and deferment" in Arabic allows freedom of word order in a clause. On the other hand, English clauses follow a certain order in the arrangement of the elements.

(b)   In both English and Arabic, the two elements: "subject" and "predicate" are obligatory. The minimal clause in English is (S V), whereas in Arabic, they are three: (V S), (S C) and (S A).

(c)   All basic patterns in English are verbal in which the verb is intensive as in (P1, P2) or intransitive (P3) or transitive (Ps 4, 5, 6 and 7). In Arabic, two patterns are nominal: (Ps 1 and 2); all others are verbal in which either intransitive or transitive verbs are used.

(d)   Apart from the two nominal patterns in Arabic, the other seven patterns have their English equivalents given in Quirk and Greenbaum's model. The Arabic pattern (V S O O O) has no equivalent in English. The transitive verb that takes a third object is expressed by a complex clause, i.e. "that clause". Thus, أعلمتك الإحسان خيرا is equivalent to "I told you **that charity is good**".

(e)   In both languages, the passive transformation process can be made with transitive verbs. Unlike English, only the object referring to person can be the subject of a passive sentence in Arabic containing a ditransitive verb. Furthermore, both languages allow a preposition before the (Oi).

(f)   The objective case in Arabic is expressed by some objects: "the object of specification" التمييز; "the cognate object" المفعول المطلق; "the circumstantial accusative" الحال; etc. In English, adverbial clauses are the equivalents of some of these objects.

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