

# Arabic Versus English Ergative Verbs<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

The analysis of ergative verbs in English and many other languages has been receiving much attention in linguistic studies. Nothing has been mentioned about the existence of ergative verbs in Arabic and generally it is a neglected topic. The dominant claim is that Arabic, as a highly inflected language, lacks ergative verbs. The aim of this paper is to show that Arabic, like English and many other languages, does have ergative verbs. This argument will be supported by providing many examples and comparing Arabic ergative verbs with their English counterparts. After careful inspection of the syntactic and semantic behavior of certain verbs, it reveals that Arabic contains ergative verbs and there are many significant differences between these verbs and intransitive verbs.

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<sup>2</sup>– In Arabic, the term '*laazim*' is used for intransitive verbs, '*muta9adii*' for transitive and '*muta9adii bimaf9ulayn*' for ditransitive and complex transitive verbs.

## -Introduction

Syntactically, verbs are classified according to the number of arguments. Accordingly, we have intransitive verbs (which select one argument), transitive (which select two arguments), ditransitive (which select three arguments) and complex transitive (which select two arguments and a subject or object complement).<sup>2</sup> For example,

English

1- a-Bill slept.

b-Bill wrote a book.

c-Bill gave her a book.

d- She made him crazy.

Arabic

2- a- naama alwalad-u.

Slept-he the-boy-NOM

“The boy slept.”

b-kataba alwalad-u qisat-an

wrote-he the-boy-NOM story-ACC

“The boy wrote a story.”

c- a9taa alwalad-u albint-a kitaab-an.

Gave-he the-boy-NOM the-girl-ACC book-ACC

“The boy gave the girl a book.”

d- ja9altu-hu majnoon-an

made-I-him crazy

“I made him crazy.”

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In the above examples, the verbs in the sentences in (a) are intransitive, in (b) transitive, in (c) ditransitive and in (d) complex transitive verbs. The verbs in the above sentences could have the following schemata:

- 3- a- slept, naama, v, NP1  
 b- wrote, kataba, v NP1 NP2  
 c- gave, a9taa, vNp1 NP2 NP3  
 d- made, ja9ala, v, NP1 NP2 Co

So, the verb which selects one argument (as a subject) is called intransitive verb. However, there are many types of intransitive or one-argument verbs. Perlmutter (1978) (see also Burzio, 1981) argues, in his unaccusative hypothesis, that there are two distinct types of intransitive or one-argument verbs. The first one is called ‘unergative’ verbs, which takes a true subject (the subject is generated in spec position in the D-structure, e.g. ‘the boy died.’). The second type is called ‘ergative’ and/or ‘unaccusative’ verbs, which does not take a true subject (the subject is base generated in object position in the D-structure, e.g. ‘the door opened.’). The subject in the second type lacks this active participation in the action of the verb. (At this stage, I will avoid the debate about whether ergative verbs are unaccusative or not).

That is, In addition to transitive verbs, we have another type of verbs which select one argument. This type is called ‘unaccusative verbs’. An ‘unaccusative’ verb is a verb which lacks external argument, hence, cannot assign an accusative case mark according to Burzio’s generalization:

#### 4- Burzio’s generalization

a- A verb which lacks an external argument fails to assign an accusative case

(Burzio, 1986: 178-79)

b- A verb which fails to assign an accusative case fails to theta-mark an external argument (ibid., 185)

This principle can be best clarified by passive and raising verbs in English. For example:

- 5- a- The book was written.
- b- Bill seems to have left.

The first sentence is a passive sentence. The internal argument ‘the book’ becomes the external argument or what is called the structural subject. The D-structure and the surface structure of the sentence in (5a) can be represented respectively in (6a,b):

6- a- [ e [was] [ [written] [the book]]]  
           IP   I       VP   V       NP

b-[ the book i [was] [ [written] [ti]]]  
           IP           I       VP   V       NP

The passive verb lacks an external argument, therefore it is not able to assign an accusative case mark to its internal argument ‘the book’. According to case filter, any NP must have a case mark, thus, to receive a case mark, ‘the book’ moves from its place as internal argument to [spec, IP] to receive a case mark. This movement is called ‘obligatory movement’.

The verb in (5b) is known to be a ‘raising verb’ which is an unaccusative verb.

That is, the external argument ‘Bill’ is not the logical subject. The D-structure and the

S-structure of (5b) can be represented in (7a,b) respectively.

7- a- [ e [pres] [ [seem] [ Bill] [to] [ have left]]]]]  
           IP   I       VP   V       IP   I       VP

b- [ Bill i [pres] [ [seem] [ ti] [to] [ have left]]]]]

IP I VP V IP I VP

So, as can be noted from (7a), the verb ‘seem’ does not have external argument, hence, it does not assign an accusative case mark to its internal argument ‘Bill’. Accordingly, ‘Bill’ is raised up to the [spec, IP] position to receive a case mark.

### 0.1 Arabic Passive verbs

The Passive verbs in Arabic are unaccusative verbs. Consider the following examples:

8- a- *kataba* *alwalad-u* *addars-a*  
 wrote-he the boy-NOM the lesson-ACC  
 “the boy wrote the lesson”

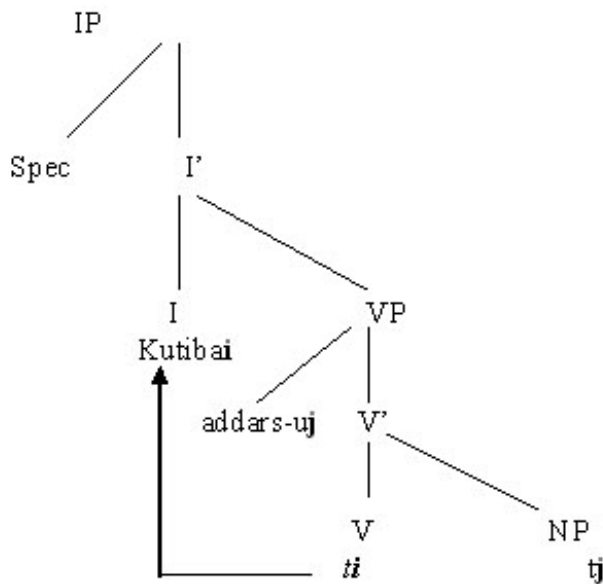
b- *kutiba* *addars-u*  
 wrote-PASS the lesson-NOM  
 “The lesson was written.”

*addars-a* (the lesson-ACC) in sentence (9a) is the internal argument of the verb *kataba* (wrote-he). It has an accusative case mark and a patient theta role. In (b), *addars-a* (the lesson-ACC) becomes the external argument. It has a nominative case mark and a patient theta role. That is, *addars-u* (the lesson-NOM) is not the logical subject, it is not base generated in this position, it is generated in VP complement position. But, the passive does not have an external argument, hence, according to Buroi’s generalization, it does not assign a case mark. So, the internal argument is raised to [spec, VP] or to [spec, IP] to receive a case mark. The D-structure for the Arabic passive sentence is as follows:

9- [ [past [ e [kutiba] [addars-u]]]]  
 IP I VP V NP

The following tree diagram clarifies the point.

10-



That is, the Arabic passive verbs, like their English counterparts, are unaccusative verbs.

### 1-Ergative verbs

It has been recognized that some verbs behave differently from the above categorizations. For instance, some verbs could appear in two distinct structures. In a certain structure they select one argument, whereas in another structure they select two arguments without any morphological modification. Moreover, the theta-role of the external argument of these verbs when used as intransitive is the same as the one assigned to the internal argument when these verbs are used as transitive.

These verbs are called ‘ergative verbs’<sup>3</sup>. "an ergative verb is a verb that can be either transitive or intransitive, and whose subject when intransitive corresponds to its direct object when transitive" (Wikipedia) The term ‘ergative’ is originally used to describe some languages like Basque in which the complement of the transitive verbs and the subject of intransitive verbs are assigned the same case mark (Radford, 1997: 259). However, this term is extended to describe some verbs with which the complement could appear as the subject of the same verb and bears the same theta-role. Baker (1988:46ff) tries to account for the assigning of the internal theta-role to the external arguments of ergative verbs by ‘the Uniformity of Theta Assignment Hypothesis’ (UTAH).

#### 11- UTAH:

Identical thematic relationships between items are represented by identical structural relationships between those items at the level of D-structure.

This means that each argument appears in the D-structure in a position in which it receives a theta role. The D-structure, according to Chomsky(1981:43f), is ‘a pure representation of thematically relevant grammatical function’. Accordingly, the external argument of certain intransitive verbs is the object or the internal argument at D-structure. Then, by ‘Move-Alpha’, it becomes the subject at S-structure.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>– Burzio uses the term ‘ergative’ whereas Perlmutter uses the term ‘unaccusative’ to describe the same phenomenon.

<sup>5</sup>-Some scholars (Sroik, 1992) argue that ergative verbs contain an empty agent (PRO) which is adjoined to the VP. Accordingly, there is an external theta role assigned to this implicit agent. To support this assumption, Stroik provides two arguments. The first one comes from subject-contained anaphor. For example,

A- Books about oneself never read poorly.

The anaphor must be bound inside its governing category (GC). Accordingly, there must be a non-overt NP to be the antecedent of the anaphor.

The second evidence to support this assumption (the syntactic presence of an external theta-role in ergative structure) comes from the presence of the prepositional phrase which has agentive features. In English it is possible to use for construction with an agentive interpretation. For example:

a-French books read easily for educated people.

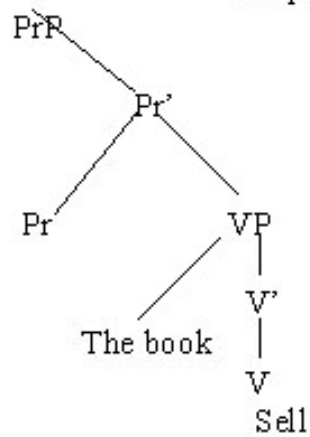
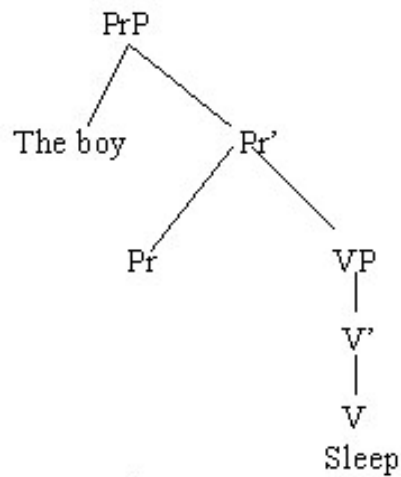
b-Latin texts do not translate easily for Bill.

Ergative verb is an unaccusative verb, it behaves like passive, which is unaccusative verb, but it differs from it in that there is no morphological or syntactic modification of the verb.

According to Bowers's predicate analysis, the difference between ergative

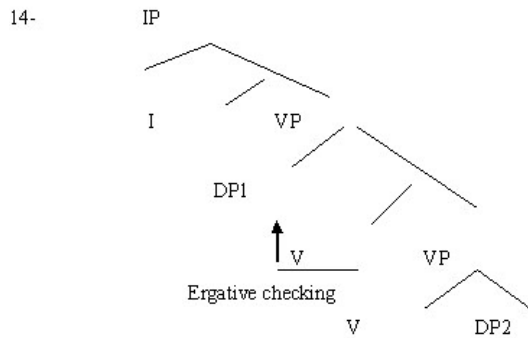
and intransitive can be clarified by the following tree diagrams:

12-

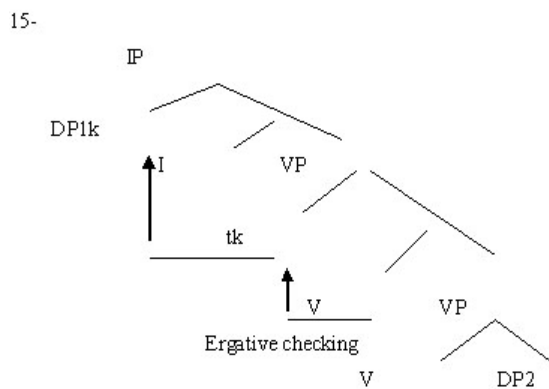




Applying the minimalist approach to ergativity, many scholars try to show the difference between ergative and intransitive verbs. Ura (2001), for example, taking the parameter which allows an element to have checking relation at its theta-position, assumes that the underlying subject of transitive verbs can enter into case checking without movement. Consider the following tree diagram:

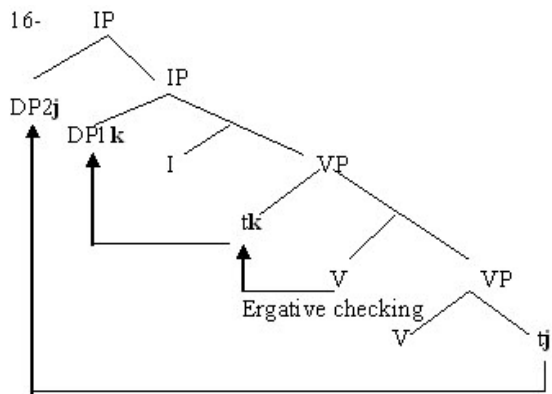


The spec of the IP must be filled<sup>6</sup>, consequently, DP1 moves to [spec, IP].



At the same time, DP2 is moved to check off the case features of the INFL, but, here, to an adjoined IP.

<sup>6</sup>see Ura (the cited reference) about the reasons for this assumption.



In some languages, the difference between ergative and intransitive is clear in the auxiliary selection. In Dutch, for instance, ergative verbs occur with the auxiliary verb *hebben* ‘have’ but not with *zijn* ‘be’, whereas other intransitive could occur *zijn* ‘be’ . For examples:

17- Dit vlees heeft/ \*zijn altijd gemakkelijk gesneden.

This meat has/ is always easily cut

“This meat has always cut.”

(Ackema and Schoorlemmer, 1995:188).

In Italian, the particle ‘ne’ can only co-occur with ergative verbs. For example:

18- a- Ne arrivano molti  
of-the arrive many

b- \*Ne telefonano molti  
of-the telephone many

(Burzio, 1986:20ff)

In Hindi/Ordu there is an ergative case assigned to the subject of many transitive verbs in finite perfective sentences. The direct object of these verbs receives either dative or nominative case mark. Consider the following examples;

19- a. **ram** gari(=ko) xArid-e-g-a  
 Ram.M.Sg.Nom car.F.Sg.Nom(=Acc) buy-3.Sg-Fut-M.Sg  
 ‘Ram will buy a/(the) car.’ Non-Perf→Nom

b. **ram=ne** gari(=ko) xArid-a  
 Ram.M.Sg=Erg car.F.Sg.Nom(=Acc) buy-Perf.M.Sg  
 ‘Ram has bought a/(the) car.’ Perf→Erg  
 (Butt,2005:6)

### 1.1 Arabic Ergative verbs

In Arabic, it is not difficult to realize that many verbs behave as ergative verbs although the existence of ergative verbs is ignored and it has been claimed that Arabic does not have ergative verbs. Consider the following examples:

20- a- **ghala**  
 the-water-NOM boil-past  
 “The water boiled.”

b- **ghala** alwalad-u almaa?-a.  
 boil-past the-boy-NOM the-water-ACC  
 “The boy boiled the water.”

21- a- **zaada** almaa?-u  
 increase-past the-water-NOM  
 “The water increased.”

b- **zaada** almaṭar-u almaa?-a  
 increase-past the rain-NOM the-water-ACC

“The rain increased the water.”

22- a- **shaa9a** al<sup>kh</sup>habar-u

spread-past the-news-NOM

“the news spread.”

Qb- **shaa9a** alwalad-u al<sup>kh</sup>habar-a.

spread-past the-boy-NOM the-news-NOM

“The boy spread the news.”

23- a- **bada?a** anniqaash-u

start-past the-discussion-NOM

“The discussion started.”

b- **bada?a** alwalad-u anniqaash-a

start-past the boy-NOM the-discussion-NOM

“The boy started the discussion.”

The verbs ‘*ghala* (boiled), *zaada* (increased), *shaa9a* (spread) and *bada?a* (started) (among other verbs such as *naqaṣa* (decreased), *faghara* (shouted loudly) and *?akhadhāa* (started)) are ergative verbs. They select one argument in (a) sentences and two arguments in (b) sentences, without any morphological modification in the form of any of these verbs.

## 1.2 Arabic and English Ergative verbs

Comparing the above Arabic ergative verbs with the English ergative verbs, we realize that they share the same syntactic and semantic behavior with their English counterparts. For example: they can select two arguments, as stated above, and they could have a passive structure, as in the following examples:

24- a- Bill sells books

b- The books sell easily.

c- The books are sold easily.

25- a- *alwald-u*            *yaghlii*            *alma?-a*  
           the-boy-NOM      boil-pres            the-water-ACC

“the boy boils (is boiling)the water.

b- *almaa?-u*            *yaghlii*  
       the water-nom      boil-pres

“water boils.”

c- *almaa?-u*            *yughlaa*  
           the water-nom      boil-pres-passive.

“The water is boiled.”

So, the verb *yaghlii* (boil-present) in (25a) selects two arguments; *alwalad-u* which is the external argument, it has a nominative case mark and an agentive theta-role, *alma?-a* (the water), on the other hand, is the internal argument. It has an accusative case mark and a patient theta-role. In (25b), the same verb *yaghlii* selects one external argument. If we look at this argument, we realize that it is the internal argument of the same verb in (25a). Then, instead of having an accusative case mark in (25a), it has a nominative case mark in (25b). However, the theta role of this argument is not changed. There is a great similarity between the sentence in (25b) and the one in (25c). In (25c) the verb selects one external argument which is its internal argument in (25a). As stated above, the case mark of this argument is nominative in (25c), whereas it is accusative in (25a). The main difference between the sentence in (25b) and the sentence in (25c) is that the former is active whereas the later is passive.<sup>7</sup> Comparing the Arabic verb *yaghlii* with the English verb ‘sell’,

<sup>7</sup>- Generally, it is referred to Arabic verbs by their paradigms, i.e. *fa9ala* (he did) for the past form, *yaf9alu* (he does/ is doing) for the present form and *sayaf9alu* (he will do) for the future form. Again, there must be a distinction between the “root”, “the stem”, and “the augmented” form. The root is the unpronounceable radicals which could be three or four consonants. The stem or the simple form, on the other hand, is the root in addition to the inserted vowels to express tense, agreement, etc. Whereas the augmented form is the form that results from the application of some linguistic processes such as doubling, deletion, affixation, etc. to express certain readings such as passivization *fu9ila*, causativization *fa99ala*, etc. For example:

Root: *k-t-b*      stem: *kataba* (he wrote)      augmented form: *kutiba* (be-written)

we realize that they syntactically behave in the same way. The verb ‘sell’ in (24a) selects two arguments, the external argument (Bill) has a nominative case mark and an agentive theta-role, and the internal argument (the book) has an accusative case mark and a patient theta-role. In (24b), the internal argument (the book) becomes the external argument having a nominative case mark. Almost, the same thing happened in (24c), the internal argument becomes the external and it has a nominative case mark instead of accusative. But in (25c) the sentence is passive. It must be noted here that in both cases (a, b) in both examples (25,24) the form of the verb has not been changed, i.e., it does not undergo any morphological modifications as in (25c & 24c). That is, we can say without any hesitation that Arabic has ergative verbs.

Accordingly, the above ergative verbs are not intransitive verbs since the subject is base generated in the VP complement position not specification. To put it in other words, ergative verbs have the D-structure in (26).

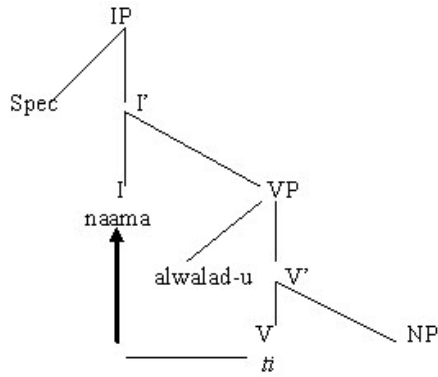
26- [ e [ [ [verb] [NP]]]]  
       IP I VP V NP

Intransitive verbs in Arabic are similar to the English intransitive verbs, as in these examples:

- 27- a- naama           alwalad-u  
       slept-he        the-boy-NOM  
       “The boy slept.”
- b- waṣala        alwalad-u  
       arrived-he     the-boy-NOM  
       “The boy arrived.”
- c- safara alwalad-u  
       traveled-he    the-boy-NOM  
       “The boy traveled.”

The above verbs ‘*naama* (slept-he), *waṣala* (arrived-he), *safara* (traveled-ed)’ are intransitive verbs, they select one argument which is, here, *alwalad-u* (the boy-NOM). It is the subject (spec- position). And it has a nominative case mark. They can be represented in the following tree diagram:

28-



It seems that there are many common things between ergative and intransitive verbs in Arabic. Each of them selects one argument, and this argument has a nominative case mark. However, there are many differences between them which could support the argument that syntactically and semantically they are not related to the same group.

The main important difference is that another argument can be added in the case of ergative verbs, while we cannot do that in the case of intransitive verbs:

29- a- *almaa?-u*                      *yaghlii*  
 the water-nom                      boil-pres  
 “Water boils.”

b- *alwald-u*                      *yaghlii*                      *alma?-a*  
 the-boy-NOM                      boil-pres                      the-water-ACC  
 “The boy boils (is boiling)the water.”

- 30- a- almaa?-u                      yaziidu                      fii albirkatii  
       the-water-nom increase-pres    in the-pond  
       “Water is increasing in the pond.”
- b- almaṭar-u                      yaziidu                      almaa?-a                      fii  
 albirkatii.  
       The rain-NOM                      increase-pres    the water-ACC    in the  
 pond.  
       “Rain increases water in the pond.”
- 31- a- naama                      alwalad-u  
       sleep-past                      the boy-nom.  
       “The boy slept.”
- \*b- alrajul-u                      namaa                      alwalada-a  
       the man-NOM    sleep-past    the boy-ACC.  
       \*“The man slept the boy.”
- 32- a- waṣala                      alwalad-u  
       arrive-past                      the boy-nom  
       “The boy arrived.”
- \*b- alrajul-u                      waṣala                      alwalada-a  
       the man-NOM    arrive-past    the boy-ACC.  
       \*“The man arrived the boy.”

The verbs in (29 and 30) can take one argument as in the sentences in (a) or two arguments as the sentences in (b) without any syntactic or morphological modification. The subjects in (a) sentences are the objects in (b) sentences, they have the same theta-role ‘patient’. However, there is a difference in case marking, They bear a nominative case in (a) and an



accusative in (b) sentences. Whereas the verbs in (31 and 32) cannot take another argument which is clear from the ungrammaticality of the examples in (b). Consequently, the subject of the transitive verb cannot syntactically or semantically behave as an object.

In English literature, the main diagnostic test which could be used to decide whether a certain verb is unaccusative or intransitive is the use of the expletive ‘there’<sup>8</sup>. ‘There’ occurs with the unaccusative verbs but not with intransitive verbs.

33- a- A ship sank

b- There sank a ship.

34- a- A boy slept.

b- \*there slept a boy.

The verb ‘sank’ is an unaccusative verb so it occurs with ‘there’. Whereas the verb ‘slept’ is intransitive, so it does not accept the expletive ‘there’. The reason is that ‘there’ is an expletive, and hence, it is a subject or a gap filler. This means that we can use it if the subject position is empty. That is, there is no NP base generated in that place (spec, IP) or (spec, VP) in the D-structure.

In Arabic, we can use the expletive *yuujad* or *hunaaka* (which can be roughly translated into ‘there’) in both cases. However, they affect the temporal meaning of the main verb. This can be seen in the following example:

35- a- yuujadu walad-un yanaamu (fii al-maktabi)

There-pres boy-NOM sleep-pres (in the office)

“There is a boy sleeps in the office.”

b- yuujadu maa?-un yaghlii

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8 It seems that the use of ‘there’ to distinguish between ergative and unergative verbs is not a solid test (for more discussion see Burzio (1986), Belletti (1988) and Haegman (1991))

there-pres water-NOM boils-pres

“there is a boiling water.”

Consequently, in the case of transitive (35a) the present form *yanaamu* (sleep-he) indicates habitual meaning not a going-on situation. The sentence is so strange without the use of the prepositional phrase *fii al-maktabi* (in the office). Instead of the present form, ‘?ism alfaa9il’ (the name of the doer or agent) form *naa?im* is generally used as we will see below. Sentence (36b), on the other hand, in which the ergative verb *yaghlii* (boil-pres) is used, expresses a going-on situation not a habitual one.

Still, we can apply many tests to show that ergative verbs behave differently from non-ergative verbs. The first one is the use of the adverb *maa-zaala* (still-he).

36- a- maa-zaala al-maa?-u yaghlii  
 still-it the-water-NOM boil-pres

“the water is still boiling.”

b- - maa-zaala al-maa?-u yaziidu  
 still-it the-water-NOM increase-pres

“the water is still increasing.”

37- a- maa-zaala al-walad-u yanaamu  
 (mubakiran)  
 still-he the-boy-NOM sleep-pres  
 (early)

“the boy still sleeps (early)”

b-- maa-zaala al-walad-u yusaafiru  
 (mubakiran)  
 still-he the-boy-NOM travel-pres  
 (early)

“the boy still travels (early).”

In the first two examples (37a,b), the ergative verbs *yaghlii* (boil) and *yaziidu* (increase) express a progressive meaning when they accompany the adverb *maa-zaala* (still-he). That is, the situation is going on at the moment of speech. Whereas, the verbs *yanaamu* (sleep) and *yusaafiru* (travel), which are unergative verbs, express habitual reading when accompanied by *maa-zaala*.

The second test which could be presented here is the form ‘*faa9il*’. This form is called ‘?ism alfaa9il’ (the name of the doer or agent). The form ‘*faa9il*’ of ergative verbs expresses perfective meaning (the occurrence of the situation). Whereas, if the verb is unergative, this form, *faa9il*, expresses an imperfective situation ( an incomplete or a going on situation).

38- a- al-maa?-u                    ghaali

the-water-NOM            boil

“water has already boiled.”

b- al-maa?-u                    zaa?id

the-water-NOM            increase

“water has already increased.”

39- a- al-walad-u                naa?im

the-boy-NOM sleep

“the boy is/has been sleeping.”

b- al-walad-u                    musaafir

the-boy-NOM travel

“the boy is/has been travelling.”

As indicated by the translation, the situations in (38) express a perfective (complete) meaning, whereas sentences in (39) indicate an imperfective (incomplete) meaning. That is, at the moment of speech ‘the boy is asleep’ and he is not here ‘he is in his travel’.

The significant difference which could be so helpful in the distinction between ergative and unergative verbs in Arabic is the use of *?isim al-maf9uul* (the name of the object or affected). In the case of ergativity, this form is generally, used freely. While in the case of unergativity, this form cannot be used without the use of a prepositional phrase.

40- a- maghli (has been boiled)

b- musha9 (has been spread)

c- muzaad (has been increased)

41- a-\* manuum-un

a’- manuum-un fihi

“it has been slept in”

b-\* musafar-un

b’- musafar-un li?ajlihi

“it has been travelled to”

c-\* muqaam-un

c’- muqaam-un 9alayhi

“It has been stood on”

Consequently, ergative verbs co-occur with the form *maf9uul* whereas unergative verbs cannot occur without the use of prepositional phrases *fihi* (in it), *li?ajlihi* (for it), and *9alayhi* (for it). The most important point, here, is that the subject in the case of ergative verbs can be used

with this form, whereas the subject in the case of the unergative verb cannot be used with this form.

42- almaa?-u maghli

the water-NOM boiled.

“the water has been boiled.”

43 \*alwalad-u musafarun

The boy-NOM traveled

In Arabic The form of the verb ‘*maf9uul*’ is used with the object not

the subject, which supports our argument that the subject in the case of ergative verbs in Arabic is not base generated in ‘spec position’, it is generated in ‘object position’. For example,

44- kataba al-walad-u kitaab-an

Wrote-he the-boy-NOM book-ACC

“The boy wrote a book.”

45- \*a- al-walad-u maktuubun

the-boy-NOM written (in the state of being written)

b- al-kitaab-u maktuubun.

The-book-NOM written (in the state of being written)

“The book is in the state of being written.”

“The book has already been written.”

*Alwaladu* (the boy) is the agent or the subject in (44) whereas *kitaaban* (a book) is the patient or the object. When we derive the form of *maf9uul* from the verb *kataba* (wrote-he), it does not occur with the agent *alwaladu* (the boy) as indicated by the ungrammaticality of the sentence

in (46a). Whereas it occurs with the object *kitaabun* (the book) as indicated by the grammaticality of the sentence in (46b),.

Again, it must be noted here that this form is inflected for the subject in the case of ergative verbs, i.e. *maghli* (boil-it (water)), whereas, this form when derived from unergative verbs is not inflected for the subject, i.e., *manuumu* does not mean (slept-he(boy)).

### **Conclusion:**

I have shown in the above discussion that the Arabic language exhibits ergative verbs. These verbs, as the ergative verbs in English, can occur as transitive or intransitive verbs. In the case of intransitive use, the subject or the external argument, unlike the external argument of intransitive verbs, receives the theta-role generally assigned to the object or internal argument. That is, it is not base generated in [spec, VP/ IP], it is generated in VP internal position. Also, I have shown that, by applying different augmented forms such as *faa9il* and *maf9uul*, there is a clear cut difference between ergative and intransitive verbs. The use of the augmented form *maf9uul* not *faa9il* with the subject of the ergative verb distinguishes it from the subject of other types of verbs. Moreover, the form *maf9uul* is associated with the object or, to be more accurate, with the patient or recipient of the situation.

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