

Open Learning
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4



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Let's study!
English

Good afternoon!

Today, I am going to talk about similarities and differences between Arabic and English in terms of syntax.

In syntax, we have sentence elements, sentence types, and word order. Today, I will start with sentence elements.

Syntax: Sentence Elements

What do I mean by sentence elements?

The English sentence elements are:

Subject + Verb + Object

Is that all?

Students: complement, adverb, preposition

Teacher: You are now talking about parts of speech.

Student: Can we say subject + predicate?

Teacher: Excellent. This predicate is: verb + direct / indirect {object + subject / object complement.

Now, in any structure in the English language, we have: Subject + Verb.

This is the main structure. Now, talking about subject in English, it is typically a noun phrase. So, subjects could be:

- Nouns

- Pronouns

What is the function of the subject in English?

Student: It determines the doer of the action.

Teacher: Okay. Subjects in English are explicit, but in some cases, they are not. Like in:

- Imperative

- Passive

- Question

For example: go out!

When I say this, you understand that the subject is (you).

In questions, we have auxiliary-subject inversion.

For passive, the subject of the active sentence corresponds to the object of the passive sentence.

Now, we said that subjects can be nouns or pronouns, but if I say:
It is snowing.

We call the pronoun (it) here an Empty Subject.

When we say: *John reads a book*, the doer of the action is 'John.' When you say: it is snowing, you are talking about the weather; there is not a specific doer.

Student: Do we call animals like cats and dogs empty subjects too?

Teacher: Of course NOT! We can say:

The cat slept.

It is a subject; it is doing the action, but when we say, "it is snowing," or "it is John," we call it an empty subject because it does not refer to a doer.

Both (it is) and (there is/ are) are considered empty subjects.

If I say: some friends, is it a subject?

Yes. It is a noun phrase; it consists of a determiner and a noun.

If I say:

It is easy to fix this car.

Student: empty subject

Teacher: Okay, and (to fix) is (to infinitive), but the question is: do you know who is the doer of the action? Is it clear?

Students: No, we can only imagine.

Teacher: So, it is easy for someone to fix the car.

So, in English, sometimes, you need to think about the subject; it would be clear from the context. For example, in cases of infinitive or imperative, we do not have an explicit subject.

Now, if I say:

We learned to type.

Can you understand who the doer of the action is?

Students: We

Teacher: Yes. It is not explicitly stated, but I can understand the subject.

We talked about words such as nouns and verbs, and we also talked about phrases, but what about **clauses**? Can a clause be a subject?

First of all, can we consider a clause as a sentence?

Student: It is subject and a verb.

Teacher: Sentences have subject and verb!

Student: dependent clauses do not have a full meaning; it cannot stand alone.

Teacher: Excellent. This is one point, but I just want you to focus on one thing: I want you to differentiate between a sentence and a clause.

In English, any sentence starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop, and it has a subject and a verb.

A clause, however, may start with a capital letter and have a subject and a verb, but it doesn't end with a full stop; it may not start with a capital letter but end with a full stop. This is a **subordinate clause** that cannot stand alone.

This is the main difference between a sentence and a clause.

Now, how can I employ a clause as a subject?

Student: Like: *writing in English is easy.*

Teacher: Here, (writing) is a gerund; a noun. We can employ it as a clause—a subject in English.

Student: To write in English

Teacher: Yes. We can say:

To write in English is beneficial for you.

This is also infinitive. Infinitive is related to verbs, but it can be considered as a clause. What about verb clauses or wh-clauses?

We do have those in English. For example:

What you need is to study well.

What about (that)? For example:

That he retired annoyed me.

Here, the subject is a clause.

So, subjects can be verb phrases or clauses.

Another example: *what she did annoyed me.*

Now, let's move to verbs in English.

Student: We said we have explicit and implicit subjects; do we say implicit or empty subjects?

Teacher: No, empty has a different use; there is an explicit subject but it is empty, while implicit is like when I say: watch out! You know that the subject is 'you.'

Implicit means implied; you can understand the subject from the context.

Student: It is like having (ضمير مستتر) in Arabic.

Teacher: Yes, we will talk about this.

Now, talking about verbs in English. We have:

• **Transitive Verbs:** Here, we also have three types:

➤ Mono-transitive: one object

➤ Ditransitive: two objects

➤ Complex transitive

• **Intransitive Verbs:** no object

Transitive verbs mean they require objects.

Student: We do have such verbs in Arabic.

Teacher: Yes. اللزوم والمتعدى

Student: What about past simple, past continuous, and past perfect?

Teacher: These are aspects. We have something similar in Arabic except for perfect; in Arabic, we have past, present, and future, but we do not have perfect.

Now, talking about mono-transitive and ditransitive, we have another kind of verbs in English that is not found in Arabic; we call it: copular verbs.

Copular verbs are like verb to be, and state verbs like: sound, seem, taste, feel, etc.

Student: We do have them in Arabic!

Teacher: No, in English, we can say: I am a teacher. In Arabic, we cannot say: أنا أكون معلمة; we say: أنا معلمة.

This is because we can have verb-less sentences in Arabic, but in English it is impossible to have a sentence without a verb.

If I say: *this meal sounds delicious.*

What is the function of (delicious)?

Students: It is an adjective.

Teacher: Okay, it is an adjective as a part of speech; what is it as an element? Is it subject, verb, or object?

Student: Complement

Teacher: Yes. Complements always come after state verbs and verbs to be; they come after copular verbs.

I am a teacher.

The word (teacher) here is a complement and it is a noun. Pay attention that it is a subject complement.

Now, we move to object.

In English, we have:

- Direct Object
- Indirect Object

Can you give me an example?

Student: *I gave my mother a gift.*

Teacher: Good. (A gift) is a direct object.

If I say:

I forgive you.

The object is: you.

So, the object could be a noun, a pronoun, a phrase, or a clause.

Now, look at this example:

His silly joke made me angry.

The object is: me, and (angry) is an object complement because it is related to the object.

Student: Does it come directly after the object all the time?

Teacher: Yes. Yet, remember that we are explaining this in English and it differs from Arabic.

They elected John president.

The object is (John) and (president) is an object complement.

Now, Do you know other verbs that we can use with object and complement?

We have certain verbs. In our example, the verb (elect) has an object and an object complement; we have other verbs that have the same function as (elect) and (make).

I can say for example:

I prefer my coffee black.

So, we have the verb (prefer) and (black) is an object complement.

We also have the verb (call):

He calls her Suzy.

Now, talking about complements. We have two kinds:

- Subject Complement
- Object Complement

If I say:

My brother is an engineer.

The word (an engineer) is a subject complement. Is it an adjective or a noun?

Students: noun

Teacher: Okay. If I say:

John is famous.

(Famous) is a subject complement and it is an adjective.

So, complements could be adjectives or nouns.

Now, let us talk about Adverbials. We have:

- Adverbs of time,
- Adverbs of place,
- Adverbs of manner

This is easy for you. So, can you give me the patterns of English structures?

We need to collect all the patterns of English sentence elements.

1) **SV:** subject + verb

For example: she sits.

2) **SVO:** subject + verb + object

For example: she ate an apple.

3) **SVOiOd:** subject + verb + indirect object + direct object

For example: She gave her mother a present.

Can we switch between the two objects?

Students: Yes, but we need to use a preposition.

Teacher: Excellent: She gave a present to her mother.

4) **SVOC:** subject + verb + object + object complement

For example: she made me angry.

5) **SVC:** subject + verb + subject complement

For example: She is beautiful.

6) **SVA:** subject + verb + adverbial

For example: She plays amazingly.

7) **SVOA:** subject + verb + object + adverbial

For example: she speaks English fluently.

She plants flowers in the garden.

I drink coffee in the morning.

8) **SVSA:** subject + verb + sentence adverbial

For example: *there is a man at the door.*

This is new for you: (a man) is a semi sentence, and (at the door) is adverbial. We can say: a man is at the door. Here, (there) is an empty subject.

Now, we move to Arabic.

Before starting with anything, we need to remember that we have two kinds of sentences.

Student: اسمية و فعلية

Teacher: Yes. Nominal and Verbal

Today, we will start with verbal sentences. Let us start with verbs since in Arabic we start the sentence with the verb.

We also have transitive verbs (افعال متعدية) and intransitive verbs (افعال لازمة).

In Arabic, we have:

- Mono transitive
- Ditransitive
- Three transitive

Let us start with examples:

Verb + subject: for example: ضحك الطفل

Mono transitive: for example: أكل الطفل التفاحة

Ditransitive: for example: أعطيت الولد هدية

Three transitive: since this one is difficult, think of the verb (tell) or in Arabic (أخبر). For example:

أخبرت المعلم علياً قادمًا.

Here, (قادمًا) can be both (حال) and (مفعول به ثالث).

ملاحظة: أفعال تأخذ ثلاث مفاعيل:

Let's move to the subject. We said in English that we have implicit subject and explicit subject.

In Arabic, we have (ضمائر مستترة) implicit pronouns and explicit nouns.

For example: حضر الرئيس

Here, (الرئيس) is an explicit noun.

And if I say: جاء متأخراً

الفاعل ضمير مستتر تقديره هو implicit pronoun

How do we say this?

Students: He came late.

Teacher: I know; I mean if we want to explain, we say: the subject is implicit pronoun, and we say the kind of the pronoun: third person, masculine and singular pronoun. Do not forget to put (implicit) at the beginning.

First person متكلم

Second person مخاطب

Third person غائب

Now, if I say: يعجبني أنك مثابر

Where is the subject?

The verb is (يعجب), and the object is (الياء). The subject is (مصدر مؤول) first person.

If I say: تعجبني مثابرتك

ماذا نعرب (مثابرتك)?
الطلاب: مفعول به ثان

ALANWAR

الاستاذة: ماذا نعرب الياء في الجملة الأولى؟
طالبة: حين تتصل الياء بالفعل دائماً نعربها مفعول به و هنا هي مفعول به أول
الاستاذة: هل (مثنائتك) عائدة على الفاعل أم لا؟ أو حين نقول (أنتك مثنائت)؟
الطلاب: لا بل هي ترتبط بالمخاطب الذي هو مفعول به

Teacher: So, it is related to the object. Yet, it might be related to the subject; I am not sure because I took this sentence from a grammar book. I will ask someone professional about this.

We have (الياء) related to the subject; we have (اسم صريح), (ضمير مستتر), and (مصدر مؤول). Yet, I want you to know that (مصدر مؤول) means infinitive verbal noun.

Now, if I say: قرأتُ الجريدة

طالبة: الفاعل في هذه الحالة ضمير متصل

Teacher: So, who is the doer of the action?

Students: Me

Teacher: So, the subject is ...

Students: تاء الفاعل المتحركة

Teacher: (الضمائر المتصلة) are **enclitic pronouns**, while **implicit pronouns** are (الضمائر المستترة).

What are the five enclitic pronouns in Arabic?

طالبة: تاء الفاعل المتحركة، ياء المؤنثة المخاطبة،

Student: just with the imperative verbs ياء المؤنثة المخاطبة

Teacher: give me an example!

Student: اكتبني ، كلي ، اشربي

Teacher: How do you translate (ياء المؤنثة المخاطبة) into English?

We say: ya'a of second person feminine pronoun; there is no need to say enclitic.

Note: We have something called transliteration; it means to use English letters to write Arabic words.

(There are many examples in the handout in this lecture.)

(تاء الفاعل المتحركة) is first person pronoun

Third person: (واو الجماعة) waw of third person masculine plural pronoun.

Also (نون النسوة): nuon of third person feminine plural pronoun.

Finally, (ألف الاثنين): alef of dual third person pronoun. Of course, the gender depends on the subject; (قامتا) or (قاما).

We have passive voice in Arabic مبني للمجهول, and we have what we call نائب الفاعل. It is called in English Deputy Agent.

We also have الظروف: temporal adverbs زمان, locative adverbs ظروف مكان. We also have circumstantial accusative الحال.

In Arabic, we have seven sentence patterns.

The first pattern: verb + subject: نام الطفل

Second pattern: verb + subject + object

Third pattern: verb + subject + object 1 + object 2

Fourth pattern: verb + subject + object1 + object2 + object3

Fifth pattern: verb + subject + object complement: for example:

أكل الطفل التفاحة باكراً.

انتخبوا علياً رئيساً.

لعب الطفل الكرة في الحديقة.

In the second sentence, how can we identify that we have two objects?

If I say: أعطى المعلم الطالب قلماً

Here, we have two objects; they are not related, but in the second sentence because it is related, it is a complement.

يعني بجملة (أعطى المعلم الطالب قلماً) لأن (الطالب) و (قلماً) غير مرتبطين ببعضهما نعتبرهما مفعول به أول وثاني، بينما في جملة (انتخبوا علياً رئيساً) لأن كل من (علياً) و (رئيساً) مرتبطين. اعتبرنا أحدهما object والثاني complement

Sixth pattern: verb + subject + adverbial

Seventh pattern: verb + subject + object + adverbial

وضعوا اللحم على النار

Handout 2:

1. Syntax: The Sentence

This section focuses on the simple sentence under two headings: sentence elements and word order.

1.1 Sentence Elements and Patterns

1.1.1 English

The simple declarative sentence can be described in terms of the following five elements: Subject (S), Verb (V), Object (Oi, Od), Complement (C) and Adverbial (A). (Oi stands for indirect object, and Od for direct object).

(a) Subject

In a declarative sentence, the subject is typically noun phrase (noun or pronoun) that determines the person and number of the verb. It usually refers to the doer of the action expressed by the verb. The NPs in bold are subjects:

- *John arrived late.*

- *Some students should take summer courses.*
- *Nobody attended the meeting.*
- *We thought that the teacher would be absent.*
- *It is snowing.* (empty subject)

We should note here that every sentence must have an explicit subject, except for the imperative and sentences with the infinitive form of the verb.

- *Go out!*

In this sentence the 2nd person pronoun 'you' is the understood subject. In questions, the order of the subject and the first auxiliary is reversed according to the subject-auxiliary inversion rule.

- *Has John left?*

In the following sentence, the subject of the infinitive 'to type' has been omitted but can be understood as 'we'.

- *We learned to type.*

In the following sentence the subject of the infinitive 'to fix' has been omitted but can be understood as 'someone'.

- *It is easy to fix this car.*

The subject of a passive sentence corresponds to the object of a corresponding active sentence.

- Active: *John wrote two letters.*
- Passive: *Two letters were written by John.*

Besides NPs, nominal clauses can function as subjects.

- That-clause: *That he retired at this age, astonished us all.*
- Wh-clause: *Why he resigned is not clear to me.*
- To-V clause: *To travel by train costs \$ 50.*
- V-ing clause: *Typing all these reports costs a lot of money.*

(b) Verb

English has three types of main verbs: transitive, intransitive and copular.

Transitive verbs require a grammatical object. They are of three types: mono-transitive (SVO), ditransitive (SVOO), and complex-transitive (SVOC and (SVOA)). Intransitive verbs, in contrast, do not require an object. Copular verbs are followed by a subject complement or an adverbial, e.g., (SVC: SOUND), and (SVA: BE).

(c) Object

An object is either direct or indirect. The direct object is usually a noun phrase that expresses the 'recipient' or 'patient' of the action.

- *The boy read a story.*

- *She visited Jerusalem last summer.*

- *I forgive you.*

- Pronoun: *This car is ours.*

- Prepositional phrase: *The players are in good shape.*

Besides noun phrases, subordinate clauses can function as direct objects.

- *Peter said that he wanted to buy a new car.*

The indirect object, on the other hand, is typically a noun phrase that refers to the person who receives something. It precedes the direct object.

- *The teacher gave the students (Oi) the exam papers (Od),*

The indirect object can be represented as a prepositional object.

- *The teacher gave the exam papers to the students.*

Among verbs that take two objects are: teach, give, show, ask, wish, offer, promise, take, read, owe, get, lend, make.

If the two objects happen to be pronouns, direct object must precede the prepositional object.

- *He gave it to me.*

(d) Complement

A complement tells us something about the subject or object. It is required for verb complementation. They usually follow the subject and verb (subject complement) or the subject, verb and object (object complement).

Complements can be realized by noun phrases or adjective phrases.

Copular/linking verbs are followed by complements:

- *Most of the participants were doctors. (SVC)*

- *They looked tired. (SVC)*

Copular verbs join a noun phrase or adjective to the subject. Examples of copular verbs are: be, look, seem, feel, become, taste, appear, get, prove, remain, keep.

Subject complements can be:

- NPs: *My brother is an engineer.*

- Adjective phrase: *John is (very) famous.*

Object complements, on the other hand, follow the direct object of the sentence (SVOC). Among verbs that are followed by objects and complements are: elect, prefer, name, select, make, leaves.

- *His silly joke made me angry.*

- *They call her Pam.*

- *I prefer my coffee black.*

- They left the house empty.
- They elected John president.

The five elements may combine to form the following eight basic sentence patterns:

- 1) SV: John left
- 2) SVO: Mary bought a car..
- 3) SVOiOd: She gave me a book.
- 4) SVA: John is here.
- 5) SVC: The teacher became impatient.
- 6) SVOC: They have elected John president.
- 7) SVOA: She put the vase on the table.
- 8) SVSA: There is a man at the door

1.1.2 Arabic

The majority of medieval Arab grammarians classified the Arabic sentence into two major types on the basis of the element that occupies initial position in the sentence: *fi.liyya*-a 'Verbal' and *'ismiyya*-a 'Nominal'. A Verbal sentence begins with a verb; whereas a Nominal one begins with a noun in the nominative case. A Verbal sentence has a basic VSO word order, while a Nominal one has a Topic (T)- Comment (C) word order *mubtada'* and *khabar*, respectively.

(a) Elements of the verbal sentence

The Arabic simple verbal sentence may be described in terms of four elements: Verb (V), Subject (S), Object (O), Adverbial (A).

(i) Verb and Object

Since verbs govern the use of objects, these two elements are discussed under one section.

The verb is either intransitive *laazim* لازم or transitive *muta.addii* متعدي.

The latter governs the noun in the accusative.

- Intransitive: *naama t-tiflu* نام الطفل 'The child slept.'

Transitive verbs are either mono-transitive (VSO), ditransitive (VSOO) or tritransitive (VSOOO).

- Monotransitive: *istaqbala 'aliyyun d-dayfa* استقبل علي الضيف

'Ali received the guest.'

- Ditransitive: 'a ʿṭaytu l-walada hadiyyatan أعطيتُ الولد هديةً

'I gave the boy a present.'

In the above sentence, the indirect and direct objects are unrelated semantically. In the following sentence, in contrast, wajadtu 'aliyyan kariiman وجدت علياً كريماً 'I found Ali (to be) generous.'

The two objects are originally Topic mubtada' مبتدأ and Comment khabar خبر 'aliyyun kariimun عليٌّ كريمٌ Ali is generous.' In other words, the second grammatical object kariiman functions as an object complement as it describes the first object .aliyyun عليٌّ

- Tritransitive: 'akhbartu l-mu'allima .aliyyan qadiman أخبرت المعلم علياً قادمًا

'I informed the teacher that Ali was coming.'

In this sentence, since the third grammatical object qadimā قادمًا modifies the second object 'aliyyan علياً, its function can be better described as complement of this object {

(ii) Subject al-faa'il الفاعل

The agent is either. ismun ṣariih اسم صريح ' explicit noun' or ḍamiirun mustatir ضمير مستتر 'implicit/implied pronoun.

ismun ṣariih: ḥaḍara r-ra'iisu حضر الرئيس

The President came.

ḍamiirun mustatir: jaa'a muta'akhirā جاء متأخراً

He came late.

In this sentence, the subject is the implicit third person masculine singular pronoun 'huwa' 'he'.

The subject is realized by either a nominal element in the nominative (noun or enclitic pronoun) or the infinitive verbal noun masdar mu'awwal .

مصدر مؤول

Noun: barada l-jawwu برد الجو

'The weather became cold.'

- Enclitic pronoun: qara'tu l-jariidat-a قرأتُ الجريدة

'I read the newspaper.'

- Infinitive: yu.jibunii 'annaka muthaabirun يعجبني أنك مثابرٌ

'I admire your being hard-working.'

Five enclitic pronouns which function as agents are attached to the verb.

- 'alifu l-'ithnayn ألف الاثنتين (M and F) 'alif of the dual)

قاما qaam-aa

qaamat-aa قامتا

- yaa'u l-mukhaataba-a ياء المخاطبة (yaa' of 2nd person feminine):

quum-ii قومي

- nuunu n-niswa-a نون النسوة (nuunu of the feminine plural):

qum-na قمن

- waawu l-jamaa.a-a واو الجماعة (waaw, of the masculine plural):

qaam-uu قاموا

(iii) Deputy-agent naa'ibu l-faa'il نائب الفاعل

In a sentence with a passive verb, the object of the corresponding active sentence becomes a deputy agent naa'ib l-faa'il marked for the nominative.

'u.tiya l-faa'izu jaa'izatan أعطى الفائز جائزة

The winner was given a prize.

(iv) Adverbial al-zarf الظرف

An adverbial can be realized by adverbs, prepositional phrases, and the circumstantial accusative, al-haal. الحال

- Adverb: jaa'a 'amsi جاء أمس

He came yesterday.

- Prepositional phrase: dhahaba 'ila l-madrasati ذهب إلى المدرسة

He went to school.

- Circumstantial accusative: ra'aytuhu naa'iman رأيته نائماً

I saw him sleeping.

These elements may be combined to form the following basic sentence patterns:

(1) VS naama l-waladu نام الولد

The boy slept.

(2) VSO shariba t-tiflu l-haliiba شرب الطفل الحليب

The child drank the milk.

(3) VSOO 'a' ta l-mu.allimu t-taaliba qalaman أعطى المعلم الطالب قلماً

The teacher gave the student a pen.

(4) VSOOO 'a.lama l-mu'allimu t-tullaaba l-imtihaana sahan

أعلم المعلم الطلاب الامتحان سهلاً.

The teacher informed the students that the test was easy.

(5) VSOC intakhabuu .aliyyan ra'iisan انتخبوا علياً رئيساً

They elected Ali President.

(6) VSA dhahaba l-waladu 'ila l-madrasati ذهب الولد إلى المدرسة

The boy went to school.

(7) VSOA wada' u l-hma 'ala n-naari وضعوا اللحم على النار

They put the meat on the fire.

(b) Elements of the nominal sentence

A nominal sentence consists of a Topic (subject) *mubtada'* المبتدأ and a Comment (predicate) *khobar* الخبر. The Topic must be a nominal element. The Comment, in contrast, may be sentential or non-sentential.

(i) Topic al-mubtada' المبتدأ

The Topic, which is typically definite, is realized by either a noun in the nominative, an expressed pronoun or an infinitive (verbal noun) *maṣdar mu'awwal* مصدر مؤول

- Noun: *ar-riyaadatu mufiidatun li-l-jismi* الرياضة مفيدة للجسم
Sports are good for the body.

- Pronoun: *huwa ghaa'ibun* هو غائب
He is absent.

- Verbal noun:

'an taquula l-ḥaqiiqata khayrun laka أن تقول الحقيقة خير لك
It's-good for you to tell the truth.

The Topic is *'an taquula l-ḥaqiiqata* أن تقول الحقيقة

(ii) Comment al-khobar الخبر

The Comment *al-khobar* الخبر which typically follows the Topic, is realized by a noun, an adjective in the nominative, a phrase *shibh jumla-a* شبه جملة consisting of a prepositional phrase or a temporal or locative adverb, a nominal sentence, or a verbal sentence.

- Noun:

'al-'ilmu nuurun العلم نور
Erudition is light.

- Adjective:

al-'as'aa'uru murtafa'atun الأسعار مرتفعة
The prices are high.

- Prepositional phrase:

al-ḥamdu li-llahi الحمد لله
Praise be to Allah.

- Locative adverb:

an-nahru taḥta l-jisri النهر تحت الجسر
The river is under the bridge.

- Temporal adverb:

al-ijtimaa' u ghadan الاجتماع غداً
The meeting is tomorrow.

- Nominal (equational) sentence jumlatun 'ismiyyatun: جملة اسمية
muhammadun 'abuuhu mariidun محمد أبوہ مريض
Mohammad, his father is sick.

In the above sentence, muhammadun محمد is the first Topic and the equational sentence 'abuuhu mariidun أبوہ مريض is the Comment. This sentential comment itself consists of a Topic 'abuuhu أبوہ and a Comment mariidun مريض. We notice that the second topic contains a pronominal suffix --hu that is anaphoric with the first Topic muhammadun محمد

- Verbal sentence jumlatun fi.liyya-a جملة فعلية
at-tabiib-u ḥaḍara mubakiran الطبيب حضر مبكراً
As for the doctor, he came early.

al-bintu ḥaḍara 'abuuhā البنت حضر أبوها
As for the girl, her father came.

We notice that the agent of the sentential Comment 'abuuhā أبوها contains a pronominal suffix that anaphoric with the Topic al-bintu البنت

CONTRAST

The following differences hold between sentence elements and patterns in English and Arabic. First, in English, the syntactic functions of sentence elements are determined by word order, but in Arabic, these functions are marked by case endings that are retained by the elements regardless of their position in the sentence. This explains why Arabic thematizes sentence elements more freely than English. An exception to this would be sentences with indeclinable nouns, as in

- ḥaddatha muusaa .iisaa حدث موسى عيسى
Mousa talked to Issa.

- ḥaddatha .iisaa muusaa حدث عيسى موسى
Issa talked to Mousa.

Second, unlike English, Arabic has two types of sentences, namely, verbal and nominal. The latter is further subdivided into nominal (+ verbal Predicate) and equational (verbless).

Third, unlike English, Arabic may have a complete (VSO) sentence realized by one word, e.g.

- saa.adaahaa ساعداها

Both helped her.

Fourth, unlike Arabic, English allows an indefinite noun to occur initially in a copulative sentence

- English: A man is in the house.

- Arabic: fi d-daari rajulun في داري رجل

We notice that the English sentence is rendered in Arabic by a verbless sentence with the prepositional phrase adverbial obligatorily occupying initial position.

Fifth, English allows the compounding of nominal phrase modifiers, whereas Arabic generally doesn't.

English: I like the colour and size of the toy.

Arabic: 'uhibbu lawna d-dumyati wa hajmahaa أحب لون الدمية و حجمها

I like the colour of the toy and its size.

Sixth, some Arabic verbs are tritransitive, that is, they are followed by three direct objects (VS(OO)).

Finally, in English simple declarative sentences, the subject is an obligatorily realized element, whereas in Arabic, it may be overt or covert:

English: Ali entered the house.

Arabic: dakhala .aliyyun l-bayta دخل علي البيت

(The subject is overt.)

English: He entered the house.

Arabic: dakhala l-bayta دخل البيت

(The subject is covert.)

This is made possible in Arabic since it has a rich inflectional system which marks the person and number of the subject.

2.1 Word Order Variation

2.2.1 English

English is generally described as having a relatively "fixed" word order. The basic unmarked word order in a declarative sentence is: S(ubject) V(erb) O(bject).

- The dog chased the cat.

- The cat chased the dog.

In the above sentence, the syntactic functions of sentence elements are determined by word order. However, English allows "thematic reordering", defined by Huddleston (1984, p. 454) in terms of a "transformation" "...that moves an element from an unmarked position to a marked position." Thematic reordering is achieved by thematic fronting and thematic postponement. A theme, which is given information, is defined as the point of departure of a clause. It is the first constituent in the clause. A rheme, which expresses new/newsworthy information, is the focus of attention in a message.

Variation in word order is utilized for encoding pragmatic information such as focus and saliency and marking information structure. Besides the use of prosodic devices such as stress and intonation, English employs several syntactic strategies for realizing fronting and postponement, among which are: thematization, it-clefts, wh-clefts, passives, there-constructions and extraposition.

Thematization

Thematization (thematic fronting) is defined by Quirk et al (1985, p.1377) as "...the achievement of marked theme by moving into initial position an item which is otherwise unusual there." Fronted elements can be subjects, objects, adverbials, complements and nominal clauses.

- *JOHN his name is.*
- *Your letter I haven't yet received. (fronting)*
- *Never have I read such a boring story.*
- *Only then did I realize how silly it was.*
- *Here comes the bus.*
- *Home went John.*
- *And very clever he is too.*
- *What he wanted from me I don't know.*

Fronting gives more immediate importance to these elements.

-It-clefts

It-clefts, which are a type of fronting, involve cleaving a sentence into two, with New information preceding Given information. They enable the speaker/writer to give prominence to different elements, i.e., marking an element as New, focused, foregrounded information.

- *It was A HORSE that the truck hit yesterday.*

In this sentence, the writer/speaker focuses on the appropriate identity of the object. The addressee knows that the truck hit something, but does not know what it hit. The clefted element is the object.

Other possible variants are:

- *It was A TRUCK that hit the horse.*

The clefted element is the subject.

- *It was YESTERDAY when the truck hit a horse.*

The clefted element is the time adverbial.

- *It is THE STUDENTS that I am worried about.* (not the teachers)

The above sentence illustrates a second function for it-clefts, namely setting things right. The addressee is worried about the teachers. The writer/speaker holds a different view and tries to correct the addressee's mistaken view.

- Wh-clefts (pseudoclefts)

Like it-clefts, wh-clefts cleave a sentence into two. However, the latter highlight New information by placing it at the end of the clause and achieve a contrastive effect.

- *What John wants is MONEY.* (not food)

- Passive

The passive creates thematic postponement, which involves moving a constituent to the right of its basic position. Among other discursual functions, it allows the writer/speaker to give greater prominence to the agent farther than the verb.

- *The letter was given to me by JOHN.*

In this sentence JOHN, the focused agent, is New information.

-There-constructions

One of the functions of existential there-constructions is to allow the writer/speaker to highlight New information.

- *There was PLENTY OF FOOD on the table.*

- Extraposition

Extraposition, a postposing device, involves introducing preparatory "it" and pushing an element to the right to make it more salient.

- *It's good to see you.* (infinitive subject)

- *It doesn't matter what he says.* (clause subject)

Thank you very much!

See you next week

