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A Morphosyntactic Analysis of Ostensible Lexical Categories in Arabic

This study investigates the syntax of ostensible lexical categories (OLCs) in Arabic. OLCs refer to opaque categories whose functions cannot be determined from their surface forms; in one sense, they show up to function based on their apparent form, yet in another sense, they do not fulfil the predicted function. Studies have investigated the nature of OLCs across several languages (e.g., Borsley, Tallerman, & Willis, 2007; Carnie, 2011, 2011; Li, 2004; Willis, 1988). Arabic language has a class of words that are exceptionally categorized as nouns-verbs. Such class of words show a behaviour that makes their interpretation looks like verbs and nouns, without fitting the specifications of either.

- (1) **hak** ʔal-kitab-a
take.OC:2SG DEF-book-ACC
‘take the book.’
- (2) **hajhat** ʔal-ʕawd-u ʔilla ʔaḏ-ḏul-i.
impossible.OC DEF-back-NOM to DEF-disgrace-GEN
‘Going back to disgrace is impossible.’

The categorization problem has attracted attention among grammarians and linguists. Traditional categorization attempts emphasize their status as verbs (Owens, 1989), while most recent attempts list them as interjections (Lutz & Jong, 2011). Previous categorizations are far from being accurate according to recent specifications of verbs (Baker, 2003) and interjections (Hill 2013). It is ungrammatical to mark a verb with an addressee agreement (e.g., **xuḏk* ‘take’). However, this type of morphological agreement is acceptable in (1). In addition, unlike constructions formed by lexical verbs, permitting SVO and VSO patterns, constructions created by OLCs restrict patterns to affirmative VSO (cf., (2) & (3)) patterns, preventing negation, and impose restrictions on peripheral movements (4) (Rizzi, 1997). The data also stands in sharp contrast with interjections. Cross-linguistically, interjections do not assign case (1) nor can they have arguments (2). According to Hill (2013), interjections are optional; nevertheless, the bolded items are part and parcel for the grammaticality of the examples above.

- (3) * ʔal-ʕawd-u **hajhat** ʔilla ʔaḏ-ḏul-i.
DEF-back-NOM impossible.OC to DEF-disgrace-GEN
‘Going back to disgrace is impossible.’
- (4) * ʔal-kitab **hak**.
DEF-book-ACC take.OC:2SG
‘THE BOOK take’

We argue that OLCs are morphologically complex expressive units, formed by suppletive forms that undergo multiple projections. Internally, a verbal component governs expressive roots for case assignment and selection properties. Externally, OLCs move to higher expressive discoursal functional heads, specified by speech act participants - speakers and addressees. Being specified by speech act specifiers accounts for their restrictions on word order patterns and agreement, beyond phi [φ] (Miyagawa, 2017). External specifiers block movement of internal ones, deriving fixed VSO outer layer and they value discoursal features on OLCs to agree with discourse

participants. The findings provides new line of reasoning for the Encyclopedia of Arabic Linguistics (Lutz & Jong, 2011) for recategorizing OLCs as expressive units, rather than phatic interjections and settles the so-long debated arguments regarding their nature.

Word Count: 454, excluding references

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