

Pro-Drop Parameter and Theta Role Theory: Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

For translators, understanding the linguistic features of languages affects the quality of translation. The theory of Universal Grammar is one of the tools that allow translators to study the linguistic norms of languages. Here, I presented a comparison of Arabic and English language using the pro-drop parameters and theta role principles. The comparison resulted in identifying some of the aspects of the two languages. Arabicas a pro-drop language differs from English in the feature of the subject. Also, the examples that were provided showed the performance of the theta role in the Arabic sentences in comparison with the English sentences.

INTRODUCTION

One of the interesting theories in the field of comparative linguistic is the theory of Universal Grammar (UG) that was proposed in the early 1980s. To be more precise, this theory was proposed by Chomsky (1981) in his book *Lectures on Government and Binding*. Generally, Universal Grammar (UG) is a collection of principles and parameters that assumingly can be applied to all human languages. Universal Grammar is a part of the Language Acquisition Faculty (LAF); besides it is part of the genetic endowment of humans (Campos & Martínez Gil, 1991). According to Chomsky (1986), Language Acquisition Faculty (LAF) is like a device used to acquire language. This device is an innate constituent in the mind of all people. It produces a particular language during its interaction with the experiences obtained. Then these experiences are converted into "a system of knowledge attained"; the knowledge of the language (Chomsky, 1986:5).

Although its reputation, the term "Universal Grammar" has provoked different reactions; because the linguistic principles that this theory proposes are highly abstract and not clear for many language students. Add to that, the generalization this theory draws derived the scholars to take it as either a partly true or abstract nonsense. At the same time, some other scholars think that Universal Grammar is the best theory possible because of its "explanatory adequacy" (Ellis, 1994; Zhang, 2007; Askedal,

Roberts & Matsushita, 2010; Wilmsen, 2014; Aboh, Guasti & Roberts, 2013). From the opposite point of view, Universal Grammar studies language from a psychological fact and pay no attention to the social aspects.

The discussion of Universal Grammar led us to discuss the theory of Principles and Parameters (P&P). This theory is a framework in the field of genetic linguistic. Principles and Parameters were proposed by Chomsky and Lasnik based on several previous research in genetic linguistic. These Principles and Parameters describe the nature of language using general principles and specific parameters that divide all human languages to either plus-feature or minus-feature. Another concept for P&P is the theory of Government and Binding. Both concepts refer to the generative tradition of phrase structure grammar.

To P&P, principles are those statements that are true to all languages. For example, Structure preservation principle, Trace erasure principle, Projection principle, Subjacency principle, and Empty category principle. While parameters identify the variation in grammar between different languages, some of these parameters are Nominal mapping parameter, Null subject parameter, Pro-drop parameter, Subject placement parameter, Subject side parameter, and Verb attraction parameter.

Because all these parameters and principals can be applied at all languages, I will try to provide a brief description of the Pro-drop parameter

and Theta principal in Arabic and English language. The description will include some examples and illustrations.

PRO-DROP PARAMETER

Pro-drop parameter (or null subject parameter) is associated with those languages that allow dropping or omitting the subject pronoun. These languages can be said they have a parameter of a [+pro-drop] value (White, 1989). Arabic is one of those languages that have [+pro-drop] value, among other languages like Japanese and Spanish. English, however, is not a pro-drop language and it must include lexical subject; which means that the position of the subject must be filled. For example:

1- a. English: He read the story.

b. Arabic: قرأ القصة ه

The Pro-drop parameter divides languages into two groups; [+pro-drop] group and [-pro-drop] group. This deviation is built upon whether these languages allow: null subject, subject-verb inversion, Absence of expletive pronouns (Montrul, 2004).

NULL SUBJECT

In the null subject parameter, some languages must have subjects in their structures while others do not always require a subject and their subject position can be left unexpressed. Unlike English, languages like Italian, French, and Arabic can have an empty subject position in their sentences. Languages with such features are referred to as null-subject languages (NSLs). The null subject feature is considered as a critical parameter in Arabic and English language. The examples in (2) show how Arabic (NSL) and English (non-NSL) are different according to this parameter. 2- a. He writes stories.

b. يكتب احمد القصص.

c. *writes stories.

d. يكتب القصص

The subject in the Arabic language carries the phi-features specification (person, number, and gender) and agrees with the verb in these features. The subject احمد in (2b) agrees with the verb يكتب, and the possibility of making the subject explicit is better, this explains why the sentence in (2d) is grammatically correct. The English subject, however, does not carry some of the phi-feature so it should follow the verb to gain the missing features. The subject He in (2a)

carries only the number and gender feature but it is missing case. The case can be found in the verb writes, therefore the omission of the subject will result in an ungrammatical sentence as in example (2c).

Semantically, the verb writes is a two- predicate verb that requires Agent and Theme, so the omitting of one predicate will result in an ungrammatical structure. The Arabic verb يكتب is one predicate verb and omitting one of the predicates will not affect the sentence grammatically. It is important to realize that some verbs in English are a one-place predicate. For instance, the verb slept in (3a) is a one-place predicate that does not require a theme. Yet, structurally speaking, these verbs, however, cannot stand without an agent, they must have an external argument and the absence of this argument will result in an ungrammatical sentence as in (3b) (Llinàs i Grau, 2008).

3- a. he slept.

b. *slept early.

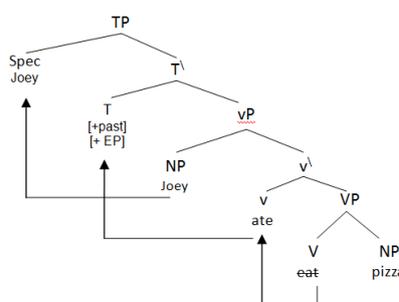
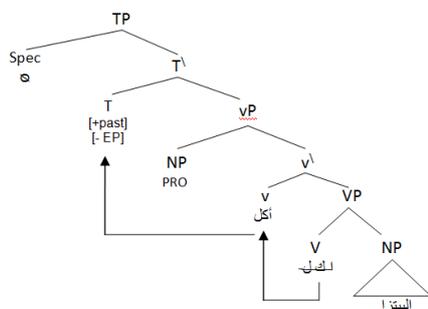
SUBJECT-VERB FREE INVERSION

Another parameter that is associated with the pro-drop parameter is subject-verb free inversion. The free inversion typically refers to the movement of the verb and the subject within the sentence by fronting either the verb in SVO or the subject in VSO (Stepanov, Fanselow & Vogel, 2004). In Subject-verb free inversion, "free" indicates that this inversion is not influenced by any trigger. In other words, this inversion is not obligatory and has no restriction (Riemsdijk & Williams, 1986 cited in Altamimi, 2015). In this regard, Kayne (1980) claims that all fully NSLs have the feature of subject-verb free inversion. The inversion of the subject is allowed "if the subject can appear after the verb, leaving the canonical subject position empty" (ibid, P207). It is must be remembered that the subject-verb free inversion restricted to verb and subject only and it does not include other verb agreements. For example, the Arabic verb أكل in (4c) can appear to the right of the subject أحمد like in (4c) or the left of the subject like in (4d). In the English sentence, however, the verb ate in (4a) can be placed only to the right of the subject Joey, and the sentence is considered ungrammatical if the verb is placed to the left as in (4b).4- a. Joey ate pizza.

b. *ate Joey pizza.

c. أكل أحمد البيتزا.

d. أحمد أكل البيتزا.



The structure of Arabic shows that the null pro subject is generated in the thematic position [Spec of vP] and stays there due to the lack of expanding projection [EP] in the Arabic structure. Whereas in the English structure, the subject Joey moves to Spec of TP after being generated in the thematic position [Spec of vP] as in Arabic structure. The main reason for the movement of the English subject is that English has the feature of EP, which shows another difference between the two languages.

the feature of pro-drop language (Grewendorf, 1989).

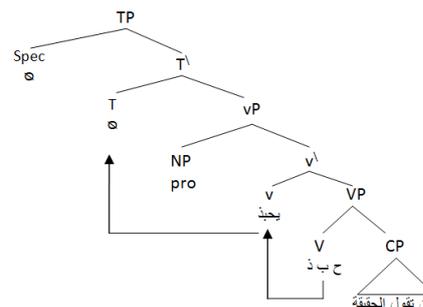
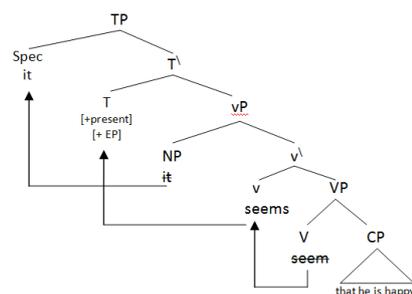
ABSENCE OF EXPLETIVE PRONOUNS

Expletives pronouns are a non-pro drop language feature. They occur in the non-thematic position, where they are usually licensed. The expletives in the subject position are formally licensed by EPP. To value the D-feature of T, EPP requires a specifier or subject that is located in spec T. For this reason, the English language uses expletives like it (5a) to meet the EPP requirement. Arabic, on the other hand, does not need any specifiers or subjects in the spec T because it is already filled with a pro as you can see in the illustration in (5b).

Another justification for the phenomena of the free inversion of subject and verb is that this inversion depends on the "the syntactic and gramatic-interpretive constraints" (Quesada, 2016: 48). Add to that, Chomsky (1981) thinks that there is a relation between the pro subject and the free inversion. Safir (1985) supports Chomsky's opinion and he assumes that the free inversion of subject and verb is associated with

5- a. it seem that he is happy

b. يحبذ أن تقول الحقيقة



Syntactically, pro and expletives are both subjects of a finite clause. They also both satisfy the EPP. Expletives like it in (5a) have no semantic value; therefore they have no theta role and must have a case. Pro, on the contrary, carries semantic value and has a theta role at the D-structure and case at the S-structure.

position refers to the position of the Argument. Theta theory is based on two basic principles:

THETA THEORY

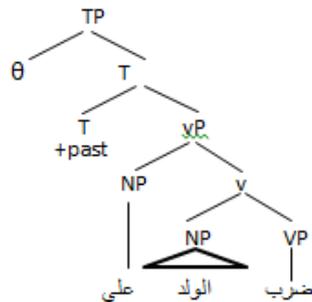
1. Assigning one Theta role for each NP Argument.
2. Each Theta role can be assigned only once.

Theta theory or Theta role (or as some refer to as θ -role) is proposed by Chomsky (1981, 1986) as a part of the Government and Binding theory. It describes the relationship between Arguments and Predicates considering the semantic features of the lexical items. Theta

These principles form a Theta grid for each Argument. Theta grid identifies how many Argument is needed and what kind of thematic relations these Arguments hold. To meet the EPP principle (cf. Chomsky, 1981), every sentence must have one predicate at least. Besides this assumption, every sentence must include a subject, even if that subject has no

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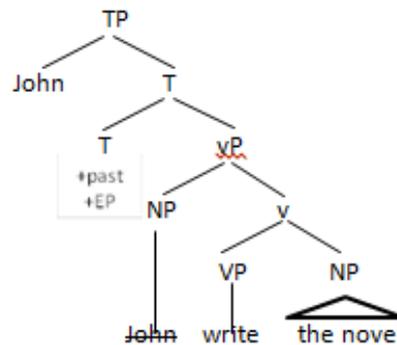
semantic value (ex. dummy subject). This means that sentence like (6b) is grammatically incorrect because even it fulfills the Theta basic principles, it breaks the EPP principle.



6- a. John wrote the novel.

b. *wrote the novel.

c. ضرب علي الولد.



d. It seems that John wrote the novel.

The position of the Argument can be internal or/and external and it changes according to the verb of the sentence. For instance, the verb wrote, for example (6a), lexically requires internal Argument and external Argument, the external Argument is John while the internal Argument is the novel. If one Argument is deleted, the sentence will be ungrammatical as in (6b). A similar Argument can apply in Arabic grammar. The verb ضرب (6c) can have two Arguments; external (subject علي: lit. Ali) and internal (complement الولد: lit. the kid).

As mentioned before, every sentence in English should have a subject even if it does not carry any semantic feature; in example (6d), it has no semantic feature but it is still considered as the subject of that sentence. In the case of non-null-subject, these subjects are not assigning in D-structure therefore they must not assign a Theta role. There exists at the S-structure level is only to meet the EPP requirement (Al-Alamat, 2010, p103).

Gruber (1976) and Haegeman (1994) have summarized the most common types of Arguments as follows:

1- Agent: is the role assigned to the subject that intentionally causes the affection of the object and mostly occurs with genitive verbs; as in examples (7) where the Actors (the boy & الولد) carry an Agent role.

7-a. The boy caught the ball.

b. امسك الولد بالكرة

2- Theme: is the role in which an entity is placed or moved to a position by outer force. The examples in (8) show that the location of the thematic role is not fixed; sometimes it is in

the subject position and other times in the object.

8- a. the car is moving.

b. John gave the money to his friend

c. The company gave its employees a raise

d. تتحرك السيارة

e. أعطى علي المال لصديقه.

f. منحت الشركة موظفيها علاوة

3- Goal: "is the role assigned to an entity towards which an activity is directed" (Saidat, 2006: 57). For example, the lake and المرمى are the points that the actions walked and اندفعت is moving towards.

9- a. The boy walked towards the lake.

b. اندفعت الكرة باتجاه المرمى

4- Locative predicates that have a locative feature like a preposition. The NPs the car and السيارة are considered as locative where the Arguments money and أموال are located.

10- a. He keeps his money in the car.

b. يحتفظ بأمواله في السيارة

5- Patient: the role of the persons or things where they receive the action of the agent which is usually suffering a kind of physical activity. In the examples (11), the NPs the guy and الرجل are the ones who receive the action of killed and قتل which was caused by the agent the soldier and الجندي.

11- a. the soldier killed the guy.

b. قتل الجندي الرجل

6. Experience: the emotional or sensual feeling that an animate is going under and it is

A Re-Reading of John 2:1-12 in Yoruba Context

expressed by the verb. In (12), the emotional verbs like and يحبون refer to the emotional state of kids and الأطفال, or in other words, of kids and الأطفال are undergoing the emotional feeling expressed by the verbs like and يحبون.

12- a. kids like toys

b. الأطفال يحبون الألعاب.

13- Source: is the role that describes the original location of an entity before it moves. The NPs John and الطفل are the sources, where the original location of the bag and الحقيبة was before the move.

13- a. he took the bag from John

b. أحمد من أخذ الحقيبة من عند الطفل.

8- Existent: the role that describes an entity that belongs to such as the entity's profession, shape, manner, etc. The NPs the house and البيت are existent. Existents are mostly occurring in the copula sentences. It is worth notice that in the Arabic language the verbal copula is null or deleted. In (9b), the sentence originally is لون البيت هو الأبيض. The copula "هو lit. it" is deleted (cf. Eisele, 1999, pp. 99- 147)

14- a. The house is white

b. لون البيت أبيض.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have provided a comparison of the application of the Pro-drop parameter and Theta principle in Arabic and English language. I have highlighted some of the main differences between the two languages' grammar. One of the most significant differences is that Arabic does not always require a subject because the verb carries the feature of the subject and if it was omitted the verb will compromise for it's absent. However, the subject in English carries some features that are not presented in the verb and its omission results in a meaningless sentence. The dependent entity of the subject in the Arabic language has given the subject the free inversion feature where it can freely change place with the verb in the sentence. Under those circumstances, the Arabic language cannot have expletive pronouns feature. The expletive pronoun can only be found in the English language because as stated before the English sentence cannot stand without a subject so in case of the absents of a

subject, English sentence uses the expletive pronouns, which have no semantic feature but still carry the syntactic feature of the subject. Furthermore, some examples were provided to show how theta principles can be applied in Arabic sentences in comparison with English. The general description of this research can be further investigated and developed.

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