

A Semantic Study of 'Verbs to be' in Modern Standard English & 'Defective Verbs' in Modern Standard Arabic

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Abstract

This study focuses on analyzing and contrasting the meanings of "verbs to be" in Modern Standard English (MSE) and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) to reveal the features of similarity and difference between them. It is meant to point out the difficulty of "existence" in the two languages context.

It is concluded that both MSE and MSA have fourteen aspects of similarity as well as eleven aspects of difference. In relation to the similarities, the two languages have the existence meaning in continuous active forms, orders, destiny, and wish of another person when 'be' is an auxiliary verb in English. In addition, Arabic is similar to English in some features such as existence implied in using 'kāna'; existence denoting physical and mental conditions; age, size, price, colour; the existence implied in the predicate +adv., prep. particles in nominal sentences; existence in possession; the meaning of "become"; "get"; "go, come"; and the meaning of "Ṣāra".

— As for the differences, in this respect, Arabic has no auxiliary or ordinary 'defective verbs', tenses structure like English, passive forms of 'kana wa akhawatuha', intention, possibility, supposition, and mutual arrangement. On the other hand, English has no divisions of general existence, special existence, continuous existence, and the one implied in the predicate in nominal sentences. The number of 'verbs to be' are eight only compared to thirteen in Arabic; no extra verbs follow the main 'defective verbs', the existence is very clear by the 'verbs to be' compared with the implied existence of Arabic predicate in nominal sentences, and finally English 'verbs to be' are not formed by adding a prefix like the Arabic 'verbs to be' mā+zāla = māzāla, mā+ dāma = mādāma, and etc.

The present research includes an introduction, definitions of basic terms and three sections. Introduction is about the theoretical perspective regarding the theory of contrastive analysis (CA) on which the research is based. Section one presents the meanings of 'verbs to be' in English and 'defective verbs = kana wa akhawatuha' in Arabic. In Section Two we have contrastive analysis of both MSE and MSA concerning their similarities and differences, Section Three is conclusions and recommendations.

Introduction

Generally speaking, English language has been rapidly developing; everyday one meets a new word or usage. Therefore, people should keep in touch with such developments to be well-informed about language. One of these developments is what is called "Contrastive Analysis" which means to compare two or more than two languages in order to reveal the aspects of similarity and difference.

This study is one of its applications. It is about the meaning of "verbs to be" in MSE and MSA. In English, these verbs have eight forms, i.e., is, are, am, was, were, be, being, and been. These verbs are of two categories: an auxiliary verb and an ordinary verb.

In Arabic, "verbs to be" are called 'kāna wa akhawātuha' or 'defective verbs'. They are thirteen verbs: kāna, aṣḥaba, zalla, amsā, bāta, ṣara, leisā, adha, mādāma, mābariha, māfati'a, māzāla, and manfakka.

In this paper, the researcher tries to solve or decrease the degree of difficulty of ambiguity faced by EFL learners in understanding 'verbs to be' and 'defective verbs'

in the two languages. The phonological system used in transliteration is adopted from “Encyclopedia of Islam” Vol. 1. E.j. Brill, Leiden (1967).

Definition of Basic Terms:

a- Contrastive Analysis (CA):

"It is a linguistic enterprise aimed at producing inverted (i.e contrastive, not comparative) two –valued typologies (a CA is always concerned with a pair of languages), and founded on the assumption that languages can be compared" (James, 1980:3).

b- Foreign Language (FL):

It is the language that a learner learns, understands, and utters through academic courses or acquires through contact with the native speakers, (Nasr, 1972: 17 and Broughton *et al*, 1980:6).

c- Modern Standard English (MSE):

It is the variety of English used in writing and print taught in schools to the students of English as a foreign language and it is spoken by scholars and educated people, (Yule, 1985: 180 and Carter, 1993: 65).

d- Modern Standard Arabic: (MSA)

It is the variety of classical Arabic used in official writing, science and learning and it is the language of literature of theatre, and of the press, radio and television. (Al-Ani, 1970:18).

e- Semantics:

"It, roughly defined, is the study of meaning". (Bissantz and Johnson, 1985: 175,).

The Arabic consonant and vowel sounds in the present study

Sounds	Examples	English meaning
ʔ	ʔmir	prince
B	bab	door
T	tamr	dates
Th	Tha'lab	fox
J(researcher changed di to j)	jadid	new
H	hadid	iron
D	dar	house
Dh	dhayl	tail
R	rajul	man
Z	Zir	jar
S	safara	traveled
Sh	sham'a	candle
S	salat	prayer
D	marid	patient
T	tayr	bird
,	ayn	eye
Gh	ghubar	dust
F	fawakih	fruit
K	kalb	dog
K	kalam	pencil
L	layl	night
M	miftah	key
N	nar	fire
H	Hamish	margin
W	warda	flower
Y	yara	see
Z	zulm	injustice
A	walad	boy
U	dub	bear
I	miftah	key
A	bab	door
U	sura	picture
I	Fil	elephant

This phonological system was adopted from “Encyclopedia of Islam” Vol. 1. E.j. Brill, Leiden, (1967).

Section One

A "Verbs to be" in MSE:

According to Eckersley and Eckersley (1960: 192) the verb to be is a verb of incomplete predication, i.e., it requires something else (called the complement) to complete its meaning such as: (Your dinner is ready), (His father was a famous man). In this part, 'verbs to be' in MSE, there are two kinds of 'verbs to be' that we should take into account, i.e., 'be' as an auxiliary verb and 'be' as an ordinary verb.

1. 'Be' as an auxiliary verb:

1.1 Form:

Principal parts: be, was, been

Gerund / present participle: being

Present tense : is, are , am

Past tense : was , were

(Thomson and Martinet, 1986: 116)

1.2 Use:

1.2.1 'Be' is used to form tenses: (Ibid).

a. in continuous active forms:

-He is working hard.

- He will be studying hard.

b. in all passive forms:

-He was killed .

1.2.2 be+inf construction to show:

a- Orders meaning must or ought:

-He is to stay here till we return.

b- Intention:

-They are to be married in May.

c- Possibility

- The book was not to be sold. (=could not be).

d- Supposition or unreal condition:

-If it were to rain (= if it rained) tomorrow.

e- Destiny (chiefly past tense):

-He was never to see his wife and family again.

f- Mutual arrangement:

-We are to be married in May.

g- Wish of another person:

-At what time am I (=do you want me) to be there?

h- Purpose:

-The telegram was to say that she had been delayed. (Hornby, 1974: 68; Swan, 1980: 97; Al-Wahab, 1990: 115).

1.2.3 be about to + inf., to show the immediate futures, (Thomson and Martinet, 1986: 118):

-They are about to start. (=they are on the point of starting)

1.2.4 Passive infinitive of 'find', 'see', and 'congratulate' in structure with 'be': (Swan, 1988: 97).

-The watch is nowhere to be found.

2. 'Be' as an ordinary verb:

2.1 Form : as in (1.1)

2.2 Use :

2.2.1 Existence : be + adj/n./prep. (Hornby, 1974: 68; Praninskas, 1975: 7; Azar, 1998: 17)

- a- denoting a person or a thing or to give information about them:
 - Tom is a doctor. (be +n.)
 - The horse is in the garden. (be + prep.)
 - The house is large. (be + adj.)
- b- with a preposition or adverbial particle, indicating place:
 - The cat is on the table. (prep. particle)
 - The ball is upstairs. (adv. particle)
- c- Physical or mental condition:
 - I am cold. (physical)
 - She is unhappy. (mental)
- d- indicating size, weight, age, colour, and prices:
 - The building is large.
 - How old are you? I am 30.
- e- referring to possession, actual or intended when 'be' is used with a noun or a preposition:
 - The money's not yours, it's John's. (noun).
 - The watch is for you. (preposition)
- f- be, when a linking verb, means 'become':
 - He wants to be a doctor .
- g- It can also mean 'go, come' (when paying a visit):
 - I've been to see my aunt.
- h- It means 'get': (Low, 1986: 55).
 - You can be there in five minutes .

B: "Verbs to be" in MSA:

In Arabic, the sense of 'verbs to be' can be found in what is called 'kana wa akhawātuḥā' as well as it is shown in nominal sentences, especially when it is genitive (= prepositional phrase) or adverb (Ibn-Akeel, 1980: 201). There are nearly thirteen particles of 'kana wa akhawātuḥā' such as: kāna, ḡalla, bāta, adhā, aṣḡabaḡa, ṣāra, leisa, māzāla, mābariḡa, mafati'a, manfakka, and māḡāma. Arabic grammarians call them (af'alunnakisa = incomplete verbs) since their meanings remain imperfect in the sentences until we mention their predicate and such verbs can refer to existence (Al-Makhzumi, 1964: 176, 180 and Al-Sammarra'i, 2003:190). In addition, they abrogate the rule of subject and predicate, i.e., they change the final /u/ (the nominal case) of their predicate into accusative (i.e. pronouncing the final consonant /a/) (Cowan, 1980: 349, 968). Following Al-Makhzumi, the researcher will divide 'kāna wa akhawātuḥā' concerning existence into three groups excluding 'ṣāra' and 'leisa' because they have no sense of existence as Al-Makhzumi (1964:180) thinks.

1. General Existence

1.1 kāna

a- It means "existence of a thing in the past":(Hassan, 1974: 549)

أشرفت الشمس فكان النور.

Ashrakat ashshamsu fakāna annour.

The sun rose and was the light*.

The sun rose and there was the light. (The researcher's translation).

b- It can mean 'to stay without stopping, i.e., continuity without a certain time': (ibid)

وكان الله غفوراً رحيمًا. (النساء: ٩٦)

Wa kāna allahu ḡhafūran rahīma.

Allah was forgiving and merciful*.

And allah is Ever Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Al-Hilali and Khan, 1404 A.H. :126) (An-Nisa', 96).

c- It can also mean 'to become': (Al-Sammarra?i, 203:197).

جمد الماء فكان تَلْجًا.

Jamada alma?u fakāna thaljan.

The water froze and was ice*.

When water froze it would become ice. (The researcher's translation)

It is worth mentioning that there are some other verbs that follow 'kāna' like 'istakkarra' (=to reside) 'hasala' (=to happen), 'wajada' (=to find), and 'hadatha' (=to happen), (Al-Makhzumi, 1964: 180).

2. Special Existence:

2.1 aṣḥāḥa

a- It mainly indicates 'the existence in the morning': (ibid)

اصبح الساهر متعباً.

Aṣḥāḥa assāhiru mut'aban .

The staying up person became tired*.

The staying up person became tired in the morning. (The researcher's translation)

b- It also means 'sara' (= to become): (Hassan, 1974: 554)

اصبح الطالب طبيباً.

Aṣḥāḥa aṭṭalibu ṭabībān.

The pupil became doctor*.

The student became a doctor. (The researcher's translation)

2.2 amsā

a- It denotes 'the existence in the evening': (Al-Jarim and Amin, 1966: 63)

امسى الحارس.

Amsa alḥārisu .

The guard entered the evening*.

The guard ḥas was awake at night. (The researcher's translation)

b- It also means 'sara' (=to become): (Hassan, 1974: 555 and Al-Turfi, 1986: 145)

امسى النهار بارداً.

Amsa annahāru bāridān .

The day evening cold*.

The evening became cold. (The researcher's translation)

2.3 adhā

a- It refers to 'the existence in the time of forenoon': (Hassan, 1974: 555 and Al-Jarim and Amin, 1966: 63)

أضحى النائم.

Adha anna?imu.

The sleeper entered the forenoon*.

He was sleeping until forenoon. (The researcher's translation)

2.4 zalla

a- It refers to 'the existence in the day' (Al-Makhzumi, 1964: 180)

ظلّ الجو معتدلاً.

Zalla aljawwu mu'tadilan .

The weather stayed moderate*.

The weather was moderate. (The researcher's translation)

b- It means 'ṣara': (Al-Sammarra?i, 2003: 215)

إذا فقد الإنسان عزيزاً ظلّ حزيناً.

Idha fakada al?insanu azīzan zalha ḥazīnan.

If the man lost precious stayed unhappy*.

If the man lost his beloved he became unhappy. (The researcher's translation)

c- It indicates 'continuity': (Hassan, 1974:554)

ظَلَّ الحَرُّ.

Zalla alḥarru.

The hot weather stays*.

The warmth continued . (The researcher's translation)

2.5 bāta

a- It denotes 'the existence at night': (Al-Makhzumi, 1964:180)

باتَ القائدُ ساهراً.

Bāta alkā'idu sāhiran .

The leader slept staying up*.

The leader stayed up at night. (The researcher's translation)

(Al-Makhzumi, 1964: 180) says that the Arab grammarians neglected to mention another verb 'ghada' which indicates the same existence as the verbs in special existence.

3. Continuous Existence: This sense is represented by the following:

3.1 māzāla

ما زالَ الجوُّ بارداً.

Māzāla aljawwou bāridan.

The weather still cold*.

The weather is still cold. (The researcher's translation)

3.2 manfakka

ما أنفكَّ العاملُ نشيطاً.

Manfakka ala'milu nashīṭan.

The worker still active*.

The worker is still active. (The researcher's translation)

3.3 mabāriha

ما برحَ الجنديُّ شجاعاً.

Mābariha aljundiyyu shujā'an .

The soldier still courageous*.

The soldier is still courageous. (The researcher's translation)

3.4 māfati'a

ما فتىَ الربيعُ جميلاً.

Māfati'a arrabi'u jamīlan.

The spring still beautiful*.

The spring is still beautiful. (The researcher's translation)

3.5 mādāma

يفيدُ الأكلُ ما دامَ المرءُ جائعاً.

Yufidu ala?klu mādāma almar'u jā'ia'n .

Food useful as long as the person hungry*.

As long as the person is hungry, food is useful. (The researcher's translation)

Some other particles in this respect should be added such as 'istammarra', 'māwujida', 'mastakarra', and 'māḥasala', since they denote the continuous existence (Al-Makhzumi, 1964: 180).

4. The Existence Implied in the Predicate of the Nominal Sentences:

It is one form of genitive (=either prepositional particle or adverbial particle) to have the meaning of 'ka'in' (Ibn Akeel,1980: 210 and Al-Turfi, 1986: 144).

4.1 Genitive (prepositional particle):

عليّ في الدار.

Aliyyun fiddār.

Ali in the house*.

Ali is in the house. (The researcher's translation)

The meaning of the existence here is that 'aliyyun kā'inun fiddar'.

4.2 Genitive (adverbial particle):

الطائر فوق الشجرة.

Attā'iru fawaka ashshajaratī.

The bird on the tree*.

The bird is on the tree. (The researcher's translation)

The meaning here is also 'atta'iru kā'inun fawka ashshajaratī'. (Al-Makhzumi, 1964: 180).

Section Two

2. Contrastive Analysis of 'Verbs to be' in MSE & 'Defective verbs' in MSA:

2.1 Similarities:

(a) Be as an auxiliary verb:

1- Be, when used in continuous active forms, is similar to the Arabic 'defective verbs' in continuous existence such as māzāla, manfakka, mābariḥa, māfati'a, istamarra, mādamā, māwujida, and mahasala:

- He is working hard. (English)

- māzāla aljawwu bāridan. (Arabic = The weather is still cold)

2- When English 'be' is used to give orders in 'be + inf.', the Arabic has a similar sense by the imperative case of 'kāna', zalla', 'aṣbaḥa', 'amsa', and 'bāta':

- He is to stay here till we return. (English)

- Kun ḥakīman fi mu'ālatati al'umūri. (Arabic = You should be wise when dealing with matters), (The researcher's translation)

3- 'Destiny' by 'be +inf.' is found in both English and Arabic 'kana' only:

- He was never to see his wife and family again. (English)

- kāna muḥaddaran lahu an la yara zawjatahu marratan ukhra. (Arabic = He was never to see his wife again), (The researcher's translation)

4- 'Wish' of another person by 'be+inf'. can also be shown by both English and Arabic 'kāna':

- At what time am I to be there. (English)

- Arju an takūna ma'anā. (Arabic = I hope you are to be with us.)

5- With regard to the English construction 'be about to +inf.' denoting immediate future, Arabic has the same reference by three ways. The first is by the predicate (prep. or adv. Particles) in nominal sentences. The second is by the general existence. Finally, by the special existence:

- They are about to start. (English)

- kāna ala washaki alfawzi. (Arabic = He was about to win.)

- asbaha ala washaki annihaya. (Arabic = He was about to finish.)

6- Both English & Arabic have the same meaning of the verb 'to find' when using 'be' to mean existence:

- She is nowhere to be found (English)

- Innahu gheiru mawjūdin filbeit. (Arabic = He is not found in the house.)

b- Be as an ordinary verb:

1- When English 'verbs to be' mean 'existence', the Arabic existence is implied in the verbs used in sentences:

- Tom is a doctor. (English)

- Ashraḳati ashshamsu fakāna annuru. (Arabic = When the sun rose the light would spread.)

2- Existence denoting physical or mental conditions appears in both English & Arabic 'kāna wa akhawātuha' (i.e. kāna, aṣḥaḥa, zaḥḥa, amsā, bāta, adhā, māzalā, manfakka, mābariḥa, māfati?a, and māḍāma):

- I am cold.

- She is unhappy.

} **English**

- Aṣḥaḥa aṭṭalibu mujiddan. (Arabic = The student became hard-working.)

3- The sense of existence can be shown in English and Arabic when dealing with 'age', 'size', 'price', and 'colour', i.e., either by the 'defective verbs' or by the nominal sentences (subject & predicate):

- Ali is ten years old.

- The wall is white.

- The house is large.

- How much is the banana? It is 5.

} **English**

- Māzāla umruhu ṣaghīran. (Arabic = He is still little.)

4- Another similarity is shared by the two languages by the construction of 'be+ adverbial/prepositional particle', i.e., it is implied in the predicate of the nominal sentences to mean 'kā?in' (= existence) of Arabic.

- The cat is in the garden. (be +prep. Particle). (English)

- The man is upstairs. (be +adv. Particle). (English)

- Aliyyun fiddāri. (Arabic = Ali is in the house.)

- Alṭa?iru fawḥa ashahajarati. (Arabic = The bird is on the tree.)

5- When referring to 'possession' in English, the same reference is found in Arabic 'kāna wa akhawātuha':

- The picture is for you. (English)

- Yakūnu almalu laka idha ḥabilta ashsharta. (Arabic = If you accept the condition the money will be for you.)

6- Both English 'verbs to be' and Arabic 'kāna wa akwātuha' can mean 'get'. The meaning of Arabic existence is shown by both 'kāna' & 'aṣḥaḥa':

- You can get there in five minutes. (English)

- Yumkinuka ?an takūna hunaaka khilala sa'atin wahidatin. (Arabic=You can get there in one hour.)

7- The meaning of 'verbs to be' found in (go & come) is common in English and Arabic 'kāna', 'aṣḥaḥa', 'amsā', and 'bāta':

- I've been to Baghdad. (English ⇒ to pay a visit)

- Kuntu fi bābila ?amsi. (Arabic = I went to Babylon yesterday.)

- ?amseitu inda ṣadiki albārihata. (Arabic = I visited my friend yesterday evening.)

8- Arabic 'verbs to be' (kāna, aṣḥaḥa, amsā, adhā, and zaḥḥa), when meaning 'sara' They are similar to the English 'be' when meaning 'to become':

- He wants to be a doctor. (English)

- Adha aljawwu baridan. (Arabic= The weather became cold.)

3.2 Differences

Unlike similarities, differences will be listed or discussed without referring to whether 'be' is an auxiliary or an ordinary verb, i.e., in general:

1- There is no auxiliary or ordinary verb in Arabic, but in English.

2- Unlike English, Arabic 'kāna wa akhawātuha' (=defective verbs) do not form tenses.

3- No passive forms in Arabic 'defective verbs' while English does have.

4- It is only in English that 'be +inf.' construction can refer to intention, possibility, supposition (unreal condition), mutual arrangement, and purpose, but no existence for them in Arabic 'defective verbs'.

5- No divisions of general existence, special existence, continuous existence, and the existence implied in the predicate of the nominal sentences in English, but only in Arabic.

6- There are eight 'verbs to be' in English, whereas Arabic has thirteen 'defective verbs'.

7- Arabic has some verbs following the verbs 'kana' in function, like 'istakkarra', 'ḥaṣala', 'wajada', and 'ḥadatha', but English has no verbs following the 'verbs to be'.

8- All the eight forms of 'verbs to be' in English have the same function when coming in one context, but Arabic ones have different meanings in the same context, for example:

- He is to be a doctor.
- I am to be a doctor.
- They are to be doctors. } English ⇒ the meaning is 'existence'.

While in Arabic, we have 'zalla' = the existence in the day, 'asbaha' = in the morning, 'amsā' = in the evening, 'adhā' = in the time of afternoon, and 'bāta' = at night.

9- Arabic 'verbs to be' (kāna, māzāla, mābariha, māfati'a, manfakka, and mādamā) have the meaning of continuity without referring to certain time, but English 'verbs to be' should take (-ing) form or should be in the progressive to show continuity. For example:

- He is being threatened. /He is writing a letter now. (English)

While Arabic:

- Māzāla alwaḥtu mubakkiran lil'amali. (= It is too early to work.)

10- The existence of Arabic predicate in nominal sentences is implicit, but it is explicit in English:

- He is a student. (English) ⇒ explicit

- Aliyyun fiddari. (Arabic) ⇒ implied.

11- We have some 'defective verbs' in Arabic which are formed by adding a prefix (ma), for example, in 'continuous existence' verbs: mā-zāla, mā-bāriha, ma-dama, ma-fati'a, and ma-infakka, while such a prefix is not used in English 'verbs to be'.

Section Three

3.1 Conclusions

It has been concluded that both MSE & MSA are similar in fourteen aspects and different in eleven ones in terms of 'verbs to be'.

In relation to similarities (when 'be' is an auxiliary verb) MSE & MSA share the following features: continuous existence, existence in (orders, destiny, wish, immediate future), the verb 'to find' implying existence; (when 'be' is an ordinary verb) the two languages are similar in: existence between 'verbs to be' and 'kana', existence denoting physical and mental condition, existence showing 'age', 'size', 'price', and 'colour', existence shown by (be + adv./prep. particle) in English and that is implied in the predicate of the nominal sentences in Arabic, existence in possession, existence by 'be' meaning 'to get', 'go & come', and 'to become'.

As for differences, the two languages are different in: the number of 'verbs to be' compared to 'defective verbs', the existence of auxiliary or ordinary verbs in Arabic, the tenses, the passive forms, some constructions which are not found in MSA and found in MSE and vice versa, the using of (-ing) form, the using of prefixes, and whether there are some verbs follow 'verbs to be' or 'defective verbs' in the two languages.

3.2 Recommendations

Although, so far, some aspects of similarity and difference between MSE & MSA have been revealed through this study, it still seems that there is some ambiguity concerning the area of 'verbs to be'. Therefore, the researcher hopes to recommend the following points which are of great value in the field of methodology, translation, syllabus design, teacher training, etc.:

- 1- English teachers can successfully present the information to the students by making use of similarities between the native language and the second language.
- 2- Those who are in charge of teaching English, must guide students to understand 'verbs to be' through contexts, and differentiate between 'be' as an auxiliary verb and an ordinary verb.
- 3- 'Verbs to be' should be studied individually according to languages (MSE & MSA), to avoid the interference.
- 4- It is the job of English teachers to distinguish between 'be' as a 'linking verb' and a 'verb to be', by giving more practice on such a point.
- 5- Teachers of English should pay more attention to English than Arabic concerning 'verbs to be' in their teaching since the Arabic lacks such verbs.

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