A Contrastive Analysis of Derivational Prefixation of Verbs in Arabic and English

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Abstract

This paper attempts a contrastive analysis of derivational prefixation of verbs in Arabic and English. It assumes a possibility of similar derivational mechanism applicable to some verbs in the two languages. The derivational systems of the two languages are at extremes, creating challenges to interested learners and researchers from both languages. The contrastive analysis method is adopted to carry out this study. A general contrast of the morphological system of the two language is provided focusing on the category of verbs in the two languages. The paper narrows its scope to one area derivational morphology, namely prefixation. A set of six prefixes from the two languages (three from each) are used the examine the derivational processing of verbs from the two languages. These are the English prefixes; a-, en- and i and their Arabic counterparts humazat alqatae (Ɂ-), in- and humazat wasal (i-) respectfully. The morphological properties of these prefixes and verbs have been contrasted to reveal and identify the areas of difference and similarity of the derivation system in the two languages. Some of these prefixes affixes are found have similar function and form and have the similar morphological behavior that might set them as identical cognates .

Keywords: derivation, root, triconsonantal root, prefix, humazat wasal, humazat alqatae.

1. Introduction

1.1. Contrastive analysis at a contrast

Contrastive analysis has flourished and dominated the scene of language teaching, acquisition and research in1960s and 70s. It was stimulated by Lado's book Linguistics Across Cultures. Lado in fact develops his contrastive analysis perspective adopting Fries assumption that "The most effective materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner." [see Lado 1971:1]. It follows that contrastive analysis was pedagogically oriented and largely recommended for the improvement of foreign/second language teaching. He (i.e. Lado) has introduced a bunch of significances of contrastive analysis for the targets of language teaching and testing as well as for research on language.[ibid:2-8]. The availability of adequate data about the similarities and dissimilarities found at basic levels of linguistic analysis (pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar), such data would serve the different targets just mentioned. It could also points to the of the potential language learning difficulties.

On one hand, a language learner who comes in contact with a foreign language would encounter some easy features of the target language and other extremely difficult ones. He would easily handle the element similar to his native language and the different elements would arise the difficulties. Teachers, on the other hand, would have on basis of the comparisons of the foreign language and the native language of their students, have the advance in preparing new teaching materials that meet the needs of their students and to accurately diagnose the difficulties his pupils have in learning each pattern. Furthermore, contrastive analysis could be effective for language testing. If testing is to detect the language learning problems, the systematic comparison provided by contrastive analysis could better draw them to our focus. The account so far given about contrastive analysis gives it great merit and significance of contrastive analysis but what there in the opposite episode? Let the beginning be from the history and the theoretical foundations of contrastive analysis.

The precedence of introducing contrastive analysis by western linguists in the mid twentieth century is questioned and doubted by some Arab researchers. Jassem and Jassem for example have cited come evidence from Arabic heritage that the practice of contrastive analysis could be traced throughout the medieval Arabic. They cited [Jassem & Jassem,2001: pp. 244-248] examples from different classic Arabic authors such as Aljahiz , Alsuti and Alfraheedi who describe and diagnose some language learning problems. Alsuti and Alfraheedi for example dealt with some speech disorder such lisp. Al-Jahiz "elaborated on the problem of lisping, and some of the defects of tongue for some people. In introducing this question, he points to the learning of foreigners to the sounds of the Arabic language, and he mentioned causes the lisp; and how to cure it." [ibid:246]. These linguists has also investigate the interference of the mother tongue in learning the target language where learners rely on their knowledge of their native language to overcome the difficulties they encounter in the target language. And just as 20th century contrastive analysis linguists recommend the practice of sounds that are difficult to pronounce in the target language, Al-Jahiz has as well referred to this.

Contrastive analysis has of course received much of criticism. The problem of contrastive analysis hypothesis with structuralism has aroused earlier. "The transformational linguists assumed that that the structures of language are finite. Therefore, the assumption that languages can be compared lost ground because it is not possible to categorize infinite structures." Yang[1992:139]. It was accused of failing to predict learning difficulties. Some empirical research on language learning does not support the assumption that contrastive analysis be could a predicator of learning difficulties. [Yang, ibid:141-143]   .

1. 2. The nature of root in the two languages

Morphology; the linguistic discipline that deals with the structure and formation of word ,is termed in Arabic as Elim Al-saraf. This discipline studies the changes in the structure of word and form to decide the root and the other additional word elements. The rules that govern the morphological processes in Arabic are characterized by a high degree of complexity but they have their grounds on distinct regularities. These regularities are generated out of a morphological scale that basically adopts a triconsonantal root. The rationale for choosing a triconsonantal root [see Al-Hamlwi, 20**:53] is that most of the Arabic words are triconsonantal and thus the Arab linguistics have considered the origin of words to be made up of three letters.

In fact the showing the differences and the nature of the term root in the Arabic and English is crucial for understanding the morphological system of each these two languages. Generally the root in English is a lexical root whereas in Arabic it is a functional one. Arabic language, in contrast to the English one, has s thoroughly different concept of the term root. It cannot be identified in terms of grammatical categories (i.e. verb, noun, adjective..etc.). Arabic roots are empty roots either triconsonantal or teteraconsonanatal but it is basically triconsonantal.. In Arabic the root "is a relatively invariable discontinuous bound morpheme, represented by two to five phonemes, typically three consonants in a certain order, which interlocks with a pattern to form a stem and which has lexical meaning" [Ryding.2005:45]. Arabic grammarian represent these three consonants by the letters as ف-ع-ل . Affixes are to be added to this root to produce different word patterns. The function of these affixes (10 in number) and their insertion in the root is clearly elaborated by these grammarians. [Hamlwi, ibid:192-196]. Arabic affixes include seven consonants (?, t, m, n, s, y, w); / and three vowels(/a/, /i/, and /u/).

Arabic derivational system, on bases of the components mentioned above, proves to be a very productive one. A single root may result in numerous forms belonging to a particular semantic domain that is indicated by the lexical meaning included in that root. The Arabic root رسم which means to draw (a picture) can produce the following derivational forms:
he painted rasama (v.) رسم
painting rasm (n.)
painter rassam (n.)
painters (pl. masc.) rassamun (n.)
painters (pl. fem.) rassamat (n.)
drawing (singular) rasmah (n.)
paintings (plural) rusumat (n.)
paintings (plural) ruswum (n.)
studio, place for painting marsam (n.)

In English language the a root is a meaningful morpheme. It is the "core of a word…that…. denot[s] the morpheme that makes the most precise and concrete contribution to the word's meaning."[McCarthy, 2002:20]. This differentiation is most probably due to mechanism of lexical acquisition (the term is used here to refer to the way a language adds a word to its lexis) in each of the two languages. As for English, it has the dynamic feature of free lexical borrowing where words can be freely taken over from another languages. These words might not be fully linguistically absorbed in the linguistic system of the language (i.e. English). Sometimes the word undergoes assimilation in the process of its phonetic borrowing but retains some of its other original properties as we will see later in this section. Some words gain a very high frequency of usage due to special occasions, particularly the political ones. Though these words have literal equivalents in English but these English equivalents may not fully express the sense of the target word. The word 'fatwa', to cite one example is defined in the Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary as 'a decision or order made under Islamic law'. The word has become widespread and made a vast currency in western media in the late 1980. This is after the British Indian novelist Salman Rushdie has published his novel, The Satanic Verses, in 1988. The subject of the novel was thought to be offensive and insulting to Muhammad, the Prophet to Islam. It rouses protests against him in several countries. The great reaction was the famous fatwa given by Al-Khomeini (the Supreme Leader of Iran) , calling for the assassination of Salman Rushdie.

Upon considering the properties of the word fatwa in English, it can be treated as inflectional root; the plural is fatwas, but it is not subject to morphological processes. The verb form from fatwa is to be assisted by another English lexical item such as 'give' or 'issue' and thus we have give or issue fatwa.

Arabic, on other hand, lays heavy constrains on the process of lexical borrowing. We can refer to one major mechanism in this regard; namely Arabicization which is a translation strategy that aims at naturalizing the form of the target word by converting it from the source language into Arabic language. Arabicization has emerged from the need for Arabic equivalents to foreign words especially scientific terms. When a foreign word is being Arabicized, it fully acquires the properties of the Arabic word and as for the concern of the present paper, the morphological properties are the ones that matter. Most evidently an Arabicized foreign word fits with the Arabic morphological scale as we can see in the example of the Arabic word تَ لـ فاز (the Arabicized form of the English word 'television'. The Arabic root of this word is a quad consonantal (تَ لـ فز) one and it can processed into the following morphological and inflectional forms:

تَ لـ فاز (television)
مـ تَـ لـ فز (being televised)
تَ لـ فزة (televising)
تَ لـ فازات (televisions)

2. Data and methodology

This paper examines, on basis of the principles of contrastive analysis, the rules underlying the process of verb derivation in Arabic and English. A formal description of the general morphological system in the two languages will be provided.

The data would be selected from Arabic and English dictionaries. Basic entry verb form restricts the selection of the data . The derivation tools to be studied are the three English prefixes; a-, en- and i and their Arabic counterparts, humazat alqatae (ʔ-),in- and humazat wasal(i-) respectfully. The morphological properties of these prefixes and verbs will be contrasted to reveal and identify the areas of difference and similarity of the derivation system in the two languages.

3. The Analysis

The discipline of morphology receives a wide coverage in linguistic research. As for the scope of the present paper, only the derivation of the category of verbs will be dealt with. Arabic as we have seen earlier develops a root-pattern derivational system, generally based on a trilateral root, that allows the derivation of ten verb patterns. [Catford. J.C et al [1974:105]. Unlike Arabic, English is not a typically derivational language. It does not prove restrict regular and systematic derivational behavior as in the case of Arabic language. The structural description of verbs in English more likely points to their forms in terms of inflectional endings; -s, -ed and –ing. But with regard to their derivational affixation we refer to derived verb form from other verbs (active-activate), from other word categories as in befriend from friend (noun to verb) or as in soften from the adjective soft.

As set for the target of this paper, we will trace some English verbs that might have the probability to undergo derivational processes similar to the ones in Arabic language. In the following section a set of six prefixes from the two languages (three from each) the examine the derivational processing of these verbs.

3.1. The English prefix a- and the Arabic humazat alqatae ʔ-

The prefix a- (in English) and the humazat alqatae ʔ- (in Arabic) are verb derivational affixes in the two languages. The nature of this Arabic prefix (i.e. hamza) worth some elaboration. In Arabic the hamza (counterpart of English glottal stop) is the 29th letter in the Arabic alphabetical system. Rules about hamza in Arabic [see The Writing System of Modern Standard Arabic,1976: 217-219] are a confusing area and we would only tackle those rules that might have relevance to making the contrast with the English prefix e-. This hamza is of two kinds; humazat alqatae and humazat wasal. The former is recognized as the letter symbolized by ء It may be written above the letters waw and yaa , below or above the letter alif or written dependently. When written. with the letter alif , it is the type of humazat alqatae. But in case it does not appear in writing, then the type of humazat wasal

The humazat alqatae is a trilateral verb derivational prefix. It can function as a class maintaining prefix. The English prefix a- is a class changing and class maintaining prefix reduced form of the Old English preposition on. It [Hiensleighi, 1859:1] corresponds to the German er implying a completion of action. as seen in the German verb erwachen, meaning to wake up from a state of sleep.

It can be suggested here that Arabic humazat alqatae and the English prefix a- are cognate prefixes. Let us consider the following examples:

i. The prefix a- can be added to the root shame to form the verb ashame which means to cause to feel ashamed. Similarly the prefix humazat alqatae can be attached before the Arabic root noun خجل (shame) to derive verb أخجل (ashame). It should be noted that the prefix a- in ashame has only a functional role ; that it changes the word form from one grammatical category to another. The Arabic humazat alqatae in contrast, does not only derive the verb form, but further determines its peculiar meanings. In Arabic to ashame someone is to make him feel shy by praising him, to bore him or to embarrass him.

Another example for a- and hamza prefixes are the rise (n.) , arise (v.) in English and their Arabic equivalents أنهض. ,نهض

3.1.2.The English prefix a- results from the assimilation of the Latin prefix ad-. This is a type of total assimilation to particular roots. "Total assimilation occurs most frequently in borrowed words in which prefixes ending in consonants are attached to roots beginning with a non-identical consonant." [Stockwell, Minkova 2001: 101]. The prefix ad- is assimilated to a- when added to particular roots that begin with consonants c, f, g, r, s and t. [see Hiensleighi, 1859:21].

One example is rive and arrive. When added to rive, the prefix –ad is totally assimilated to –a. Tracing the origin of the noun rive [see Ayto, 2005:35], reveals that this word originated from the Latin noun rīpa or riparian meaning shore or a river bank. The prefix ad- (expressing the toward a direction), is then attached to the word rīpam (bank or shore) and results in the verb *arripāre 'come to land' which seems to be become later the Anglo-French ariver and finally it has its way to English lexis as arrive. The sense of verb, as oriented by its origin, is related to reaching a particular destination (i.e. come to river shore) but later generalized to refer to any destination. Then, it further becomes semantically involved to express other meanings that imply the making of achievement, success or power.

The Arabic counterpart that corresponds to the original meaning of the Latin noun rīpa (the source of the English river) is the noun bahr which means sea or river. The derivational processing of the verb out of this noun root in Arabic, is more significantly, similar to the way shown in the case of the English verb above . The cognate of the English prefix a- (the Arabic prefix hamza) is added to the noun root (meaning river or sea), to derives the verb form [ʔabhara] meaning to sail.. It worth mentioning in this regard that the Arabic word bahr is generally taken as the equivalent to the English word sea. It is fact, is more probably due to its occurrence in scientific terminology which tend to distinguish it from river. But the word ……. is used in Arabic [Ibn Manzour, V.2, 2003:25] is used to refer to earth as it could might be opposing to water and much water in particular whether salty or not. It also refers to every great river as the River Nile.

3.2. The English prefix en- and the Arabic prefix in-

The prefix en- (with its allomorph em-)[see MacCarthy,ibid:55 and Hiensleighi, ibid:517] is often used to form verbs from English nouns, meaning 'cause to become X' or 'cause to possess or enter X'. Examples includes , enslave, empower, , enthrone and entomb. It is also added to English adjectives to form causative verbs (cp. enlarge embitter, enable, ennoble,).

The cognate prefix of the English en- in Arabic is the prefix in-. Both of the two prefixes are pronounced as [in]. The kind of derivative causative verbs as just referred to in the case of English verbs are also proposed by Arab linguists who use of the prefix in- as a derivative verb prefix.

The letter i in the Arabic prefix in- is originally a hamza. This prefix consists of two letters the hamza and the letter noon (n). The Arabic verb pattern in which the derivational prefix is used is infaʕal. In this pattern in- is the prefix , [f-ʕ-l] is the trilateral root and the a which appears twice in the pattern is an additional vowel affix. Additional vowel affixes in Arabic function as parsing signs. They are not derivational morphemes. These additional vowels or parsing signs are added at the beginning and end of words or inserted between consonant letters to show how Arabic words are properly pronounced.

The Arabic verbs derived according the pattern infaʕal, including the prefix in- of course, should all associate with the meaning of almutawaea which indicate the acceptance of an impact) caused by a subject). In other words, the state and action (of the verb) accords with what is established by the doer (subject). In Arabic language there many verb patterns that relate the concept of almutawaea but the pattern of infaʕal is being chosen because it correspond to verbs in English with a cognate prefix and similar meaning of the resulting derived verbs.

The causative force of the cognate affixes (the Arabic in- and the English en-) is evident as shown in the following examples:

- the derivative verb enforced (as a past tense) is formed by attaching the prefix en- to the root force (noun). The equivalent of the word force in Arabic is the noun root [jbr] which can accept the prefix in- to derive the verb [injabar] which has the exact meaning of the English verb enforce (to cause / compel obedience and submission).
- Another example is the English (joy-enjoy) and the Arabic [bsṭ and inbasaṭ]. Again the two prefixes are used to form causative verbs and the two derivative verbs have similar meanings.

It could noted , in light of the similarities of form and function, the Arabic prefix in- and the English en- are cognates.

3.3. The English prefix e- the and the Arabic humazat wasal

The third pair of prefixes, which are assumed to have similar form and function, is the English e- pronounced [i or i:] and the Arabic humazat wasal pronounced i (see section 4.2. above).. and this is the type of hamza that corresponds to the English prefix e-. With reference to the rules that govern the use of the humazat wasal , the one that function in the formation of verbs conveying imperative meaning, is quiet relevant to the present discussion. The root is the target verb a trilateral one. The forming of the a trilateral verb into the imperative mood requires the addition of humazat wasal to the verb root. This initial hamza is pronounced as [i] sound as the following examples:

The imperative verb 'iqra' (you red) = the trilateral consonantal root q-r-ʔ+ the prefix i-
The imperative verb 'ijlis' (you sit) = the trilateral consonantal root j-l-s+ the prefix i- The imperative verb 'iqra' (you red) = the trilateral consonantal root q-r-ʔ+ the prefix i-

In English language the prefix e- is attached to some nouns and adjectives to form verbs. The derived verb 'elongate' [Cobuid Advanced English Diictionary[from Latin ēlongāre to keep at a distance, is formed by attaching the prefix ē- away to the Latin longē (adv). This adverb itself is later became the adjective longus which means long. Similarly the prefix e- is added to the root lope to derive the verb elope elope meaning to run away Another example is the verb espouse (to take a woman as a wife) is derived from the noun root souse.

It could be summed up that the prefixes English e- and the Arabic humazat wasal have a similar derivational function with reference to the category of verbs.

4. Conclusion

The paper dealt with the derivation of verb in terms of prefixation in two language, Arabic and English. The contrast of verb prefixation in these two languages was carried out according to the principles of the contrastive method hypothesis.

A general contrast of the morphological system of the two language is provided focusing on the category of verbs in the two languages. The nature of words root marks an essential difference of the morphological systems of the two languages. The morphological behavior of six prefixes from the two languages (three from each) was examined. These prefixes were found to have quite similar morphological properties with regard to function and from to the extent that might set them as identical cognates .

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