COPULAR SENTENCES IN ARABIC AND ENGLISH: AN AGREE-BASED APPROACH

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Abstract The current paper offers an *agree*-based account for the derivation and Case feature valuing in the so-called **copular** sentences in Arabic and English. The paper shows through syntactic arguments that an *agree*-based approach to these sentences offers a principled and straightforward account for their Case and structural facts

The source of the predicative Case in English copular sentences such as *It is me*, as Sigur?sson (2006) rightly remarks "has not generally been taken seriously as a linguistic fact, at least not within generative Case theory." They have at best been characterised as "largely unsystematic, and best treated as the product of local rules, grammatical viruses, and hypercorrection" Quin (2005: 1). An Accusative Case, under the earlier versions of Chomskyan syntax (Chomsky 1981, 1993), was assigned by a transitive verb or a functional head associated with a transitive verb. In English copular sentences, the verb *be* is not transitive, yet there is an Accusative Case on the subject complement in these sentences. "Under such an approach the predicative case … makes no sense; it is just unexpected and mysterious." Sigur?sson (2006: 15)

The problem with Arabic *verbless* copular sentences has been about the source of the NOM Case that appears on both the subject and its complement, given the fact that these sentences **lack** a verb altogether in their present tense form (see for example, Fassi Fehri 1993, Benmamoun 2000, Homeidi 2003, among many others). When a *copular* sentence is used in the past or future tense, the copular verb *kaan* 'was' is obligatorily used. In this case, the predicate DP must bear the Accusative Case, exactly as in the English structure *It was* **me**.

The central analytical claim of this paper is that Arabic **NOM-NOM clauses** have a syntactic structure that differs radically from that of NOM-x-ACC / x-NOM-ACC clauses, henceforth **ACC clauses**, for short. More specifically, I argue that all ACC clauses have a *v*P headed by a little *v* that is 'responsible' for ACC, much as *v** in Chomsky's approach (2000, 2001). I also claim that T and *v* value the case of a DP under Agree (as Chomsky suggests for *v** and T).[1] An analysis of the English copular sentences is also offered along similar lines.

Key words: *Agree*, Case, '*kaana* and its sisters', copular sentences, linking verbs.

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[1] I am greatly indebted to two anonymous reviewers whose remarks, questions and suggestions have greatly improved this paper.

1. Introduction

Under the earlier versions of Chomskyan Syntax (Chomsky 1981, 1993), Accusative Case is assigned by a transitive verb or a functional head associated with a transitive verb. In the English sentences (1-3) below, the verb *be* is not transitive, yet there is an Accusative Case on the subject complement:

1) It is us. (Sigur?sson 2006: 14)
2) I'm me. (Wales 1996: 95)
3) It was not him.

As Sigur?sson (2006: 15) rightly remarks "[t]he English type accusative marking [such as (1-3) in this paper] has not generally been taken seriously as a linguistic fact, at least not within generative Case theory." Quinn (2005a: 1) [in Sigur?sson 2006], in her detailed study of English case-marking, also remarks that it has often been assumed or suggested "that pronoun case selection in English is largely unsystematic, and best treated as the product of local rules, grammatical viruses, and hypercorrection". Sigur?sson (2006: 15) also states that

> The Germanic predicative Nom/Acc variation has remained largely neglected within generative case theory, for the embarrassing reason ... that there is really nothing interesting to be said about it under a structural approach to Case – under such an approach the predicative case variation makes no sense, it is just unexpected and mysterious.

Although copular sentences in English have been discussed from many aspects (e.g. Declerck 1983, Belletti 1988, Heggie 1988 and Mikkelsen 2005, among many others), to the best of my knowledge, Belletti (1988) Sigur?sson's (2006) account for the predicative Accusative Case in sentences like *It was me* is the most relevant one for my purposes in this paper.

Belletti (1988) argues that unaccusative verbs are, in general, able to assign Case, in particular *partitive* Case, which is classified as inherent and hence is exempt from Burzio's Generalization.

Sigur?sson (2006) is a more recent attempt to account for predicative Accusative Case in English, as part of his discussion of Nom/Acc Case variation in Germanic languages. For Sigur?sson the predicative Accusative Case in English in (1-3) above is a "relational accusative [that] is dependent on nominative being present or active in the structure". For him this is a problem of morphology, not syntax, as "the same syntactic structure gets different interpretations in morphology." (P. 27)

Similarly, Arabic sentences like the ones in (4-5) below have been a very hot topic of discussion for sometime now, especially with regard to the Case on the two elements of a copular sentence (e.g. Fassi Fehri 1993, Benmamoun 2000, Homeidi 2003, among many others):

4) ?ahmad-u Tabiib-u-n *Verbless Copular Sentences*
Ahmad-*Nom* doctor- *Nom*-Indef
'Ahmad (is) a doctor.'

5) kaana ?ahmad-u Tabiib-a-n *Verbal Copular Sentences*
was Ahmad- *Nom* doctor-Acc-Indef
'Ahmad was a doctor.'

However, the focus has been on Arabic *verbless* copular sentences and the source of the Case that appears on both the subject and its complement, given the fact that these sentences ***lack*** a verb altogether in their present tense form. When a *copular* sentence is used in the past or future tense, however, the copular verb *kaan* 'was' is obligatorily used. In this case, the predicate DP must bear the Accusative Case, exactly as in the English structure *It was **me***. To the best of my knowledge, no one has been successful in offering a plausible account for the source of the Accusative Case on the predicate DP.

Therefore, in this paper I would like to present an analysis and an explanation of the Arabic and English data above in a simple and straightforward fashion adopting Chomsky's (2000, 2001) approach of *Agree* expounded in Adger (2003). I also present cross-linguistic evidence which shows that the approach adopted in this paper offers a simple and straightforward account for predicative Case across languages using the available concepts and tools of Chomsky's syntactic theory (2000, 2001 and subsequent work).

2. Case Domains in Chomskyan Syntax

Let's start, however, with tracing how Case has been dealt with under the recent versions of syntactic theory, namely the *Principles and Parameters* approach (Chomsky 1981, and subsequent work), the *Early Minimalist* approach (Chomsky 1993, 1995, and related works) and the *latest* version of the Minimalist approach (Chomsky 2000, 2001, and related works).

Under the *Principles and Parameters* version of syntactic theory (Chomsky 1981, and related work), Case is ***assigned*** by a Case-assigning head (functional or lexical) to a DP under *Government*.[2] Thus, the subject is *assigned* a Nominative Case by a finite ***I*** head in a Spec-head configuration while the Accusative Case is assigned by the V(erb) in a Head-complement configuration.

Under the *Early Minimalist* version of Chomskyan Syntax (Chomsky 1993, 1995, and related work) DPs enter the derivation with Case already specified on them. This Case, then, like other [- interpretable] features, is *checked* in the syntax in a strictly Spec-head configuration. Thus, the subject checks its Case in the [Spec, Agr_sP] while the Object DP checks its Case in the [Spec, Agr_oP]. This *checking* approach to Case was supposed to be advantageous to the earlier *assignment* approach as it overcomes the problem of Exceptional Case Marking (ECM) and the

[2] The relation *Government* was defined as follows:
Government
α governs β iff
(i) α m-commands β and
(ii) there is no barrier γ that dominates β but does not dominate α.
Barrier
α is a barrier iff
(i) α is a maximal projection and
(ii) α is not a complement. (Hornstein *et al* 2005: 115)

problem of violating the ***Uniformity Condition*** when the Case was assigned sometimes under a [Spec, Head] relation, as in the case of subjects, and sometimes in a [Head, Complement] relation, as in the case of objects (*cf.* Hornstein *et al* 2005). The *checking* approach also had its problems as the movement of the object to the [Spec, Agr_oP] violated Rizzi's ***Relativized Minimality***.

In Chomsky (2000, 2001 and subsequent work), Case is a syntactic feature that is ***valued*** in the syntax via the operation ***Agree***; DPs enter the derivation with an unvalued Case feature [*u* Case:]. A functional head specified for Case, among other features, *probes* its c-command domain in search of a matching *goal*. Given the appropriate configuration for feature matching (see below), *Agree* assigns values to unvalued features for Morphological reasons, while at the same time deleting such [- interpretable] features for morphological purposes of LF (Hornstein *et al* 2005). Thus, Case valuing takes place as a by-product of the relation *Agree* between the *probe* and the matching *goal*.

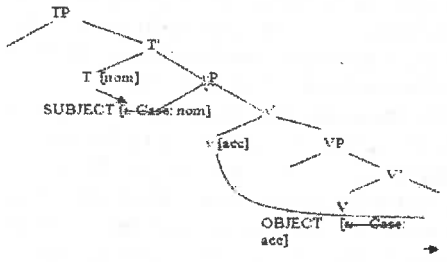
Under the same approach, a finite T bears a [nom] Case feature[3] and *v* bears an [acc] Case feature. The (grammatical) subject of a sentence gets its [*u* Case:] valued as [nom] under the *Agree* relation that takes place between the finite T and this subject, which is argued to be base-generated in the [Spec, *v*P] (see Huang 1993 for tests showing that the subject is *not* base-generated inside (minimal) VP).

Similarly, the (grammatical) object of the sentence, or any DP bearing such Case, gets its [*u* Case:] feature valued as [acc] under the *Agree* relation that takes place between the *probe* of *v* and the matching DP (the *goal*). Thus, the Accusative Case, under the *Agree* approach, is not tied to a verb but to the functional head *v* that has the ability to value the Case of a DP in its *probe*/c-command domain, irrespective of the nature of the main verb of the sentence. The configuration[4] in which the valuing of the Case feature of the DPs, as well as the other [- interpretable] features, is as follows:

[3] Finite T also bears the [- interpretable] features [*u* N*] or the EPP feature and [*u* □-features:] in addition to the [+ interpretable] [Tense] feature.

[4] The *Agree* relation operates under a strict locality condition expressed as follows:
Locality of Matching: *Agree* holds between a feature F on X and a matching feature F on Y if and only if there is no intervening z[F].
Intervention: in a structure [X … Z … Y], Z intervenes between X and Y iff X c-commands Z and Z c-commands Y. (Adger 2003: 218)

6)



Let's now turn to my proposed analysis of Arabic and English copular sentences. I will start with English because that will make the point under discussion clearer, as English is much widely known than Arabic.

3. Copular Sentences in English

3.1.0 Positive Copular Sentences in English

First, let us have a look at the English copular sentences below:

7) a. This is John.
   b. This is him.
8) It is us. (Sigur?sson 2006: 14)
9) I'm me. (Wales 1996: 95)
10) It was not him.

As the reader can clearly see, the predicate DP in the examples above is in the Accusative Case.[5] This is very clear in (7b), (8), (9) and (10), as pronouns in English show morphological Case marking.

Under the assignment or the checking approach it is impossible to account for the Accusative Case on the subject complement in the examples above. These sentences do not contain a 'transitive' verb that has the ability to *assign* this Case and, consequently, Agr_oP in the specifier of which *us*, *me*, or *him* can check their Accusative Case is not projected. Therefore, the Acc Case on these DPs cannot be explained under an 'assignment' or 'checking' approach to Case.

Belletti's (1988) account for this Case as a *partitive* Case that is inherent is *ad hoc* prima foci. First, it is very clear that the Case on the subject complement DP is Accusative, not a new Case that demands a new category. Second, the concept of an 'inherent' Case in Chomskyan syntax at least has been dismissed and is

[5] Constructions such as *It is us* are the only grammatical form of this sentence in everyday Modern English and, to the best of my knowledge, no speaker of English would say that *it is we* is a natural expression. This latter expression is an exclusively prescriptivist language use today. Sigur?sson (2006: fn 15) remarks that, in English, examples like *It is I* do occur in the written language (e.g., Quinn 2005a: 233ff). He further remarks that fixed expressions like *This is she* (as a formula used to answer the telephone) and *It is I* are better or more familiar than for instance ??*It is we*.

considered an *ad hoc* solution by most syntacticians. Thus, Belletti's analysis has two problems; it introduces one more Case category, namely the *partitive* Case, to account for a Case that is universal in nature, which is anti-minimalist in spirit and, second, the analysis of this Case as 'inherent' can hardly stand today, as the concept of an 'inherent' Case has been rejected by most syntacticians (*cf.* Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2001, Webulhuth 1995a and Hornstein *et al* 2005).

Sigur?sson (2006) discusses the occurrence of both Nominative and Accusative predicate DPs (= subject complements) in Germanic languages, and argues that "there are basically only two accusative types: Relational Acc, and Non-relational Acc, where the notion 'relational' means dependent on the presence of a nominative DP." On this view, so-called default, predicative accusatives, according to Sigur?sson, are a well-behaved subtype of Relational Acc. For Sigur?sson "relational accusative is dependent on nominative being present or active in the structure". This relation is referred to as the "Sibling Correlation, SC". Sigur?sson further argues that, contrary to common belief, however, SC is not a structural correlation, but a simple morphological one, such that Nom is the first, independent case, CASE1 ('an only child' or an 'older sibling', as it were), whereas Acc is the second, dependent case, CASE 2, serving the *sole* purpose of being distinct from Nom – the Nom-Acc distinction, in turn, being a morphological inerpretation or translation of syntactic structure.

He further generalizes that Case-rich languages quite generally seem to apply either case agreement in predicative constructions or a special predicative case. He even proposes what he calls a tentative 'Greenbergian type' universal (for finite constructions) as follows:

> *With much greater than chance frequency, case-rich languages do not assign accusative case to predicative nominals.*

This generalization is not true about Arabic because Arabic, which is a very case-rich language assigns Acc Case to predicative nominals. Moreover, Sigur?sson himself admits that his universal has exceptions including Arabic, Ruhr-German and Allemannic varieties.

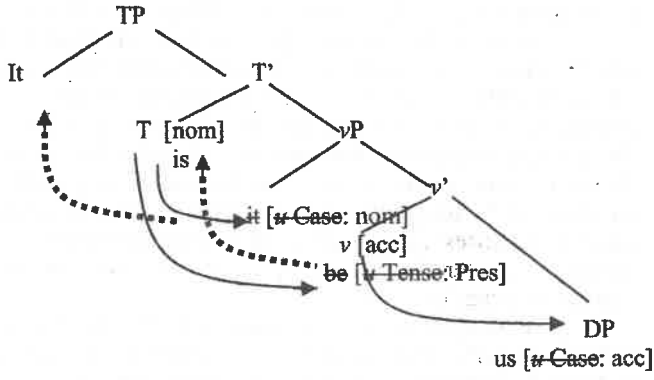
As the reader can clearly see, Sigur?sson's proposal regarding the predicative Case complicates the simple facts of these structures and suggests that the presence of a Nominative Case should lead to the presence of an Accusative DP in the structure. The data he discusses in his paper, as well as the Arabic data discussed below, show that the presence of a Nominative Case in the structure does not necessarily lead to an Accusative Case on the second DP. Moreover, he argues that Case is a problem of morphology, not syntax, a claim that is yet to be substantiated and expounded. He claims that "morphological case *interprets* syntax in its own terms or its own 'language' rather than directly expressing or mirroring it." He also does not say how languages like English can have the ability to have both an Accusative predicate DP and a Nominative one.

3.1.1 Accusative Predicative Case in English

Let's see how applying the *agree*-approach I adopt in this paper can account for the predicative Accusative Case in English. Consider the following derivation of (8) above repeated below as (11a):

11) a. It is ***us***.

b.



Let us assume following Adger (2003: 196) that "*be* is a version of little *v*, with the subject in its specifier and the PP, NP or AP in its complement." This would explain the thematic relationship arguments have in copular structures, which is very different from that which exists between arguments in transitive structures, assuming that the Uniformity of Theta Assignment Hypothesis (UTAH) is true (*cf.* Adger 2003: 138).

Thus, as can bee seen in (11b) above, *v probes* its complement in search of a suitable *goal* and finds it in the DP, *us*: this DP is in a local relation with *v* (as there is no intervening element between the two with □- features); and it is active for agreeing purposes, for it has a [*u* Case:] feature to be valued. Upon matching through *Agree*, the Case-feature of *us* is specified as Accusative.

Thus, an *Agree* approach offers an explanation for the source of the Accusative Case on the subject complement DP, as the Accusative Case, under the *Agree* approach, is not tied to a verb but to the functional head *v* that has a [-interpretable] [acc] feature that needs to delete by valuing the Case of a DP in its *probe* domain, irrespective of the nature of the main verb of the sentence (the verb here being intransitive).

One question that comes to mind at this point is "can we extend the ***same*** analysis proposed by Adger (2003) for unaccusatives and unergatives to copular sentences in English?'

Adger (2003) suggests that *v* in unaccusatives lacks both Accusative Case and the c-selectional *u*N feature, so that it can neither project a specifier nor assign Accusative Case. However, in unergatives, *v* only lacks Accusative Case but **does** have a *u*N feature[6] which allows the single Agent argument to be merged in [Spec *v*P]. Moreover, according to Adger, both the Theme argument that is merged within

[6] In Chomsky (2000, 2001, and subsequent work), *u*N is an uninterpretable formal c-selectional feature on a functional head that, if of the *u*N* type, requires merging a nominal element (via move or simple merge) in the specifier position of that head. If it is of the *u*N type, however, the functional head carrying it does not demand the physical presence of a nominal element in its specifier position. In both cases, however, the feature is erased by agreeing with a matching goal.

VP in an unaccusative, and the Agent argument merged in [Spec *v*P] in unergatives, are attracted to [Spec TP] by the strong EPP feature of T in English.

Given the facts of the copular sentences in English, I argue, in this paper, that *v*P is projected, just like in the Case of unaccusative and unergative sentences (*cf.* Adger 2003). However, the little *v* in copular sentences, unlike Adger's (2003) unaccusatives and unergatives, **has** the Case feature and a selectional *u*N-feature. The syntactic evidence for this claim is the fact that the theme in (7 - 10) above is in its base position and that it carries the Accusative Case, which means that in copular sentences in English, unlike in unergatives and unaccusatives, *v* has the ability to value the Case feature of a DP in its c-command domain. This is the reason why copular sentences should ***not*** be given the same treatment as unaccusative/ unergative structures.

Moving further up the structure in (11b), the verb *be* gets its □ and Tense features valued by the *probe* of T as a result of the *Agree* relation between the *Probe* of T and *be*. Furthermore, T *probes* its complement for a matching *goal* to value its [*u* Case:] feature. The first DP that is available in its c-command domain is the subject *It*. The *probe* of T enters into an *Agree* relation with this matching *goal* valuing its unvalued Case feature as Nominative [~~*u* Case~~: nom]. At the same time, T gets its unvalued □ features valued as [~~*u* □ features~~: 3.Sg]. However, for checking its [*u*N*], or the EPP feature, the DP, *It*, must move to the [Spec, TP] to satisfy this condition. It seems that, in English, this feature can only be checked through the canonical presence of a DP in the specifier of T.

The verb *be* in (11), and other copular sentences, unlike main verbs, moves, like all other auxiliaries, to T.[7]

3.2 Negative Copular Sentences in English

In English, a negative copular sentence will contain the negative particle '*not*' after the verb *be*. Consider the following example:

13) It was *not* me.

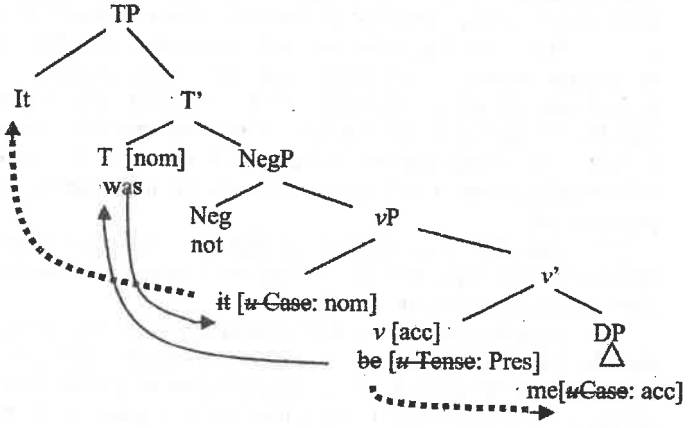
Thus, the derivation of negative copular sentences will involve one more functional category, namely NegP, because *not* is now part of the numeration with which a negative sentence starts. This functional category is argued for by syntacticians to project higher than the auxiliaries and adverbs (see Adger 2003). The proposed (universal) hierarchy of the categories within the sentence is as follows:

14) T > (Neg) > (Perf) > (Prog) > (Adv) > *v* > V (Adger 2003: 177)

The derivation of an English copular sentence like the one in (13) above will go through the stages in (15):

[7] For the arguments on the movement of auxiliaries and *be* forms to T, see the huge amount of literature on affix-hoping and verb raising in English, e.g. Chomsky 1981, Pollock (1989), Adger (2003), among others.

15)



Let us see in the next section how the *Agree* approach just outlined for copular sentences in English can work for the copular sentences in Arabic.

4. Copular Sentences in Arabic

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) has basically two types of copular clauses. The first type is verbless, plain **DP-DP** (Ahmad a doctor = Ahmad is a doctor); the other type has a verbal or at least a 'linking' element, **DP-x-DP** (Ahmad *was* a doctor, Ahmad *not* a doctor). Interestingly, the predicate DP is NOM(inative) in the 'unlinked' DP-DP type but ACC(usative) in the 'linked' type.

4.1 *Verbless* Copular Sentences

Let's first start with *verbless* copular sentences of the type in (16) below:

16) ?ahmad-u Tabiib-u-n
Ahmad-Nom doctor-Nom-Indef
'Ahmad (is) a doctor'

Such sentences, though verbless, are judged by native speakers of Arabic as full sentences because they express a complete thought/ idea/ meaning through the simple juxtaposition of two nouns, a noun and an adjective or a noun and a prepositional phrase without using any (copular/ linking) verb. Such sentences are not limited to Arabic but can also be found in Hebrew (*cf.* Doron 1983) and Russian (*cf.* Tsvaig 2008).

I have used a lexical noun in (16) because lexical nouns in MSA, unlike in English, show Case morphology while pronouns do not.[8] As the reader can easily see in (16), we just have two nouns which express a full thought/idea. The question

[8] This happens for purely phonological reasons. All the personal pronouns in Arabic end in a vowel. The Case markers in MSA are vowels themselves. Therefore, it seems there is a phonological rule in Arabic that prevents two vowels from appearing one after another.

now is whether the derivation and Case valuing in these sentences take place in the same way as was proposed for the English copular sentences above.

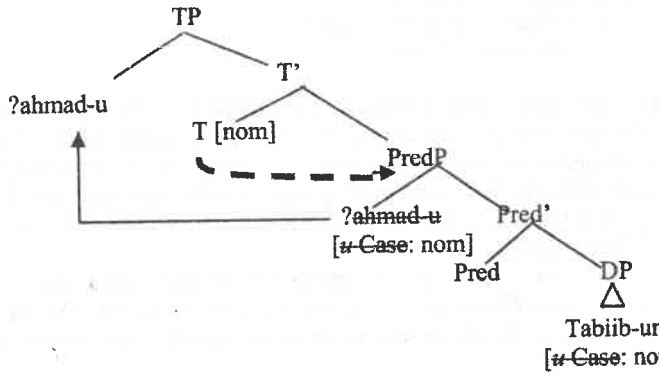
First, one clear difference between *verbless* copular sentences in MSA and the copular sentences in English under discussion is that the Arabic ones ***lack*** a lexical verb altogether. This absence of the lexical verb is syntactically correlated with the absence of an Accusative Case in these sentences. The presence of a lexical copular verb, which becomes obligatory if we want to express the same idea of Ahmad being a doctor in the past or the future tense, triggers Accusative Case on the predicate DP.

This fact about *verbless* copular sentences in Arabic leads us to propose that when these sentences are derived, their numeration *does not contain a lexical verb* and, therefore, no *v*P is projected.

Adapting Bowers' (1993) predication theory for my purposes here, namely that the traditional notion of Predication is instantiated by a functional Category PredP, whose Specifier hosts the external argument and whose complement is the predicate of that subject, I argue that the two nouns in Arabic *verbless* copular sentences are merged into a PredP that is c-selected by T; *Tabiib* under the head Pred and *Ahmad* in the [Spec, Pred]. However, unlike in Bowers' (1993), PredP does not c-select in this case a VP because there is simply no verbal element in the numeration. It rather gets c-selected by T and it is this selection of PredP by T that anchors this nominal phrase in Time and gives it the present tense interpretation that native speakers of Arabic get. Specifying the categorial status of the projection housing the two nouns in the structure as PredP also helps in specifying the exact relation between them and explains why *verbless* copular structures differ from GEN-NOM structures like *John('s) doctor* or coordinated structures like *John (and) a doctor*. Furthermore, the presence of T and PredP in the structure enables the conceptual-intentional interface to interpret NOM-NOM structures as copular clauses, rather than genitive or coordinated structures.

The proposed derivation of (16) is sketched below in (17):

17)



Now through *Agree*, T values the Case feature of the NPs within the PedP as [*u* Case: nom]. This Case feature is realised on both the nouns by whatever mechanism one adopts for the agreement and Case assignment facts between a

predicate and its external argument. [9] It is a fact, however, that in the so-called nominal sentences in MSA (referred to in this paper as *verbless* copular sentences) the subject and the predicate ***always*** carry the same Case. The following sentence is ungrammatical in MSA simply because the predicate carries a Case that is different from that of the subject:

18) * ?ahmad-u Tabiib-*a*-n
Ahmad-Nom doctor-*Acc*-Indef

Thus, the absence of an Accusative Case in these sentences, unlike their English counterparts, is accounted for in terms of the absence of a (copular) verb and, consequently, the non-projection of *v*P because it is simply not part of the numeration. Moreover, the Nominative Case on the two nouns is the result of valuing their Case feature by the T head.

The other question that needs to be addressed is whether the subject moves from within PredP to the [Spec, TP], similar to the movement of the subject from the [Spec, *v*P] to the [Spec, TP] in English to satisfy the EPP feature of T.

The position of adverbs, when such sentences contain any, suggests that the subject actually moves from within PredP to the [Spec, TP]. Consider the following example:

19) ?ahmad-u *daa?iman* sa?iid-u-n

Ahmad-Nom always happy-Nom-Indef
'Ahmad (is) always happy.'

As one can see in (19) the adverb *daa?iman* 'always' appears between the subject and its predicate indicating that the subject has moved from [Spec, PredP] to the [Spec, TP], given the assumption that adverbs are generated below T but above the lexical domain (*cf.* Cinque 1997).

4.2 *Verbal* Copular Sentences

One fact about the nominal sentence in (16) (repeated below as (20a)) is that if we want to anchor it in the past or future Time, *kaana* 'was' or *sa-yakoon* will be' has to be used to indicate the 'state of being' in the past or future, respectively. The present form of this verb, namely *ya-koon*, cannot be used either before or after the subject to indicate the present Tense of the sentence, as (20 d-e) below shows:

20) a. ?ahmad-u Tabiib-u-n
Ahmad-Nom doctor-Nom-Indef
'Ahmad (is) a doctor'

b. *kaana* ?ahmad-u Tabiib-a-n
was Ahmad-Nom doctor-Acc-Indef

[9] One could assume multiple valuing of the Case of these two NPs by the *Probe* of T along the lines suggested by Bejar and Massam. (1999). The essence of their argument is that a Case feature on a Case valuing head does not delete immediately after valuing the Case of the first DP in its c-command domain but remains available during the derivation for valuing the Case feature of another matching goal. Only when the structure is sent to PF, the uninterpretable features are deleted.

'Ahmad was a doctor.'

c. *sa-yakoon* ?ahmad-u Tabiib-a-n
will-3.S.M.Iperf - be Ahmad-Nom doctor-Acc-Indef
'Ahmad will be a doctor.'

d. * *yakoon* ?ahmad-u Tabiib-a-n
3.S.M.Imperf-be Ahmad-Nom doctor-Acc-Indef

e. *?ahmad-u *ya-koon* Tabiib-a-n
Ahmad-Nom 3.S.M.Imperf-be doctor-Acc-Indef

Notice first that in (20 b-c), the predicate DP is in the Accusative Case. This supports the argument presented above for Arabic (copular) sentences that once a *verb*, or an element of a verbal nature, is part of the numeration, the *v*P projects and its projection is co-related with the appearance of a DP in the Accusative Case in the structure.[10] Under the analysis I am proposing for these sentences in this paper, it is this *v* that is responsible for the Accusative Case on the predicate DP. This explains why the predicate DP bears the Accusative Case in these sentences despite the fact that the verb is ***NOT*** transitive.

Arab traditional grammarians dealt with sentences whose main verb is one of the verbs traditionally known as *kaana wa ?akhwatiha* '*kaana* and its sisters' as derived from *simple* nominal sentences of the DP_{Nom} DP_{Nom} type, i.e., verbless nominal sentences, by using one of the verbs of the '*kaana* and its sisters' class. The syntactic facts of verbal copular structures, however, show that they have all the properties of a VSO/SVO sentence. They have a subject in the Nominative Case and a DP to the right of the verb in the Accusative Case. However, the fact that the Arab grammarians derive the *verbal* copular sentences from the *verbless* copular sentences by adding one of the 'sisters', remind us of the fact that the two structures are the result of whether the structure projects a *v*P or not, which ultimately boils down to whether the numeration contains a verb or not.

Therefore, I would suggest the structure and derivation in (21b) below for *verbal* copular sentences in MSA:

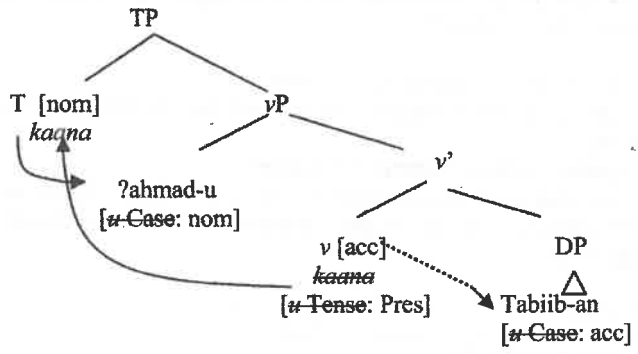
21) a. *kaana* ?ahmad-u Tabiib-a-n
was Ahmad-Nom doctor-Acc-Indef

[10] Instead of proposing that the difference between DP_{Nom} DP_{Nom} structures (*verbless* copular sentences in Arabic) and DP_{Nom} X DP_{Acc} structures (*verbal* copular sentences in Arabic and English) is whether *v* is projected or not, one could also argue, following Chomsky's (2000, 2001) distinction between *v** and *v*, that in the case of *verbless* copular sentences in Arabic and examples like *It is he* in English the little verb is of the type *v*, while it is of the type *v** in the cases where the predicative case is ACC both in Arabic and English examples. In Chomsky (2000, 2001 and subsequent work) *v* is a functional head that lacks a Case feature specification and is, therefore, unable to value the Case of a DP in its c-command domain, while *v** has a Case feature specification and is therefore able to value the Case feature of a DP in its c-command domain.

The problem is that if we assume the presence of *v* in Arabic *verbless* copular sentences, *v* will project to a *v*P and this projection will have no function whatsoever in the structure, as there is not even a verb to be accommodated under *v*. In other words, it is pointless to project *v*P in this case just to say that it is of the *v* type that cannot value Case. Therefore, including *v*P in the structure of *verbless* copular sentences in Arabic goes against the very minimalist spirit pursued in this paper.

'Ahmad was a doctor.'

b.



Notice that I assume following Adger (2003: 196) that like the English *be*, *kaana* is merged under *v*, the subject in its specifier and *v* takes a nonverbal predicate (such as DP) as its complement. This naturally leads to the non-projection of VP (for minimalistic reasons), which I shall assume to be a projection that accommodates transitive predicates and their arguments and is projected only when there is such predicate in the numeration. In the case of *verbless* copular sentences, on the other hand, there is no verbal element of any sort and so neither *v*P nor VP are projected and the two nominal elements making up such structures start as a PredP, which is c-selected by T.

Furthermore, *kaana* moves to T in this case and that is why it appears before the subject. Following Chomsky (2000, 2001), I assume that the verb moves to T in this case because the little verb is of the [*v**] type.

However, as I mentioned earlier, *kaana* can optionally appear before the subject or after it, just like all other sentences in Arabic which allow both VS and SV orders.[11] Consider the following examples:

22) a. *kaana* ?ahmad-u Tabiib-a-n VS order
was Ahmad-Nom doctor-Acc-Indef
'Ahmad was a doctor.'

b. ?ahmad-u *kaana* Tabiib-a-n SV order
Ahmad-Nom was doctor-Acc-Indef
'Ahmad was a doctor.'

To account for (22b), we can adopt the same structure and derivation given in (21b) above except that for (22b), where *kaana* appears after the subject, not

[11] *kaana*, like the English *be* verbs, can also be used as a helping verb along with a lexical main verb, in which case it can be used to express different tenses and aspects. Consider the following examples:

a. *kaana* ?ahmad- u y-aqra?u fi al-maktabat-i
was Ahmad-Nom Imp-read in the-library-Gen
'Ahmad was reading in the library.'

b. *sa-yakoon* ?ahmad-u yaqra?u fi al-maktabat-i
will-be Ahmad-Nom Imp-read in the-library-Gen
'Ahmad will be reading in the library.'

before it, the EPP feature in this Case is of the [*u*N*] type, not the [*u*N] one, that is why the subject has to obligatorily move to the [Spec, TP] to satisfy the EPP feature (*cf.* Chomsky 2000, 2001).[12]

4.3 Negative **Copular Sentences in Arabic**

Let's now turn to negative copular sentences in MSA and start with the verbless ones.

4.3.1 Negative Verbless Copular Sentences:

If a speaker of Arabic wants to negate a *verbless* copular sentence like the one in (16) above, a special negative particle, namely *laisa* is used. Consider the following examples:

23) a. ?ahmad-u *laisa* Tabiib-a-n
Ahmad-Nom is-not doctor-Acc-Indef
'Ahmad isn't a doctor.'

b. *laisa* ?ahmad-u Tabiib-a-n
is-not Ahmad-Nom doctor-Acc-Indef
'Ahmad isn't a doctor.'

As the reader can clearly see in (23), the predicate appears in the Accusative Case. A ***verbless*** copular sentence such as the one in (23) can be negated only with *laisa*. That is, other negative particles cannot be used to negate such sentences, as (24 a-c) below show:

24) a. * ?ahmad-u *la* Tabiib-a-n
Ahmad-Nom not doctor-Acc-Indef

b. *?ahmad-u *lam* Tabiib-a-n
Ahmad-Nom not doctor-Acc-Indef

c. * ?ahmad-u *lan* Tabiib-a-n
Ahmad-Nom not doctor-Acc-Indef

lam, *lan* and *la* are different negative particles that are used to negate verbal sentences in different tenses in MSA: *lam* is used to negate sentences in the Past tense, *lan* to negate sentences with a future meaning and *la* to negate sentences in the present tense. However, a *verbless* copular construction, though in the present tense, is incompatible with the negative particle *la* that is used to negate present tense sentences because such a construction lacks a lexical verb. I mentioned earlier that the present form of *kaan*, namely *ya-koon*, cannot be used to express a state of being in the present Time and as such the question whether *la* can be used to negate a *present verbal* copular sentence does not arise, as there are no such sentences.

[12] One could also assume a uniform setting for the EPP feature on T in Arabic (which would be desirable), and then motivate the word order variation through discourse features such as [topic] or [focus]. The fact of the matter is that as a native speaker of Arabic I do not get the supposedly 'focus/topic' reading in the SV order and neither did the other native speakers of Arabic I asked about this sentence and other similar sentences. When this sentence is said with a statement intonation, the subject, for example, does not get the focal stress of the sentence.

In sentences ***with*** verbs (whether copular or otherwise), the tense-dependent negative particle can either precede the subject or follow it, but it always precedes the verb as in (25) below:

25) a. *lam* ya-ktub ?ahmad-u d-dars-a
not Asp-write Ahmad-Nom the-lesson-Acc
'Ahmad did not write the lesson.'

b. ?ahmad-u *lam* ya-ktub d-dars-a
Ahmad-Nom not Asp-write the-lesson-Acc
'Ahmad did not write the lesson.'

Now going back to (23), the Accusative Case on the predicate in this example clearly argues for the presence of an Accusative Case-valuing head in the structure of this sentence. Notice that this Accusative Case appeared only when *laisa* appeared in the structure.

laisa is actually classified by Arab grammarians as a member of the '*kaana* and its sisters' class of verbs I mentioned earlier. When these verbs enter the structure of a 'nominal' sentence, they 'force' the predicate DP of the original DP_{Nom} DP_{Nom} structure to be in the Accusative Case (see Ibn Aqeel 1979, Nahr 2000, among many others). This class includes, in addition to *kaana*, *?aSbaHa* 'became', *?aDhHa* 'became (at noon), *?amsa* 'became (at night)', *Dhalla* 'remained', *ma zaala* 'lit. not move', and *ma fati?a* 'lit. not give up'.

laisa has been classified as a member of this class of verbs because of the effect it brings into the structure of the nominal sentence with which it is used. Like the other verbs in the class, it 'forces' the predicate of the sentence to bear the Accusative Case as is clear in (23) above. Moreover, *laisa* shows agreement with the subject, just like any other verb in Arabic. Consider the following examples:

26) a. ?ahmad-u laisa[13] Tabiib-a-n
Ahmad-Nom not doctor-Acc-Indef
'Ahmad (is) not a doctor.'

b. fatimat-u laisa-*t* Tabiib-at-a-n
Fatima-Nom not-*F* doctor-F-Acc-Indef
'Fatima (is) not a doctor.'

c . hom lais-*u* ?aTibaa?-a-n
they not-*Pl* doctors-Acc-Indef
'They (are) not doctors.'

Other negative particles in Arabic, unlike *laisa*, do not show agreement with the subject. Consider the following examples:

27) a. fatimat-u *la* tuHibbu al-qiraa?at-a
Fatima-nom not like the-reading-Acc
'Fatima does not like reading.'

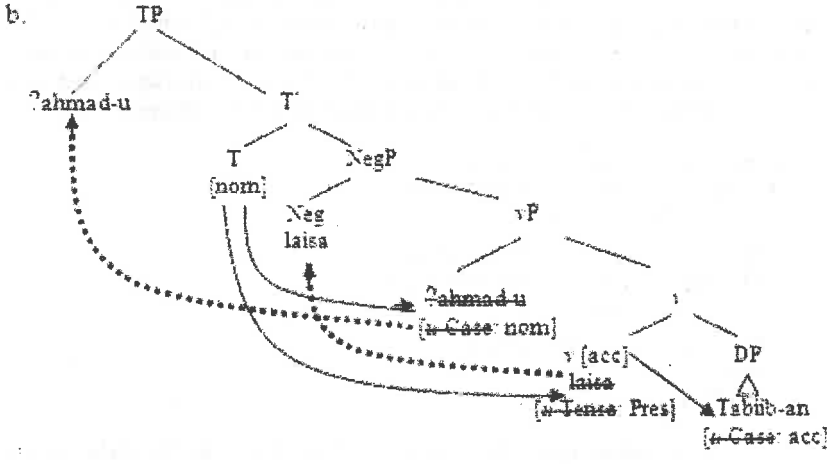
[13] *laisa* here does not show agreement morphology, just like other verbs in Arabic preceded by a 3SgM subject. The verb form that does not carry any distinctive agreement morphology is taken as the 3SgM by default.

b. * fatimat-u la-*t* tuHibbu al-qiraa?at-a
Fatima-Nom not-*F* like the-reading-Acc

Since *laisa* shows verbal agreement morphology, it seems plausible to assume that it is a verb. However, *laisa* does not share all the verbal characteristics that the other members of the class of '*kaana* and its sisters' have: it does not conjugate for tense and it negates the nominal sentence in which it appears. The other members of the '*kaana* and its sisters' class conjugate for both Tense and agreement and they don't negate the nominal sentence in which they appear. These sisters require one of the verbal negative particles to negate the sentence in which they appear.

Thus, because the numeration with which the sentence in (26) starts with *laisa*, the *v*P projects because of the (semi-) verbal nature of *laisa*. As the structure now contains a verb, the subject is base-generated in the [Spec, *v*P] rather than within a PredP containing it and its predicate, as in the case of *positive* verbless copular sentences like the one in (16). Moreover, *v* bears the [acc] Case feature which values the Case of the predicate DP as [~~*u* Case~~: acc]. Thus, the sentence in (27a), repeated below as (28a), is derived as in (28b):

29) a. ?ahmad-u *laisa* Tabiib-a-n
Ahmad-Nom not doctor-Acc-Indef
'Ahmad (is) not a doctor.'



Thus, the derivation of a negative Arabic copular sentence such as the one in (28a) goes through more or less the same derivational steps that a negative English copular sentence, such as the one in (15) above does, except that we cannot say for sure whether *laisa* ends up in T like the English *be* verb or stops in Neg. There is simply no syntactic evidence that compels us to commit to one of the two possibilities.

Without adopting an *Agree*-based approach that assumes the presence of a *v* head[14] that has the ability to value the Case feature of a DP in its c-command domain as [acc], it will be impossible to account for the source of the Accusative Case on the predicate *Tabiib-a-n* 'doctor-Acc-Indef' in (28).

I will not go into the details of how verbal copular sentences in MSA are negated because, as I mentioned earlier, they behave in this respect exactly like other sentences in Arabic with an ordinary verb. A paper on Arabic negation should deal with that.

5. Cross-linguistic Evidence

In this section I would like to propose an alternative account for the cross-linguistic data discussed in Sigur?sson (2006), part of which is presented in (29) below. The cross-linguistic evidence presented below suggests that the proposed account for the Predicative Case in this paper is on the right track:

29) a. *Verbless* Copular sentences (Only NOM):

i. ?ahmad-u Tabiib-u-n — Arabic: NOM
Ahmad-Nom doctor-Nom-Indef
'Ahmad (is) a doctor.'

ii. dani more — Hebrew: NOM
Dani teacher-NOM
'Dani (is) a teacher.' (Doron 1983: 88)

iii. Ona vrač. — Russian: NOM
3sg.fem.NOM doctor.sg.NOM
'She (is) a doctor.' (Attia, 2008)

b. *Verbal* Copular Sentences:

1. Only NOM:

i. dani haya more — Hebrew: NOM
Dani was teacher-NOM
'Dani was a teacher' (Doron 1983: 93)

ii. ?a? erum vi? / *okkur. — Icelandic: NOM
it are we / *us
'It is us.'

ii. Det ?r vi/*oss. — Swedish: NOM
it is we/*us (*cf.* Sigur?sson, 2006: 14 ff)

2. Only ACC:

i. kaana ?ahmad-u Tabiib-a-n — Arabic: ACC
was Ahmad-NOM doctor-ACC-Indef
'Ahmad was a doctor.'

ii. Det er os. — Danish: ACC

[14] I don't claim in here that Acc in Arabic is 'exclusively' derivable from the presence of little *v* (and V). Acc in Arabic can also be triggered by other elements (e.g. □*inna* and its sisters). There are as many as eleven different environments where a DP can appear in the Accusative Case. This is not surprising as it is also known that in English, for example, Acc can also be found in other environments in addition to the post verb position (e.g., after a preposition, after *like*, and the comparative *than*) (*cf.* Kayne 2004). I plan to deal with Case triggering particles in Arabic in a separate paper.

it is us (*cf.* Sigur?sson, 2006: 14)

3. Both NOM and ACC/ INST:

i. It is I. Early Modern English: NOM
ii. It is me. Modern English: ACC
(*cf.* Sigur?sson, 2006: 19)

iii. katja byla pevic-a. Russian: NOM
Katja was singer-NOM
'Katja was a singer.'

iv. katja byla pevic-ej. Russian: INST[15]
Katja was singer-INST
'Katja was a singer.' (Geist, 2005: 105)

To account for the cross-linguistic variation pertaining to predicative Case shown in (29) above, I would propose that languages should be classified first into two groups based on whether the copular sentence contains a verb or not.

If the copular sentence is *verbless*, then the predicate DP can only be in the Nominative Case. Since there is no copular verb in the numeration[16] to begin with, *v*P is not projected and the only functional head in the structure that can value Case is T. Now, since T is specified with a Nominative Case feature, we expect the predicate DP(s) to appear only in the Nominative Case. This is borne out by the Arabic, Hebrew and Russian data above.

If the copular sentence is *verbal*, i.e., there is a lexical copular verb (because the numeration starts with one), then *v*P is projected and, hence, the predicative Case could be one of three: ***only*** Nominative (Icelandic and Swedish), ***only*** Accusative (Arabic and Danish), or ***both*** Nominative or Accusative/Instrumental (English and Russian).

To explain the variation in this case, I adopt Chomsky's (2000, 2001) distinction between *v* and v* because we have a *v*P in the syntactic structure now.

In those languages where the predicative Case can ONLY be Nominative as in the Case of Swedish and Icelandic (*cf.* Sigur?sson 2006), the copular, like passives, unergatives and unaccusatives, will be of the *v* type, thus failing to value the Case of the predicate as [acc] and giving way to T to value it as [nom].

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[15] In Russian *verbal* copular sentences the predicative DP appears in the Instrumental Case rather than the Accusative Case that the proposed analysis in this paper predicts. The only explanation I have at this point is that *Instrumental* should be taken as a sub-category of Accusative. Instrumental Case is after all not a structural Case, but a semantic one, and thus one could say that the different Case morphology the DP exhibits here should be taken as an allomorph of the structural Case [acc] that is conditioned by semantic relations.

[16] Since *verbless* copular sentences are only allowed when the sentence is meant to be in the Present Tense, then one explanation for how the system decides which sentence would be verbless and which one will be verbal is to say that [+ Present] on T and a copular verb are mutually exclusive. As I mentioned earlier, the interface system interprets the structure as a sentence because of PredP and as a present sentence because of the feature [+ Present] on T. Thus, a copular verb is needed only when the Tense is [- Present] to support the [- Present] Tense morpheme. This is exactly what happens in Arabic at least, where the copular element is allowed to appear only when the copular sentence is [- present].

In those languages, on the other hand, where the predicative Case in ***verbal*** copular sentences is always in the Accusative (e.g. Arabic and Danish), the little *v* is of the *v** type. That is why the predicative Case in these sentences is always valued as [acc].

And in those languages where the predicative Case in ***verbal*** copular sentences could either be Nominative or Accusative/Instrumental as in English and Russian, I would propose, again using Chomsky's (2000, 2001) distinction between *v** and *v*, that the examples where the predicative Case is Nominative show that the little *v* ***was*** of the *v* type in the past and that these languages are witnessing a shift towards the Accusative Case. Thus, the Nominative predicative Case is a relic of the past.

The modern English examples in which the predicative Case is Accusative show that the little *v* in English has become of the *v** type, and the Russian examples where the predicative Case is Instrumental show that the *v* might be in an intermediate state on the way towards becoming of the *v** type.

This would mean that the ***nature*** of functional categories can be subject to change over time. One could even go a step further and say that an optimal solution to the Case problem in Language is for the DP following *any* type of finite verbs to be in the Accusative. In this light, the English and Russian data, and possibly similar data in other languages, could be understood as a movement towards a more optimal and symmetrical Case System.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I presented an analysis of the so-called copular sentences in Arabic and English. The very argument put forward in this paper is that the case of a predicative noun phrase in a copular construction depends on:
(a) the presence vs. absence of a verbal element that will trigger the projection of *v*;
(b) the exact syntactic properties of *v* (if it is projected), i. e., whether it is of the *v* or *v** type.

Through syntactic evidence, I have also argued that *kaana* and *laisa* in Arabic (and the be verbs in English, as well as other languages) should not be given any special treatment syntactically and should be treated just like any other (transitive) verb, because the derivation of a sentence containing them and the Case facts in these sentences are exactly the same as those sentences with a simple 'mono-transitive' verb. However, *kaana* and *laisa* (and their counterparts in other languages) do have a special property that sets them apart from regular lexical verbs, in that they belong to the category *v* rather than V.

Furthermore, using available tools in the theory, I could provide a unified account for the Case and derivation facts for different types of sentences, namely copular sentences (verbal or verbless), and sentences with transitive verbs. This is, undoubtedly, an excellent minimalist gain.

I have also shown that the analysis proposed in this paper can explain the cross-linguistic variation noticed in the predicative Case in copular sentences across languages.

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