A Tagmemic Analysis of Subject-Verb Agreement in English and Arabic in Selected Quranic Texts : A Contrastive Study

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Abstract: The current study is a contrastive analysis devoted to check the subject–verb agreement in English and Arabic to find out the points of similarities and differences between the two languages at sentence level. In order for that to happen, a grammatical theoretical framework, namely, Pike's Tagmemic Theory, is applied to some selected Quranic Texts, in an attempt, to describe the subject–verb agreement in both languages. Tagmemic theory deals primarily with grammatical analysis, associated with Kenneth Lee Pike. It is an branch of structuralism. But Structuralism concentrated only on form and ignored functions of a linguistic form. Tagmemics mixes together the form and the function of a linguistic entity (Pike and Pike,1977:20). According to Cook and Walter (1969:15), a tagmeme is "the relation between a functional slot with the class of items that fill that slot. This unit is not only the denotation of a form unit, as in other grammatical models, but it consists of a function and form." However, applying Pike's Tagmemic Theory, the results of the study show that the differences between Arabic and English subject-verb agreement mostly occur in the levels of number, gender and position.

Key words: Tagmemic Theory, contrastive analysis, Arabic, English, subject, verb, Kenneth Lee Pike

Introduction

The goal of Contrastive Analysis (CA) is to determine similarities and differences between the native language (NL) and the target language (TL). It has been given numerous additional names such as "comparative linguistics", "contrastive grammar", "differential description". Whatever nomenclature is used, it is basically "the juxtaposing of accounts of twolanguages and the extraction of certain observation of difficulty" (HAMP 1968, 139).

Pike (1954:9) pioneers the tagmemic model of language analysis, which he expands into a full-fledged grammatical model in his subsequent revised publications (1955, 1960). He has been afterwards followed by other linguists, like Robert E., Longacre, and others. Pike coins the term 'grameme', the fundamental unit of tagmemics, which is later replaced by the term 'tagmeme' (Pike, 1958:9). Tagmeme is a grammatical unit akin to phonemes and morphemes in the three linguistic hierarchies: phonology, lexicon, and grammar. Meanwhile, it is a meaningful grammatical unit formed of taxemes (without meaning) in Bloomfield's timetable, comparable to the meaningful lexical unit morpheme built of phonemes (without meaning) (Pike,1958:66).

Subject-verb agreement is a major morpho-syntactic phenomenon that has been heavily investigated in many world languages. Although it is widely viewed as a "syntactic process", it "is subject to a variety of influences both syntactic and non-syntactic" (Bock et al, 1999). This paper explores subject-verb agreement patterns in two distinct languages, namely Modern Standard Arabic (A Semitic language) and English (A Germanic language).In addition to highlighting how these two languages are similar to and/or different from each other with respect to subject-verb agreement and the main operating constraints.

Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive analysis (CA) was first employed to address second or foreign language instruction and learning in the 1950s. It was used in this context to compare pairs of languages, uncover similarities and differences, and forecast learning difficulties with the ultimate purpose of addressing them (Fries, 1943; Lado, 1957). The main idea of contrastive analysis, as proposed by Robert Lado in his book *Linguistics Across Cultures* (1957), was that by systematically comparing the two languages and cultures, it is possible to identify the areas of difficulty a particular foreign language will present for native speakers of another language. Learning challenges are not to be expected where the two languages and cultures are comparable; but, learning difficulties are to be expected where they are different, and the bigger the difference, the greater the degree of predicted difficulty. It is assumed that on the basis of such analysis, teaching materials might be adapted to the needs of learners of a certain first language.

The goal of contrastive analysis is to predict linguistic difficulties encountered during second language acquisition; as proposed by Lado (1957), difficulties in acquiring a new (second) language are derived from differences between the new language and the native (first) language of a language. Wardaugh (1970) distinguishes between two CA versions: "a strong version" and "a weak version". He dismisses the former as "unrealistic and impractical," but admits that the latter has "certain possibilities for usefulness" (12). The strong version maintains that it is possible to compare the NL system - grammar, phonology, and syntax - with the TL system in order to predict the difficulties that learners will face, allowing the text-book writers and teachers to create more efficient teaching materials (WARDAUGH 1970,12). In the preface of his book, LADO (1957, 2) says,

"The plan of the book rests on the assumption that me can predict and describe the patterns that mill cause difficulty in learning, and those that mill not cause difficulty, by comparing systematically the language and culture to be learned with the native language' and culture of the students".

Understanding contrastive linguistics and contrastive analysis is critical for individuals engaged in contrastive research. Contrastive linguistics is defined as 'a sub-discipline concerned with the comparison of two or more languages or subsystems of languages in order to determine both the differences and the similarities between them' (Fisiak et al. 1978, cited in Fisiak, 1981:v). In this sense, contrastive analysis is described as "research about differences and similarities between a limited number of languages carried for 'its own shake" (Willems et al., 2003:1).

Subject-verb agreement in English

Modern-day English is widely viewed as a language that has an impoverished agreement system. In this language, the verb shows partial agreement with the subject, as shown in the following examples:

1. (a). "Tom/Alice speaks Italian".

(b). "They/I/you/ Tom and Alice speak Italian".

In (1a), the subject *Tom* and the verb *speaks* do not express full agreement that the verb does not express, for instance, the Masculine [M] Gender of the subject, resulting in the obvious poor

agreement between the subject and the verb. The only potential manifestation of morphological agreement is the use of the suffix -*s* when the subject is singular. The suffix -*s* is not used on the verb when the subject is a plural, as (1b) clearly demonstrates. An obvious generalization that can be drawn here is that when the subject is singular, the suffix -*s* is used on the verb. This generalization is however directly dismissed when considering instances where the suffix -*s* is not used when the subject is the speaker (*I*), whose content is [1SG.]. Additionally, the suffix -*s* is not either used with singular *you*. In view of this, it can be proposed that the verb shows poor agreement with its subject only when the latter is singular and 3rd person. If the subject is plural, 1st person, or 2nd person, the verb shows no agreement with the subject at all. In the latter situations, the verb holds the same form that is free of any agreement (Hudson, 1999; Koeneman and Zeijlstra, 2014).

Subject-verb agreement in Modern Standard Arabic

Subject-verb agreement in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) has attracted much attention from researchers. This attention is mainly ascribed to the fact that subjectverb agreement in MSA, unlike the case in many other languages, can be rich where the verb fully expresses the grammatical features (Person, Number, and Gender; known as ɸfeatures) of its subject or poor in which case the verb expresses some of the ɸ-content of its subject. The main factors that determine the type of agreement (rich vs. poor) are related to the word order as well as the type of the subject (Harbert and Bahloul 2002).

Tagmemic Theory

The term tagmemics is derived from the word "tagmeme" which means

"arrangement" in Greek (Walter and Cook, 1969:7). It refer to slot or function of grammatical unit and the class of words that fills the slot. Tagmemic theory is taught mostly in connection to grammatical analysis, with a focus on Kenneth Lee Pike. It is a branch of structuralism. Structuralism is uninterested in the functions of language forms and focuses solely on form. Tagmemics combines both the form and function of a linguistic entity. This method analyzes utterances at three interpenetrating layers at the same time, with each level displaying a hierarchy of units. These levels are lexical (deals with morpheme), phonological (deals with phoneme), and grammatical (tagmeme). The grammatical component consists of a set of syntactic declarations about sentence, clause, phrase, and word level structures. The lexicon is a catalogue of a language's formal units, whereas the phonological components provide the phonemic phrase a phonetic embodiment in the language (Pike and Pike ,1977: 20).

The 'tagmeme' is the fundamental unit of tagmemics. A tagmeme is the smallest functional element in a language's grammatical structure. The word was coined in the 1930s by linguist Leonard Bloomfield, who described it as the smallest meaningful unit of a grammatical form (similar to the morpheme, it is defined as the smallest meaningful unit of lexical form). The term was later adopted, and its meaning became well-known, by Kenneth Pike and others in the early 1950s, who called it tagmeme (Akmajian, 1979: 8).

According to Elison and Pickett (1962:57), tagmemics is "a grammatical unit with the interrelation to the grammatical function or slot with a class of mutually interchangeable items which occur in that slot. This slot-class interrelation has an effect on the grammatical hierarchy of language". Thus, in the idea of the tagmeme, there is a functional slot, a filler class, and the correlation of these two slots.

5.1 The Functional Slot

The functional slot serves as the foundation of the construction framework; it indicates the role of the linguistic form in the text in relation to other forms in the same text. Functions demonstrate

grammatical linkages in the text as well as the role of form in the structure. Thus, the functional slots are the subject, the object, the location, the modifier, the head, and so on (Pike and Pike ,1977:1-6).

The Filler Class

All of the texts that occupy the functional slot are part of the filler class. The texts in this class are interchangeable. The filler class is a distribution class that can be heterogeneous in various instances. The same element of a sentence can be realized by different form classes. For example, the subject slot can be fulfilled by proper nouns, pronouns, noun phrases or clause. The symbol for each form class, that appears, must be included in the tagmeme (ibid).

Slot - Class Correlation

The tagmeme can specify both the function and the form, but it is neither the function nor the form, i.e. it is neither the functional slot nor the filler class. It is related to both the slot and the class. If the functions of a language are modified in any way, a new language might be introduced. Similarly, by modifying the forms, a new language can be formed if the functions are modified. It is essential to specify the functions, forms, and their consequences (ibid).

However, the four features of tagmemics can be summarized as: slot (the position of the unit), filler class (the type of the unit), role (the function of the unit), and cohesion (how the unit relates to the others) (Randal, 2002:10). The placement of the four features of the tagmeme are represented in the following figure:

```
Slot  Class
      ┌─────────────────────
Role  │
      │
      │    Cohesion
```
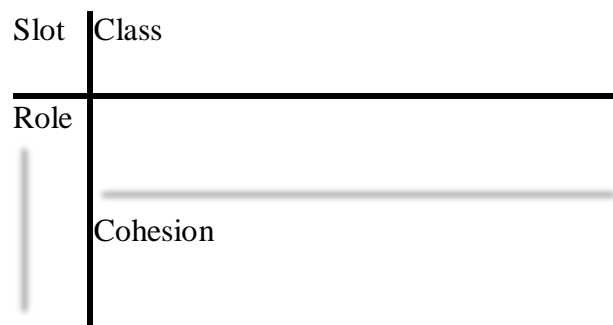
Figure (1). The Representation of Tagmemic Features

The slot in the diagram above explains where the unit appears or where the unit goes. The filler class indicates the type of unit or what kind of unit it is. The role describes how the unit works, why it is here, and what it does. The cohesions show how the unit is related to other units and to the larger context (Randal, 2002:11). The following example illustrates the idea:

2. The dogs eat meat.

```
           │
Subject    │   Noun phrase
───────────┼──────────────────────────
Actor      │   Obligatory agreement with verb
           │
```
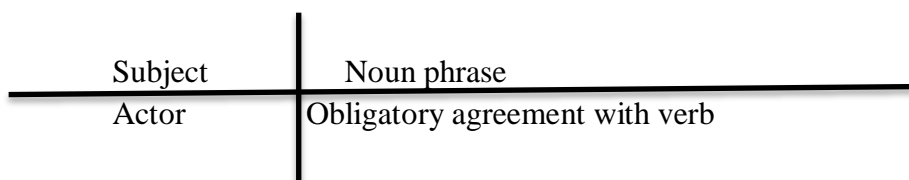
Figure (2). The Representation of Tagmemic Features of the subject-verb agreement

The diagram above shows that the words *the dog* fill the slot as subject and its class is noun phrase. Its role is as an actor and it is not in an obligatory agreement with the verb.

Types of Tagmemics Constructions

Tagmemes, as it is well known, are function-forms that are dispersed throughout the constructs in which they appear. It, on the other hand, might be obligatory or optional in construction. An obligatory tagmeme construction is one that appears in every manifestation of the structure in a given

data set. It is shown by a plus (+) symbol to signify that it must take place whenever the construction takes place. In other words, the tagmeme must be followed by a word in order to be significant. *The sentence they kiss flowers* is an example, because it requires an object. This statement is known as compulsory construction. The word 'kiss' requires an object, which is a flower. This phrase may be written as +S:pn+P:tv+O:n, which means tha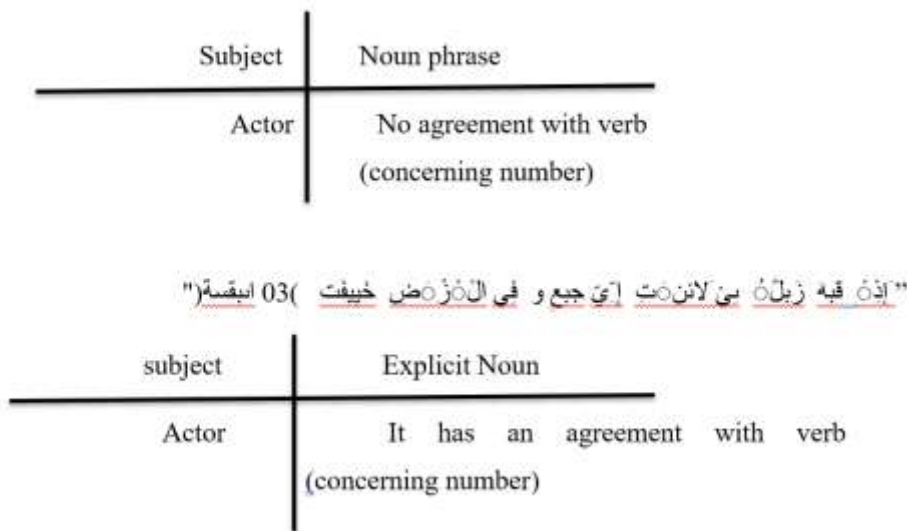t a noun subject is followed by a transitive verb predicate, which must then be followed by a noun object (Cook and Walter, 1969:7).

Optional tagmeme, on the other hand, is a tagmeme that appears in some but not all of the construction's manifestations. It is symbolized with a plus/minus () symbol to show that it may, but does not have to, occur every time the construction happens. As in the example: John eats (meat), the formula +S:n+P:tvO:n indicates that a noun subject is followed by a transitive verb predicate, which may or may not be followed by a noun object.

Arabic and English Subject – Verb Agreement in Quranic Texts

The Quran is Islam's holy text, and Muslims regard it as the actual word of God. Its language is regarded elegant and concise, and it serves as a guidance for Muslims in their faith and practice. The use of the subject and the verb in the Quranic language is a crucial component to express meanings by referring to God, prophets, angels, believers and disbelievers (Kadhim et al, 2023:13). However, applying Pike's Tagmemic Analysis, the current study will explore the subject–verb agreement in selected holy Quranic texts in both English and Arabic languages, with illustrative examples:

3. "when *your Lord said* to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority".

Subject	Noun phrase
Actor	No agreement with verb (concerning number)

"اِذۡ قَبه زِبلُهُ بسۡ لاَنِئمَت اِئۡ جِبع و فى الۡاَرۡ ضِ خِيفت 03(ابِقسةً)"

subject	Explicit Noun
Actor	It has an agreement with verb (concerning number)

The diagrams above show that, in English, the words *"your lord"* fill the slot as subject and its class is noun phrase. The role for the words *"your lord"* is as doer of the action and it is not in an obligatory agreement with the verb "**said**". On the other hand, in Arabic, the word **"ربك"** fills the slot as subject and its class is explicit noun. The role for the word **"ربك"** is as the doer of the action and it is in an obligatory agreement with the verb "قبه". Here, concerning cohesion, it is noticed that in English there is no agreement in number between the subject **"your lord"** and the verb **"said"**. In contrast, Arabic sentence shows an agreement between the subject and the verb **"قَا لَ رب كُّ "**.

On the other hand, If we see another Aya, in which the subject is plural, we will notice that the verb has the same form as if the subject was singular. The matter that is different in Arabic. Consider the following example:

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4. "They said, "**we** heard a young man mention them who is called Abraham".

Subject	Pronoun
Experiencer	No subject-verb agreement (concerning number)

قِيلَ ا " سمِعْنا فخ َ يرَ ذْمُنْ ُ ةٌ يقُّهُ ئُ انِساىٌ " ﴿٠٠ الَّ ُ ِيِبء﴾

subject	Enclitic pronoun
Experiencer	It has an agreement with the verb (concerning number)

The above clause construction, in English, consists of a mandatory subject tagmem with the role of the experiencer filled with the pronoun and it is not in an agreement with the verb "heard". For Arabic subject tagmem is mandatory with the role of the experiencer also, filled with the enclitic pronoun, and it is in an obligatory agreement with the verb "سَ عْب".

In another Aya, in Arabic, the subject and the verb agree in number when they are plural. the matter that is not found in English:

5. "**They** said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" Allah said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know."

Subject	Pronoun
Actor	No agreement with verb (concerning number)

"قِيْلَ ا أحْجْ ُ عوُ ٌ في بُ نَ ٌ يفْ ٌ سِدُ في بُ ٌ ُيسِ ٌ قلْ انِ ٌ بَ ٌ ٌ خٌ ُ من ُ ُيح ٌ ُ يحْ ذْك ُ ٌ قُد ٌ سٌ بل ُ قَّيه اِيَ أعِ ٌ يَ ٌ ٌ ب ل ُ حغْ ٌ يَ ٌ 03﴿ ٌ ٌ انِبقْسةٌ﴾"

subject	Implicit pronoun
Actor	There is an agreement with verb (concerning number)

The above clause construction, in English, consists of a mandatory subject tagmem with the role of the actor filled with the pronoun and it is not in an agreement with the verb "said". For Arabic

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subject tagmem is mandatory with the role of the doer of the action also, filled with the implicit pronoun, and it is in an obligatory

agreement with the verb "قَبِئُ ا".

The second difference between English and Arabic concerning subject – verb agreement occurs in **gender**. Starting with female gender differences, the following examples is considered:

6. "Until, when they came upon the valley of the ants, **an ant** said, "O ants, enter your dwellings that you not be crushed by Solomon and his soldiers while they perceive not."

Subject	Noun Phrase
Actor	No agreement with verb (concerning gender)

"حَخْ ٰ إِذَا أَحَ ٰ ا عَيٰ ٰ ادِ ائْءَّةَوۡ قَبى جْۡ **نَمْل ةَ** يب أَيءَّةَُءۡب ائْءُ وَ ادْخُيۡ اۡسَمءِنٰةُ ۡ ل يحۡطَ نَۡءُۡ سيينءَّةَءۡب ُ جُۡ دۡءُۡءُ ل بِشۡءُعسنُءۡءُ ءۡءۡ (18)"

Subject	Explicit Noun
Actor	It has an agreement with verb (concerning gender)

The two diagrams above show that, in English, the words *an ant* fill the slot as subject and its class is noun phrase. The role for the words *an ant* is as doer of the action and it is not in an obligatory agreement with the verb '**said**'. On the other hand, in Arabic, the word "**ن مْل ةَ**" fills the slot as subject and its class is explicit noun. The role for the word "**ن مْل ةَ**" is as the doer of the action and it is in an obligatory agreement with the verb "جبِق". Concerning the last unit in tagmemic theory, cohesion, it is noticed that in English there is no agreement in gender between the subject **"an ant"** and the verb **"said"**. In contrast, Arabic sentence shows an agreement between the subject and the verb "**ن مْل ةَ** قٰ ال ثَۡءَۡ".

Other examples from different Quranic verses support the idea:

7. "It is the Day when a soul will not possess for another soul [power to do] a thing; and the command, that Day, is [entirely] with Allah".

ُ الِّٱفطبز)"١"يِّٰۡءَۡ لَ حَۡبۡلُ ءَفۡ س ئِنۡءَفۡ س شَيِئ بۡءّءْٱلۡءُءَۡسُ يَۡ ئِءر لِّءَّةّٰءٍّ. ﴿

8. "And establish prayer at the two ends of the day and at the approach of the night. Indeed, **good deeds** do away with misdeeds. That is a reminder for those who remember".

"ءَ أَقءَرۡءٌ اصصَّلَاةَ طَسَفَيِ ائْۡءَمِب زۡءشُنَف بۡءرۡءٍوِ ايِيۡءَوۡ ءَإِءُۡ **الۡ ح سن اتِءَ** يرُۡءبۡءَ اسسَّيِّبَثِ ذيءَ لَ ذِمءۡسَ ءَذدِ(111)" بِيراَمِسِي)

Concerning the male gender agreement between the subject and the verb, the following example illustrates the idea:

"And Yusuf's (Joseph) brethren came and they entered unto him, and **he recognized** them, but they recognized him not".

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Subject	Pronoun
Recipient	No agreement with verb (concerning gender)

"حِبْءَ اِخْرَةُ يُسُفَ فَدْخَيئ اعْنىْ فَعَنَفَ ٌّ ٌٌّّ يْ نسنُ (٨٥ ينَسف)"

Subject	Implicit pronoun
Recipient	There is agreement with verb (concerning gender)

The above formula reads the word "he" fills the slot as subject, the class as pronoun and has the semantic role as recipient. This subject does not have any agreement with the verb "recognized", that is to say, if the subject was female, the same verb could be used. On the other side, in Arabic the "implicit pronoun", which acts as subject agrees with the verb " عسفعسفٌ ".

The third difference between English and Arabic subject – verb agreement is position. Generally speaking, in English, the subject precedes the verb, while in Arabic, the subject follows the verb. Consider the following examples:

10. when **Joseph** said to his father, "O my father, indeed **I** have seen [in a dream] eleven stars and the sun and the moon; I saw them prostrating to me."

Subject	Noun
Actor	It comes before the verb (concerning position)

اذْ قَبه يوُسُفُ لاَبىْ يب انجِ أيِ زْاِئنْ جُ أحَدَ عَشَن مْ مَب بانشّسْ انْقَ سَ زائنخُ ٌّ بى سيجدي (٤ يسف)

Subject	Explicit Noun
Recipient	It comes after the verb (concerning position)

Concerning position differences in the subject and the verb in English and Arabic, the two diagrams above show that, in English, the word " **Joseph** " fills the slot as subject and its class is noun. The role for the word " **Joseph** " is as the doer of the action and it precedes the verb 'said'. On

the other hand, in Arabic, the word " يُوۡسُفُﺔَ " fills the slot as subject and its class is explicit noun. The role for the word " يُوۡسُفُﺔَ " is as the doer of the action and it comes after the verb "قبه". Here, concerning cohesion, it is noticed that, in English, the subject comes before the verb **"Joseph said"**, while, in Arabic, the subject comes after the verb" قَب ةَ يُوۡسُفُ".

Conclusion

Subject and verb play a significant role in providing meaning in sentences in Arabic and English. Applying Pike's Tagmemic Theory to some selected Quranic texts, the current study concludes that subject-verb agreement patterns are not the same in the two languages. In English, verbs show poor agreement with their subjects in sentences. In Arabic, the picture is complicated as there are several factors that determine the pattern of subject-verb agreement.

Comparing English and Arabic subject-verb agreement, based on the model employed, the results indicate that the two languages differ in position, number and gender. According to position, in Arabic, verbs are positioned before the subject (in the verbal sentences), while in English, they are positioned after the subject. Concerning number, Arabic pays a great attention to the number when dealing with subject and verb, that the agreement between the subject and the verb, in the number, is very fundamental in the case of the singular, dual and plural. On the other hand, in English there is no such agreement between subject and verb, that the same form of the verb is used regardless the number of the noun (subject) whether singular or plural. With regard to gender, Arabic emphasizes the verb, whether it refers or done by a male or female, because there is a correspondence between the noun (subject) and the verb with regard to gender. In English, there is no such agreement, as the same form of the verb can be used with a masculine or a feminine subject.

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