

# **Unexpressed Object Alternations in English and Arabic: a Lexical Semantic Study**

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## **Abstract**

The main objective of this study is to provide a contrastive lexical semantic and contextual analysis of the unexpressed object alternations in English and Arabic. Contrary to the claim that objects of causative verbs and objects of 'giving verbs' are obligatorily expressed, both English and Arabic allow for the omission of these objects provided that an appropriate context is available. In both languages, the omission of these objects may function as a device to express a characteristic property of the subject. Similarly, reflexive objects, reciprocal objects and objects of psych-verbs may be omitted in both languages, even though one-to-one correspondence does not exist between the two languages with respect to the verbs that allow for the omission of these objects. However, English and Arabic exhibit striking similarities with respect to the lexical semantic and contextual conditions that license the omission of objects of transitive verbs, despite the fact that the two languages are genetically unrelated and typologically diverse.

## **1. Introduction**

Since the publication of *Aspects* by Chomsky in 1965, the question of how the inherent meaning of a verb significantly relates to its syntactic distribution has been a central concern of the syntactic theories. It has also been observed in the recent lexical semantic literature that the inherent semantic features of verbs seem to determine the syntactic patterns of sentences (See, among others, Levin 1993, Pustjovsky 2001 and Harley 2000). Thus, there has been a growing recognition that verbs are typically able to appear in a wide variety of argument structure



frames (or syntactic alternations), while retaining their same basic or 'core' meaning (Goldberg 2001, 1995; Jackendoff 1997, 1990; Grimshaw 1993). For example, as shown in (1), Goldberg (1995:11) cited the following syntactic alternations of the simple transitive verb *Kick*:

- |  |                             |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1-a. Pat kicked the wall.                        | (Transitive Alternation)    |
| b. Pat kicked the ball into the stadium.         | (Caused Motion Alternation) |
| c. Pat kicked Bob black and blue.                | (Resultative Alternation)   |
| d. Pat kicked Bob the ball.                      | (Ditransitive Alternation)  |
| e. Pat kicked at the ball.                       | (Conative Alternation)      |
| f. Pat kicked his way out of the operating room. | (Way Alternation)           |
| g. The horse kicks.                              | (Intransitive Alternation)  |

Despite the wide variety of syntactic alternations exhibited by the verb *kick*, and despite the subtle meaning differences among these alternations, the verb still entails a quick forceful motion of the leg. In other words, in all these alternations the basic meaning depicted by the verb is still retained.

On the other hand, certain alternations are only possible with certain subclasses of verbs. Levin (1993) has classified over 3,000 English verbs into subclasses according to shared meaning and the syntactic alternations associated with each subclass. For instance, the unexpressed object alternation is manifested with a wide range of transitive verbs that allow their direct objects to be omitted. Despite the lack of an overt direct object in these alternation, the verb is understood to be associated with something that qualifies as a typical object of the verb. This alternation is also referred to as 'indefinite object', 'unspecified object' or 'omitted object' alternation. (See Levin 1993, Brisson 1994, and Goldberg 2001). In this study, the terms 'object omission' and 'unexpressed object alternations' are used interchangeably. Consider the English and Arabic examples of the unexpressed object alternations:<sup>(1)</sup>

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<sup>(1)</sup> The variety of Arabic used in this study is Modern Standard Arabic. The phonetic symbols used to represent the Arabic data appear in Appendix 1 with their corresponding Arabic letters. The abbreviations used in the Arabic data are listed in Appendix 2.

2. a. John ate the cake.  
b. John ateØ.
3. a. John drank the juice.  
b. John drankØ.
4. a. ?akala ?aHmad-u l-Ka'Kat-a  
ate Ahmad-Nom. the cake.Acc.  
"Ahmad ate the cake."  
b. ?aKala aHmad-u Ø
5. a. Shariba ?aHmad-u l-'aSiir-a  
drank Ahmad-Nom the-juice-Acc.  
"Ahmad drank the juice."  
b. Shariba ?aHmad-u Ø  
drank Ahmad-Nom.  
"Ahmad drank Ø."

(This symbol 'Ø' is used to refer to the unexpressed object.)

## 2. Objectives of the Study

A number of proposals have been made by contemporary lexical semanticists to account for the phenomenon of unexpressed object alternations in English. Most of these proposals are based on the claim that the omission of direct objects can be accounted for in terms of a number of conditions or rules. For instance, several researches have argued that direct objects of causative verbs are expressed in all contexts since these objects bear the semantic role 'patient'. (See Brown 1972, Grimshaw and Vikner 1993, Brisson 1994, Van Hout 1996, Rappaport Hovav and Levin 1998). Similarly, Dixon (1991) has accounted for the phenomenon of object omission in terms of the nature of the action depicted by a given verb depending on the semantic class of that verb. For instance, according to Dixon, "transitive verbs of giving must generally specify an object" ... while corporeal verbs (e.g. eat, drink)



may omit the object' (Dixon 1991: 289).

On the other hand, the phenomenon of unexpressed object alternation in Arabic did not receive considerable attention on the assumption that an object is considered a 'FaDlah' category (i.e. non-basic), as opposed to the subject category, which is considered 'umdah' (i.e. basic). As pointed out by professor M.H. Bakalla (Personal Communication), unlike subjects, objects in Arabic are considered 'faDlah' and therefore they are omitted in certain contexts simply for the purpose of conciseness or elocutionary effect. Thus, the linguistic investigation of the unexpressed object alternations in Arabic did not receive much attention in the Arabic linguistic literature. (For more details on this issue, see Hassan 1968 and Abu-Al-baqaa? 1983).

The main objective of this study is to provide a contrastive lexical semantic analysis of the phenomenon of unexpressed object alternations in English and Arabic. Specifically, the study will answer these main questions:

1. What are the main conditions and rules that determine the omission of the objects in English and Arabic?
2. To what extent do these rules and conditions make the correct predictions in the two languages?
3. What are the main differences and similarities between Arabic and English with respect to the phenomenon of object omission?

### **3. Theoretical Background**

Following Fillmore (1987), Langacker (1987), Croft (1991) and Goldberg (1995), it is assumed in this study that linguistic analysis basically consists of structural inventory of form-meaning pairings, phrasal constructions and lexical items. Thus, no transformational component is involved since semantics is associated directly with the surface forms. On the other hand, structural distinctions are useful to the extent that they convey semantic or pragmatic distinctions (Croft 1991 and Langacker 1987).

Thus, according to the theoretical assumptions stated above, the predicate argument structure and the semantic roles associated with

the English and Arabic transitive verbs in (2a) and (4a) may be formulated as shown in (6):

6.

Argument structure:	Argument 1	Argument 2
	↓	↓
Grammatical function:	Subject	Object
	↓	↓
Semantic roles:	Agent	Patient/Theme
	↓	↓
[e.g.	• John ate	the cake.
	• ?akala ?Hmad-u	l-Ka'Kat-a]

On the other hand, the predicate argument structure and the semantic roles associated with the English and Arabic unexpressed object alternations given in (2.b) and (4.b) may be formulated as shown in (7):

7.

Argument structure:	Argument 1	Argument 2
	↓	↓
Grammatical functions:	Subject	Ø
	↓	↓
Semantic roles:	Agent	Ø
	↓	↓
[e.g.	• John ate	Ø
	• ?akala ?Hmad-u	Ø,

where the symbol Ø stands for the unexpressed object.]



#### 4. Analysis of the Unexpressed Object Alternations

This section examines the main semantic and contextual conditions relevant to the unexpressed object alternations in English and Arabic. Similarities and differences between the two languages will also be characterized. The following part is concerned with the omissibility of the 'patient' objects (i.e. objects of causative verbs).

##### 4.1. Omission of the objects of Causative Verbs

As pointed out earlier, a number of lexical semanticists have argued that direct objects of causative verbs in English are obligatorily expressed in all contexts. (See Brown 1971, Crimshaw and Vikner 1993, Brisson 1994, van Hout 1996 and Rappaport Hovav and Levin 1998). Given that direct objects of causative verbs typically undergo a change of state and therefore bear the semantic role 'patient', these linguists have concluded that arguments bearing the semantic role 'patient' must be expressed. Initial support for this generalization might be drawn from the following examples where the omission of objects of causative verbs is unacceptable:

- 8. a. John broke the glass.  
b.\* John broke Ø.
- 9. a. John cut the paper.  
b.\* John cut Ø.

The initial support for this generalization also holds in Arabic. Consider the examples below where the omission of the object of causative verbs is unacceptable in Arabic:

- 10. a. Kasara ?aHmad-u l-misTarat-a  
broke Ahmad- Nom. the-ruler-Acc.  
'Ahmad broke the ruler.'  
b.\* Kasara ?aHmad-u Ø.  
Broke Ahmad-nom.  
'\* Ahmad broke Ø.'



11. a. qassa ?aHmad-u l-waraqat-a  
cut Ahmad-Nom. the-paper-Acc.  
'Ahmad cut the paper.'
- b.\* qassa ?aHmad-u Ø.  
cut Ahmad-Nom.  
"\*Ahmad cut."

However, as pointed out by Goldberg (2001) and Cote (1996), 'patient' objects of causative verbs in English are omitted in certain contexts. Similarly, I will illustrate that Arabic also allows for the omission of the 'patient' objects of causative verbs in certain contexts. Consider the following examples where English allows for the omission of the objects of causative verbs:

12. a. The tailor always cuts Ø in straight lines.  
b. Mary always likes to bake Ø in the evening.

The example below is cited from Goldberg (2001:10); the use of this symbol 'Ø' is mine:

13. a. Tigers always kill Ø at night.  
b. The chef-in-training chopped Ø and diced Ø all afternoon.

Arabic also allows for the omission of the object of causative verbs, which is semantically 'patient'. Consider the Arabic data below:

14. a. tuHibb-u maryam-u daa?iman ?an taxbiz-a Ø fi-allayl-i  
like- Indic. Mary-Nom. Always Comp. bake-Subj. at-night-Gen.  
"Mary always likes to bake Ø at night."
- b. ?istamarra l-xayyaaT-u yufaSSil-u Ø Tuwaala l-layl-i  
continued the-tailor-Nom. cut-Indic. all the-night-Gen.  
"The tailor continued to cut all night."

15. a. haaTHa l-walad-u    yuHibb-u    daa?iman    ?an yaDrib-a Ø.  
       this        the-boy-Nom. Like-Indic always Comp hit-Subj.  
       “This boy always likes to hit Ø.”
- b. tuHibb-u    maryam-u    daa?iman    ?an    taknus-a Ø    fi-layl-i  
       like-Indic. Mary-Nom. always        Comp. sweep-Subj.    at-night-Gen.  
       “Mary always likes to sweep Ø at night.”

Obviously, in each of the English and Arabic examples given in (12-15), the action depicted by the causative verb implies some change of state affecting the object argument. Hence, the object argument in these examples bears the semantic role ‘patient’. However, contrary to the claim that ‘patient’ objects in general must be expressed (e.g. Brown 1971, Brisson 1994, and Van Hout 1996), both English and Arabic allow for the omission of ‘patient’ objects in certain contexts as illustrated in (12-15).

The question has to do with the type of context or conditions in which objects of causative verbs are omitted. Careful examination of the action depicted by the English and Arabic verbs in (12-15) reveals that all of the unexpressed patient arguments receive nonspecific iterative and predictable interpretation. In other words, the patient arguments in these examples are general and predictable from the verbal meaning and the sentence context. In addition, the incorporation of the English adverb *always* and the Arabic adverb *daa?iman* in these constructions implies that the action depicted is iterative and extended.

In fact, Goldberg (2001) and Cote (1996) have proposed these conditions (i.e. nonspecificity, predictability and iteration) to define the context in which patient objects are omitted. What is interesting here is that by virtue of the acceptability of the Arabic data in (14-15), one can make the correct predictions on the basis of these conditions in Arabic as well. In other words, the Arabic data in (14-15) provides further evidence supporting the proposal made by Goldberg (2001) and Cote (1996) to account for the omission of the ‘patient’ objects.



To confirm the validity of this conclusion compare (16a) and (16.b):

16. a.\* ?iftarasat ?a-nnumuur-u Ø

killed the-tigers-Nom.

\*"Tigers killed Ø."

b. taftaris-u n-numuur-u Ø daa?iman fi-layl-i

Kill-Indic. the-tigers-Nom. always at-night-Gen.

"Tigers always kill Ø at night."

The main distinction between (16.a) and (16.b) is that the action depicted in (16.b) is iterative and the object argument is nonspecific and predictable. Hence, the object in (16.b) may be omitted, but in (16.a) it must be expressed. Interestingly, the same conditions apply to English in exactly the same way. Compare the Arabic constructions in (16) with their English counterparts below:

17. a.\* Tigers killed Ø.

b. Tigers always kill Ø at night.

Obviously, unlike (17.a), the action depicted in (17.b) is iterative and the object argument is nonspecific and predictable. Hence, the object in (17.b) can be omitted while in (17.a) it must be expressed.

However, it seems to me that the condition of iteration is not necessary for the object omission if the appropriate context is available. For instance, if the action depicted by the causative verbs is in the negative, the object argument of these verbs may be omitted, even though the adverb *daa?iman* which implies iteration is not included. Consider the following Arabic examples:

18. a. haaTHihi n-numuur-u laa taftarisu/taSTaadu Ø

these the-tigers-Nom. Neg. kill

?aθnaa?-a n-nahaar-i

during-Acc. the-day-Gen.

“These tigers do not kill Ø during the day time.”

- b. laa taxbizu Ø maryam-u fi-n-nahaar-i

Neg. bake Mary-Nom. at-the-day-Gen.

“Mary does not bake Ø during day time.”

Similarly, English allows for the omission of the objects of causative verbs in a negative context where the adverb *always* is not included. Consider the examples below:

19. a. These tigers never kill Ø during the day time.  
b. Mary did not bake Ø today.

Based on the Arabic and English data in (18) and (19) it is clear that the omission of the object is possible in a negative context. Thus, one might conclude that the condition of iteration is not necessary for the object omission in both languages, provided that an appropriate context (e.g. a negative context) is available.

Moreover, it seems that the focus in the constructions in (18) and (19) is not on the activity depicted by the verbs. Instead, the focus in these constructions seems to be on a distinctive property of the subject. Thus, the intended message of (18.a) and (19.a) for example is that ‘a characteristic property of these tigers is that they do not kill during the day time.’ This interpretation is consistent with the acceptability of the omission of the object in these constructions since the focus is on the subject rather than the object. After all, the implicit object in these constructions is interpreted as ‘something’ or ‘somebody’. The following English and Arabic examples support this claim:

20. a. This dog bites Ø.  
b. These bees do not sting Ø.  
c. This cat does not bite Ø.  
d. This pen does not write Ø.
21. a. haaTHa l-kalb-u ya’u DD-u Ø  
this the-dog-Nom. bite-Indic.



“This dog bites Ø’

- b. haaTHihi n-naHlat-u laa talsa’ Ø

this the-bee-Nom. Neg. sting

“This bee does not sting Ø.”

- c. haaTHihi l-qiTTat-u laa ta’uDD

this the-cat-Nom. Neg. bite

“This cat does not bite Ø.”

- d. haaTHa l-qalam-u laa yaktub Ø

this the-pen-Nom. Neg. write

“This pen does not write Ø.”

(For an elaborate discussion of how the English and Arabic middle constructions are also used to express a characteristic property of the subject see Mahmoud 1991).

#### 4.2. Omission of the Objects of Psych-Verbs

So far, English and Arabic exhibit striking similarity with respect to the omissibility of objects of causative verbs and the conditions that license these alternations. However, the two languages exhibit some difference with respect to the unexpressed object alternations of a subclass of causative verbs known as ‘psych-verbs’.

These verbs are referred to in the linguistic literature as verbs of ‘psychological state’ (e.g. Levin 1993), ‘psychological verbs’ (e.g. Van Voorst 1992) or psych-verbs (e.g. De Guzman 1995). In both English and Arabic the action depicted by these verbs describes the bringing about of some change in the psychological or emotional state. This action typically requires two arguments: the subject argument and the object argument. The semantic roles associated with these arguments are most frequently characterized as the ‘experiencer’ and

the ‘stimulus’.<sup>(2)</sup> The subject argument is mapped with the ‘stimulus’, while the object argument is mapped with the ‘experiencer’.

In the rest of this section we will see that English allows for the omission of the objects of the psych-verbs, which are associated with the semantic role ‘experiencer’. Arabic, on the other hand, does not allow for the omission of ‘experiencer’ objects of the psych-verbs unless a ‘generic’ object is included to replace the omitted objects. Consider the English examples below where the omission of the objects of psych-verbs is acceptable:

22. a. John likes to please Ø.  
 b. John likes to tease Ø.  
 c. John likes to confuse Ø.

By contrast, as illustrated below, Arabic does not allow for the omission of the objects of psych-verbs. By comparing the ‘a-variants’ with the ‘b-variants’ in the constructions below, it is clear that the ‘b-variants’ at least sound better due to the insertion of the generic object like *?al-?aaxariin* ‘others.’ Consider the examples below:

23. a. \**yuHibb-u ?aHmad-u ?an yurDiy-a Ø*.  
 Like-Indic. Ahmad-Nom. Comp. please.Subj.  
 “Ahmad likes to please Ø.”  
 b. *yuHibbu ?aHmad-u ?an yurDiy-a ?al-?aaxariin-a*  
 Like-Indic. Ahmad-Nom. Comp. please-Subj. the-others-Acc.  
 ‘Ahmad likes to please others.’  
 24. a. \**yuHibb-u ?aHmad-u ?an yuDaayiq-a Ø*.  
 Like-Indic Ahmad-Nom. Comp. tease-Subj.  
 “Ahmad likes to tease Ø.”  
 b. *yuHibb-u ?aHmad-u ?an yuDaayiq-a ?al-?aaxariin-a*

<sup>(2)</sup> In fact there is some controversy over how best to characterize the semantic roles associated with the arguments of the psych-verbs. For more details on this issue, see Rosen (1984) and Grimshaw (1990). For details on the psych-verbs in Arabic, see Mahmoud (1999).



like-Indic. Ahmad-Nom. Comp. tease-Subj. the-others-Acc.

"Ahmad likes to tease others."

25. a. \*yuHibb-u ?aHmad-u ?an yurbik-a Ø.

like-Indic. Ahmad-Nom. Comp. confuse-Subj.

"Ahmad likes to confuse Ø."

- b. yuHibb-u ?aHmad-u ?an Yurbik-a ?al-?aaxariin-a

like-Indic Ahmad-Nom. Comp. confuse-Subj. the-others-Acc.

"Ahmad likes to confuse others."

Thus, as shown in (22-25), the omission of the objects of psych-verbs is quite acceptable in English, while in Arabic the insertion of a generic object seems to be necessary. However, the focus in these alternations is the same in both languages. Specifically, as illustrated by the English and Arabic data in (22-25), when the object of the psych-verbs is omitted the focus in these alternations is more likely to be on a characteristic property of the subject rather than on the activity depicted by the verb.

#### 4.3. Omission of Reflexive Objects

As well known, if the object that follows the predicate has the same reference as the subject within the same clause, then the post-predicate object must be replaced by the appropriate reflexive pronoun. In this sense, the reflexive pronoun is called reflexive object. The action depicted by the verb in the constructions containing reflexive objects is understood to be directed toward the subject of the verb.

In general, constructions that contain reflexive objects do not allow for the omission of these objects, particularly if the verb in these constructions is causative (i.e. it implies a change of state). Consider the following examples:

26. a. John cut himself.

- b.\* John cut Ø.

27. a. John hurt himself.

b.\* John hurt Ø.

28. a. John hit himself.

b.\* John hit Ø.

Similarly, Arabic does not allow for the omission of the reflexive objects in the following constructions:

29. a. jaraHa aHmad-u nafsahu  
cut Ahmad-Nom. himself  
“Ahmad cut himself.”

b.\* jaraHa ?aHmade-u Ø  
cut Ahmad-Nom.  
“\*Ahmad cut Ø.”

30. a. ?aTHa ?aHmad-u nafsahu  
hurt Ahmad-Nom. himself  
“Ahmad hurt himself.”

b.\* ?aTHa ?aHmad-u Ø  
hurt Ahmad-Nom.  
“\*Ahmad hurt Ø.”

31. a. Sadama ?aHmad-u nafsahu  
hit Ahmad-Nom. himself  
“Ahmad hit himself.”

b.\* Sadama ?aHmad-u Ø  
hit Ahmad-Nom.  
“\*Ahmad hit Ø.”

However, in certain constructions whose actions are directed to the subject, reflexive objects may be omitted. Consider the English examples below:



32. a. John bathed himself.  
       b. John bathed Ø.
33. a. John is hiding himself.  
       b. John is hiding Ø.

Arabic, on the other hand, allows for the omission of reflexive objects in the constructions similar to the English examples in (32-33). However, Arabic employs certain morphological devices to form the causative and the reflexive variants of the verb. Specifically, Arabic employs the morphological devices of gemination and the prefixation of *ʔa-* for the causative formation in (34.a) and (35.a) respectively. Similarly, the discontinuous morpheme *ʔi~ta* is employed for the formation of the reflexive variants of the verbs in (34.b) and (35.b). Consider the examples below:

34. a. Hammama ʔaHmad-u nafsahu  
       bath (Caus.) Ahmad-Nom. himself  
       “Ahmad bathed himself.”
- b. ʔistaHamma ʔaHmad-u  
       bathed (Refl.)  
       “Ahmad bathed.”
35. a. ʔaxfa ʔaHmad-u nafsahu  
       hid (Caus.) Ahmad-Nom. himself  
       “Ahmad hid himself.”
- b. ʔixtafa ʔaHmad-u  
       hid (Refl.) Ahmad-Nom.  
       “Ahmad hid.”

It is interesting to note that the Arabic verbs *labisa* and *ʔirtada* ‘to wear’ are quite similar in terms of the action depicted by them, the argument structure and the semantic roles associated with these arguments. However, these verbs exhibit different behavior with respect to the omission of their objects. Specifically, *labisa* allows for the object omission, while *ʔirtada* does not. Compare (36) with (37):

36. a. labisa ?aHmad-u malaabis-a-hu  
wore Ahmad-Nom. clothes-Acc.-his  
“Ahmad wore his clothes.”
- b. labisa ?aHmad-u Ø  
wore Ahmad-Nom.  
“Ahmad dressed.”
37. a. ?irtada ?aHmad-u malaabis-a-hu  
wore Ahmad-Nom. clothes-Acc.-his  
“Ahmad wore his clothes.”
- b.\* ?irtada ?aHmad-u Ø  
wore Ahmad-Nom.  
“\*Ahmad wore.”

In English, on the other hand, the verb *wear* behaves like the Arabic verb *?irtada*, whereas the verb *dress* behaves differently. Compare (38) with (39):

38. a. John is wearing his new shirt.  
b.\* John is wearing Ø.
39. a. John is dressing himself.  
b. John is dressing Ø.

However, in some cases the omission of the object of the verb whose action is directed toward the subject seems to be licensed by the nature of the object itself. Compare (40) with (41):

40. a. You should change your clothes/shirt.  
b. You should change Ø.
41. a. You should change your job/place.  
b.\* You should change Ø.



Interestingly, Arabic behaves exactly like English: it allows for the omission of the objects that refer to “wearing items” such as *clothes* and it does not allow for the omission of other objects though the same verb is used. Compare (42) with (43):

42. a. yajibu ?an tu-ghayyir-a malaabis-a-ka  
 should Comp. you-change-Subj. clothes-Acc.your  
 “You should change your clothes.”
- b. yajibu ?an tu-ghayyir-a Ø.  
 should Comp. you-change-Subj.  
 “You should change Ø.”
43. a. yajibu ?an tu-ghayyir-a makaan-a-ka / waTHiifat-a-ka  
 should Comp. you-change-Subj place-Acc.-your / Job-Acc.-your  
 “You should change your place/job.”
- b.\* yajibu ?an tu-ghayyir-a Ø  
 should Comp. you-change-Subj.  
 “\*You should change Ø.”

Thus, based on the Arabic and English data in (40-43) it seems that in certain contexts the omission of the object is licensed by the type of argument that functions as an object. In both languages, the object arguments *clothes/malaabis* are omissible, but *place, job/makaan, waTHiifah* are not, even though the verb used in these alternations is the same.

#### 4.4. Omission of Reciprocal Objects

The action depicted by certain verbs is inherently reciprocal in the sense that the subject of these verbs is a collective subject consisting of two participants, while the object is the reciprocal pronoun *each other* or the Arabic reciprocal phrase *kullun minhumaa ?al?aaxar*. If the collective subject in reciprocal alternations consists of more than two participants, then the reciprocal object in English is *one another*, and in Arabic it is *ba'Duhum ?alba'D*. There are also

some restrictions on the subject of reciprocal alternations concerning the nature of the participants. Specifically, all participants in the action must be of comparable status. For instance, as illustrated in the examples below, each participant must be animate and able to participate in initiating the action. Consider the following reciprocal alternations:

44. a. John and Mary met each other.  
b. All the boys met one another.
45. a. qaabala ?aHmad-u wa maryam-u kullan minhumaa al-?aaxara  
met Ahmad-Nom and Mary-Nom. each other (Acc.)  
“Ahmad and Mary met each other.”  
b. qaabal kullu l?a-wlaad-u ba'Dahum ba'Dan  
met all the-boys-Nom. one another (Acc.)  
“All the boys met one another.”

In both English and Arabic, the omission of reciprocal objects is acceptable with most verbs that are inherently reciprocal. The only difference between the two languages in this regard is that Arabic marks the reciprocal verb with an overt morpheme whenever the reciprocal object is deleted. Consider the English examples in (46) with those in (47):

46. a. John and Mary met each other.  
b. John and Mary disputed each other.  
c. John and Mary joked with each other.
47. a. John and Mary met Ø.  
b. John and Mary disputed Ø.  
c. John and Mary joked Ø.

Similarly, Arabic allows for the omission of the reciprocal object provided that a reciprocal morpheme is incorporated in the verb. Compare the examples in (48) with those in (49):



48. a. qaabala ?aHmad-u wa maryam-u kullan minhumaa al-?aaxara kaθiiran  
met Ahmad-Nom and Mary-Nom. each other (Acc.) a lot-Acc.  
“Ahmad and Mary met each other a lot.”
- b. naaza’a ?aHmad-u wa maryam-u kullan minhumaa al-?aaxara kaθiir-an  
disputed Ahmad-Nom. and Mary-Nom. each other (Acc.) a lot-Acc.  
“Ahmad and Mary met each other a lot.”
- c. maazaHa ?aHmad-u wa jamaal-un kullan minhumaa al-?aaxara kaθiir-an  
joked Ahmad-Nom. and Jamaal-Nom. each other (Acc.) a lot-Acc.  
“Ahmad and Jamaal joked with each other a lot.”
49. a. ta-qaabala ?aHmad-u wa maryam-u Kaθiir-an  
Recip.-met Ahmad-Nom. and Mary-Nom. a lot-Acc.  
“Ahmad and Mary met many times.”
- b. tanaaza’a ?aHmad-u wa maryam-u Kaθiir-an  
Recip.-disputed Ahmad-Nom. and Mary-Nom. a lot-Acc.  
“Ahmad and Mary disputed many times.”
- c. ta-maazaHa ?aHmad-u wa jamaal-un Kaθiir-an  
Recip.-joked Ahmad-Nom. and Jamaal-Nom. a lot-Acc.  
“Ahmad and Jamaal joked a lot.”

As illustrated by the English and Arabic examples, the two languages exhibit the same features with respect to the omission of the reciprocal objects. However, one-to-one correspondence among the inherently reciprocal verbs in the two languages does not exist. For instance, the English *kiss* allows for the omission of its reciprocal object, while its Arabic counterpart *qabbala* does not. Compare (50) with (51):

50. a. Fatima and Mary kissed each other.

- b. Fatima and Mary kissed Ø.
51. a. qabbalat faaTimat-u wa maryam-u  
kissed Fatima-Nom. and Mary-Nom.  
Kullan minhumaa ?al-?aaxara  
each other (Acc.)  
“Fatima and Mary kissed each other.”
- b.\* ta-qabbalat faaTimat-u wa maryam-u  
Recip.- kissed Fatima-Nom. and Mary-Nom.  
“Fatima and Mary kissed.”

As indicated in (51.b), the incorporation of the reciprocal morpheme *ta-* to imply that *Fatima and Mary kissed each other* is not possible with the verb *qabbala*. If the *ta-* morpheme is attached to the verb *qabbala*, the meaning of *ta-qabbala* changes: it would mean *accepted* or *received*.

On the other hand, some transitive verbs such as *watch* and *see* do not allow for the omission of the reciprocal objects in either language. Consider the English examples below:

52. a. John and Mary watched each other.  
b. John and Mary saw each other.
53. a.\* John and Mary watched.  
b.\* John and Mary saw.

Similarly, the Arabic verbs *shaahada* and *ra?a* do not allow for the omission of their reciprocal objects. Consider the following examples:

54. a. shaahada ?aHmad-u wa maryam-u kullan minhumaa ?al ?aaxara  
watched Ahmad-Nom. and Mary-Nom. each other (Acc.)  
“Ahmad and Mary watched each other.”
- b. ra?a ?aHmad-u wa maryam-u kullan minhumaa ?al ?aaxara  
saw Ahmad-Nom. and Mary-Nom. each other (Acc.)  
“Ahmad and Mary saw each other.”



55. a.\* shaahada ?aHmad-u wa Maryam-u Ø.

watched Ahmad-Nom. and Mary-Nom.

\*“Ahmad and Mary watched Ø.”

b.\* ra?a ?aHmad-u wa maryam-u Ø.

saw Ahmad-Nom. and Mary-Nom.

\*“Ahmad and Mary saw Ø.”

To sum up, some verbs allow for the omission of reciprocal objects in both languages. (e.g. verbs in 46-49), few English verbs allow for the omission of reciprocal objects, while their Arabic counterparts do not (e.g. verb *kiss*), and some verbs do not allow for the omission of reciprocal objects in either language (e.g. verbs in 52-55). It is assumed here that the omissibility of the reciprocal object is a lexical semantic property of the verb. Put differently, if the verb is inherently reciprocal, then it allows for the omission of the reciprocal object; if not, then it does not allow for the omission of the reciprocal object.

#### 4.5. Omission of the Objects of Giving Verbs

Dixon (1991) has accounted for the object omission in English by resorting to the semantic classification of verbs. For instance, according to Dixon, corporeal verbs (i.e. verbs of eating and drinking) allow for the omission of their objects on the assumption that objects of these verbs are predictable and nonspecific. This hypothesis is in fact true in both English and Arabic. (See the English and Arabic examples in Section 1).

On the other hand, Dixon stated that “transitive verbs of giving must generally specify an object” (Dixon, 1991:289). However, as pointed out by Aarts 1995 and Goldberg (2001), objects of giving verbs may receive indefinite and predictable interpretations. Hence, these objects may be omitted in certain contexts. The following example is taken from Aarts (1995: 85):

56. Pat gave and gave, but Chris just took and took.

Obviously, the object argument in the example above is quite general and predictable from the verb meaning and the sentence context. In

other words, the speaker in (56) must expect the hearer to be able to recover or predict the omitted object. Additional examples of alternations that allow for the omission of objects of the giving verbs are given below:

56. a. John always borrows Ø, but he never lends Ø.  
 b. I'm sorry I forgot to pay Ø.  
 c. John donates Ø once a week, but Mary donates Ø every day.

Similarly, Arabic allows for the omission of objects of 'giving verbs' in contexts where the speaker expects the hearer to be able to recover or predict the omitted objects. Consider these examples:

57. a. qallamaa yuqriD-u Ø ?aHmad-u wa laakinna-hu daa?iman yastaqriD-u Ø.  
 rarely lend.Indic. Ahmad-Nom. and but-he always borrows-Indic.  
 "Ahmad rarely lends Ø, but he always borrows Ø."  
 b. huwa da?iman yu'Tii Ø wa qallamaa ya?xuTH-u Ø  
 he always give and rarely take-Indic.  
 "He always gives Ø and rarely takes Ø."  
 c. man tabarra'a Ø qad ?adda waajib-a-hu  
 who donated certainly did duty-Acc.-his  
 "Whoever donated Ø, he certainly did his duty."

Thus, both English and Arabic provide counterexamples to the claim made by Dixon that 'giving verbs' must generally specify an object. As illustrated above, in both languages, objects of giving verbs may be omitted in contexts where these objects are predictable.

## 5. Summary and Conclusions

A central concern of the current syntactic theories as well as the lexical semantic studies is the question of how the inherent semantic features of verbs significantly relate to their syntactic distribution. Hence, there has been a growing recognition that verbs are able to



appear in a wide variety of argument structure patterns or syntactic alternations. This study is concerned with one type of the alternations exhibited by the transitive verbs in English and Arabic, namely the unexpressed object alternations.

The main objective of this study is to provide a contrastive lexical semantic and contextual analysis of the unexpressed object alternations in English and Arabic. Specifically, the main conditions that license the omission of objects in English and Arabic are characterized and the differences and similarities between the two languages are explored. Below is a summary of the main conclusions:

1. The conditions that license the process of object omission in the two languages are both contextual and lexical semantic.
2. Contrary to the claim that objects of causative verbs are obligatorily expressed, both English and Arabic allow for the omission of objects of causative verbs in contexts where these objects are nonspecific and predictable.
3. The conditions of 'iteration' is not necessary for the omission of objects of causative verbs provided that an appropriate context (e.g. the negative) is available.
4. In both languages, and as a result of object omission, the main emphasis in most cases shifts to the subject rather than to the action depicted by the verb. Hence, the process of object omission is used as a device to express a characteristic property of the subject.
5. The omission of the objects of psych-verbs is quite acceptable in English, while in Arabic the generic object *?al-?aaxariin* must be available if the object of psych-verbs is omitted.
6. In both languages, some verbs allow for the omission of reflexive objects but other verbs do not. In certain contexts, however, the omission of the object is licensed by the type of argument that functions as an object.
7. Most verbs that are inherently reciprocal allow for the omission of reciprocal objects in both languages. However, one-to-one correspondence does not exist between the two languages with

respect to these verbs.

8. Contrary to the claim that 'giving verbs' must specify an object, both English and Arabic allow for the omission of the objects of these verbs in certain contexts.
9. In certain cases, the object omission in the two languages is conditioned by the lexical semantics of the object itself.
10. Despite the fact that English and Arabic are typologically different and genetically unrelated, the two languages exhibit striking similarities with respect to the lexical semantic and contextual conditions that control the omission of objects of transitive verbs.



## 6. Appendices

### Appendix 1

The phonetic symbols used to represent the Arabic data are listed below with their corresponding Arabic letters in parentheses.

[ b ]	voiced bilabial stop .....	[ب]
[ t ]	voiceless alveo dental stop .....	[ت]
[ T ]	voiceless alveo dental velarized stop .....	[ط]
[ d ]	voiced alveo dental stop .....	[د]
[ D ]	voiced alveo dental velarized stop	[ض]
[ k ]	voiceless velar stop .....	[ك]
[ q ]	voiceless uvular stop .....	[ق]
[ ? ]	voiceless glottal stop .....	[ء]
[ j ]	voiced alveo-palatal offricate .....	[ج]
[ H ]	voiceless pharyngeal fricative .....	[ح]
[ ' ]	voiced pharyngeal fricative .....	[ع]
[ f ]	voiceless labio-dental fricative .....	[ف]
[ θ ]	voiceless dental fricative .....	[ث]
[ TH ]	voiced dental fricative .....	[ذ]
[ TH ]	voiced dental velarized fricative .....	[ظ]
[ s ]	voiceless alveolar fricative .....	[س]
[ S ]	voiceless alveolar velarized fricative .....	[ص]
[ z ]	voiced alveolar fricative .....	[ز]
[ sh ]	voiceless alveo palatal fricative .....	[ش]
[ x ]	voiceless uvular fricative .....	[خ]
[ gh ]	voiced uvular fricative .....	[غ]
[ h ]	voiceless glottal fricative .....	[هـ]
[ r ]	voiced alveolar trill .....	[ر]
[ l ]	voiced alveolar lateral .....	[ل]
[ m ]	voiced bilabial nasal .....	[م]
[ n ]	voiced alveolar nasal .....	[ن]

[ y ]	voiced palatal glide .....	[ ى ]
[ w ]	voiced bilabial round glide .....	[ و ]
[ i ]	high front vowel .....	كسرة
[ a ]	low back vowel .....	فتحة
[ u ]	high back rounded vowel .....	ضمة

Note: Consonant germination and vowel lengthening are represented by doubling the respective consonant or vowel.

## Appendix 2:

The abbreviations used in the Arabic data:

Nom.	=	Nominative Case
Acc.	=	Accusative Case
Gen.	=	Genitive Case
Indic.	=	Indicative Mood
Subj.	=	Subjunctive Mood
Refl.	=	Reflexive Form
Recip.	=	Reciprocal Form
Caus.	=	Causative Form
Comp.	=	Complementizer
Neg.	=	Negative

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## " المفعول الضمني في الإنجليزية والعربية : دراسة معجمية دلالية "

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### الملخص :

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقديم تحليل تقابلي للسمات الدلالية والمعجمية والسياقية التي تميز التراكيب المحتوية على مفعول ضمني في اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية وكذلك ضوابط حذف المفعول في هذه التراكيب ، وقد تبين في هذه الدراسة أنه \_ على العكس من الاعتقاد السائد في العديد من الدراسات المعاصرة \_ من الممكن في الإنجليزية والعربية حذف مفعول " الأفعال السببية " **Causative Verbs** " وكذلك مفعول " أفعال العطاء " **Giving Verbs** " شريطة توافر السياق المناسب لذلك ، وعند غياب المفعول في هذه التراكيب يتحول التركيز إلى الفاعل بحيث تصبح الوظيفة الأساسية لهذه التراكيب هي التعبير عن سمة مميزة للفاعل . وقد تبين كذلك في هذه الدراسة إمكانية حذف مفعول " الأفعال الانعكاسية " **Reflexive Verbs** " والأفعال التبادلية " **Reciprocal Verbs** " والأفعال النفسية " **Verbs- Psych** " ، غير أنه ليس هناك تطابق كامل بين اللغتين بخصوص الأفعال التي تسمح بحذف المفعول ، ومع ذلك فقد كشفت الدراسة عن وجود أوجه تشابه قوية جداً بين الإنجليزية والعربية فيما يتعلق بالضوابط المعجمية والدلالية والسياقية التي تحكم عملية حذف المفعول في التراكيب المشار إليها .