

Copula in Standard English and its Counterpart in Standard Arabic

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1. Introduction

Languages are different in their structures . Each language is a unique system of communication with its own sounds and morphemes . So , each language is self- contained within its own structure .The words in any language are arranged in certain patterns to produce grammatical structures .

The sentence consists of the subject and the predicate . Some languages must contain a verb in their structures like English , others may contain a verb in their structures and may not like Arabic . Accordingly , it can be said that English sentence is a verbal one begins with the subject, whereas Arabic sentence is either verbal or nominal . Some grammarians give the name *equational* to the sentence which does not contain a verb .

Some verbs have little independent meaning and their function is to link the subject with the complement so they are called copular verbs as verb *be* in English, *est* in French, *ist* in German , *bûn* in Kurdish , and □□□□ in Greek . Other languages do not have copular verbs in the nominal sentence corresponding to the verbs mentioned above so they are called by some orientalist and grammarians non-copulative languages as Arabic, Russian and Hungarian. Since that this research is concerned with Arabic , so it is to be mentioned that the term non-copulative is not suitable for Arabic because it has a copula of a different kind depending on the tenses and context.

2. Copular verbs

Copula(tive) is a term used in grammatical description to refer to a linking verb i.e. a verb which has little independent meaning , and whose main function is to relate other elements of clause structure , especially subject and complement . In English the main copulative verb is *be* as : *she is a doctor* and the term is often restricted to this verb but there are many others which have a similar function as *feel* in *she feels angry* , and *look* in *she looks nice* , etc . (Crystal, 1998 copula (tive)).

The word copula originates from the Latin noun for a "link or tie" that connects two different things. In English, it refers to the verb *be*, and the verbs which have the function of the copula are variously called copulative, equative, intensive, or linking verbs as *seem* , *become* , *appear*, *feel* , *look* , etc. (Quirk et al 1987: 64 n) . Non - Copulative is a term given by some grammarians to languages which do not have copula as Arabic , Russian and Hungarian. Other grammarians state that such languages have a copula but it is expressed in different ways depending on the tense , case , and context. They say that a copula is either explicit or implicit and they use the term zero copula referring to the linguistic phenomenon in which the presence of the copula is implied rather than expressed explicitly .

2.1 Copula in English

The verb *be* is the principal copula in English . It is a primary verb and it can be used as a main verb (lexical) or an auxiliary verb .

1.The verb *be* as a main verb has a copular function , i.e. it is used as a linking verb . It is used to express different situations as : profession, nationality, age , characteristics , condition, size, shape, colour, time , and place, i.e. it is used to give information about a person or a thing (Praninskas, 1975: 7) :

1. Betty is a student.
2. Bill is serious.
3. Mrs. Allen is ill.
4. He is here.

It is also used in existential sentences to denote the notion of existence (Quirk et al,1989: 418):

5. There is nothing healthier than a cold shower.
(Nothing healthier exists than a cold shower).

In some cases , **be** is close in meaning to **become** (Quirk et al, 1987: 1174)

6. Ann will be a qualified nurse next year.
7. She was angry when she heard about the accident.

2.1.1 Basic Sentence Patterns Related to Verb *Be* :

Stageberg (1971 : 170 – 174) states the following patterns related to the verb *be* as a main verb and the linking verbs :

- a.N be Adj
8. Man is mortal.
b. N be Uw (uninflected wor)
9.The girl is here .
10The book is on the table .
11.The meeting will be on Monday.
c. N¹ be N¹
12They are my friends .
d. N LV Adj
13. He seems friendly .
e. N¹ L V N¹
14. They stay my friends .

Quirk et al (1989 : 16) distinguish different types of clauses according to the types of object and complement . The following types are related to the copular verbs (*be* and the other copular verbs as *seem* , *become* , *get* etc.) :

- S V A
Subject verb adverbial
15. Mary is in the house .
S V Cs
Subject verb subject complement
16. Mary is a nurse

17. He is getting angry.

The verb *be* as a main verb can be used in imperative sentences and it may have *do* -construction in persuasive imperative and regularly has it with negative imperative

(Quirk et al , 1989 : 37 n (b)):

18. Be quiet !

19. Do be quiet!

20. Don't be silly!

2. The verb *be* as an auxiliary verb has two functions :

a. to form the progressive (continuous) construction :

21. He is learning English.

22. The weather has been improving.

b. to form the passive construction :

23. He was given a book.

24. Our team has never been beaten.

Note that the auxiliary verb function can be changed into copular function depending on one's point of view. One can still interpret the verb as a copula and the following verbal form as being adjectival:

25. She was sleeping when I visited her yesterday.

26. The story was written carefully.

2.1.2 Finite and non – finite verbs

The structure of verb phrase can be represented in terms of finite and non- finite verbs . Finite verb phrases have tense contrast , person and number concord between the subject of the clause and the finite verb in the verb phrase. Concord can be noticed clearly with the present tense of verb to be

27. I am here

28. You , we , they are here

29. It , she , he is here

Be is unique in having a full set of both finite and nonfinite forms in auxiliary function and it is also unique among English verbs in having eight different forms : *be , am , is , are was , were , been , being* (Quirk et al

, 1987 : 129)

30. He was awarded a prize.

31. He may be going visiting his friend .

32. He would have been being visited.

English also exhibits zero copula in rhetoric and casual speech., as in :

33. The higher , the better.

It is also used in the headlines of English newspapers.

2.2 Copula in Arabic

There are two types of sentences in Arabic : the verbal sentence and the nominal(equational) sentence. The verbal sentence contains a verb in its structure .The nominal(equational) sentence, on the other hand , does not contain a verb. It is composed of the subject and the predicate. Arabic equational sentences generally correspond to English sentences in which the main verb is verb *be* in the present tense(Aboud and McCarus 1983: 102)

In Arabic , the sentence has three elements : Al-musnad , Al-musnad Ilayhi and Al-isnaad which is called in English *copula* : the link between the subject and the predicate.

There is no copula in Arabic corresponding to *be* in English , *est* in French , *ist* in German , and □□□□ in Greek , so Arabic is considered by some grammarians non- copulative language

In the Arabic equational sentence , the subject is a noun or a pronoun and the predicate is either a noun , pronoun , adjective ,adverb or prepositional phrase . The predicate gives information about a profession, nationality, age , characteristics , condition, size, shape, colour, time , and place . When the predicate is a noun or an adjective , it should be indefinite (with some exceptions) . The indefiniteness of the predicate in such cases can be considered a kind of copula .

1. زيد معلم Zaid is a teacher.
2. زيد مؤدب Zaid is polite.
3. زيد في البيت Zaid is in the house.

The copula in Arabic is not expressed syntactically as it is in English. It is expressed according to the tense , case , and context . In the affirmative simple present tense , the copula is understood from the context , so there is no need to mention it:

4. الجو بارد The weather is cold .

In this sentence , the copula as a semantic feature is expressed by the indefiniteness of the predicate , and the tense of the copula is understood from the context .This sentence means that the weather is cold now i.e. at the time of speaking. Consider the following sentence :

5. زيد في الدار Zaid is in the house .

This sentence means that Zaid exists in the house , and his existence is clear and understood . There is no need to state the verb of existence because it is clear for the hearer but what he ignores is the place where he exists.

In the negative simple present , the verb *Laysa* ليس is used

6. ليس الجو باردا The weather is not cold .

In the simple past tense the verb *Kaana* كان (was) is used . This verb and other verbs associated with it as اصبح ، أمسى ، ظل ، ليس ، صار are called *kaana* and its sisters *كان واخواتها*:

7. كان الجو باردا The weather was cold .

This verb can be used with another verb to show that the action happened in the past :

8. كان زيد يضحك Zaid was laughing .

The verb *Yakoon* يكون is used in certain cases , for example to express a fact or a general idea for the sake of emphasis:

9. يكون الجو باردا في الشتاء و حارا في الصيف The weather is cold in winter and hot in summer.

10. يكون الجو جميلا عندما تشرق الشمس The weather is nice when the sun rises .

The form *kun* كن is used in the imperative:

11. كن مؤدبا Be polite .

The infinitives *ان تكون* and *كون* are also used :

12. ان تكون مؤدبا شيء جيد . To be polite is something good .

13. كونك مؤدب شئ جيد . Being polite is something good.

The form سيكون is used to express future time :

14. سيكون هنا . He will be here .

These verbs (كان واخواتها) are called افعال ناقصة defective verbs . They are a small group of linking verbs which their subject is in the nominative case and their predicate is in the accusative . They are considered verbs because they can be conjugated as any verb, but being defective is a matter of controversy . Some grammarians say that these verbs are defective because they are used only to express time . Others attribute the defectiveness of these verbs to their need to the predicate which should be in the accusative case and they treated it as an object .

الدكتور مصطفى جواد and others think that this name (افعال ناقصة) is not suitable for these verbs and the section of defective verbs should be omitted from Arabic grammar . They think that these verbs are ordinary verbs followed by the subject, and the predicate which is treated as حال :

15. كان زيد خائفاً . Zaid was afraid .

بشر in his translation of Ulmann 's book Words and their use comments and states that the copula in Arabic can be expressed in different ways and it can be understood through phonetic, linguistic, grammatical, and morphological phenomena as explained below :

a . the indefiniteness of the predicate can be considered a kind of copula:

16. البيت كبيرٌ . The house is big

If the predicate is definite , the structure will be a part of a sentence not a complete sentence:

17. البيت الكبير جميل . The big house is beautiful.

b. the potential pause between the subject and the predicate and the intonation can be considered a kind of copula.

c. the use of the pronoun of separation when the subject and the predicate are definite can be considered a kind of copula :

18(وقهْمُ السَّيِّئَاتِ وَمَنْ تَقِ السَّيِّئَاتِ يَوْمَئِذٍ فَقَدْ رَحِمْتَهُ وَذَلِكِ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ)

(غافر: ٩)

The pronoun of separation is normally inserted between the subject and the predicate when both of them are definite to remove the confusion of the predicate being an adjective .

The pronoun of separation in this context is called a copula and it is used either to indicate the beginning of the predicate or to emphasize the subject (Ziadeh and Winder 1957:48) .

Conclusions

It can be concluded that English and Arabic have a copula but they are of different kinds. In English the main copula is the verb *be* . In Arabic the copula is expressed by different phonetic, linguistic , grammatical , and morphological phenomena. It exists in Arabic but it is not in the same way as it is in English . The researcher finds out through her teaching English as a foreign language that Arab learners of English always make a mistake by uttering such a sentence : *Ahmed teacher* instead of : *Ahmad is a teacher* . Such mistakes are made because there is no one- to- one relationship between English and Arabic. The interference of Arabic is behind the production of such a sentence because Arabic does not have a copula *be* nor *an indefinite article* corresponding to them in English .

The Arabic nominal (equational) sentence generally corresponds to English sentence in which the simple present of verb *be* is the main verb in the sentence i.e. am , is , and are . The Arabic verbal sentence with the verb kaana كان corresponds to English sentence in other tenses and cases.

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