

The Syntactic Factors Affecting the Arabic Aspectual Verbs in Al- Tayeb Saleh's novel "Season of Migration to the North"

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Abstract

This study aims at investigating the classification of aspectual verbs in Arabic. The study will investigate the syntactic factors that affect the distribution of Arabic verbs into the four universal aspectual classes as proposed In Vendler's(1967) literature. First, it will shed light on the four types of Arabic aspectual verbs. Then, it will investigate the basic ontological features which are considered the cornerstone for any semantic classification of verbs. The study will be limited to the syntactic elements that are heavily influence the identification and classification of Arabic aspectual verbs.

1- Introduction

Most of the literature on the universals of human languages had focused mainly on the syntactic, phonological, and morphological features of languages, with much less concentration being given to the semantic part of language (Van Valin, 2006). Many linguists come to recognise the vital role of verbs in the proposition of any sentence. With regard to happening or non-happening, verbs can be classified into static and dynamic. In Vendler's(1967) literature, essential universal four verb classes are proposed. The classes are mainly: states, accomplishments, achievements, and activity.

2- Types of Arabic Aspectual verbs

Aspectual verbs in Arabic fall into:

2.1 State Verbs

These kinds of verbs are known in Arabic as (افعال الحالات). 'State' means the static situation that remains constant unless changed; that is, as التوكاني(1990:98) describes:

"ان طبقه الحالات تصف اوضاعا تستمر مده زمنيہ لا تتقيد بنقطه نهايه محددہ"

In other words, the state represents a constant homogeneous fact within the time interval, the state can be described by the static verbs in which there is no progressive in its occurrence. From the above, it can be understood that static verbs that describe static states indicate durativity that is the opposite of punctuality. although some punctual verbs do not indicate any movement. Among state verbs in Arabic are those that denote love, hate, joy, pleasure, sadness and annoyance as in the following example:

١- انا لا احبها ولا اكرهها.

‘I neither love nor hate her’

٢- فرحت كثيرا وارتحت عندما رايتك

‘I rejoiced and comforted very much when I saw you’

٣- اسلوبه في الكلام يزعجني دوما.

‘ His manner of speaking always annoys me’

None of the verbs in the previous examples indicate activity or muscular effort by the speaker, but rather a description of static situations which contain no movement.

2.2 Activities

These kinds of verbs are known in Arabic as (افعال الانشطة). 'Activities' describe the iterative dynamic situations in a time where the activity does not adhere to a specific endpoint; this means that the subject can be described by this activity at any moment that makes up that time in which the event occurs. It (ibid:98) also adds that “ويكون الوضع حركيا اذا دل على انتقال او تغيير او تكرار”. It is noticed that the Arabic language does not devote attention to recognise whether a situation is dynamic or not only but also presents some features or concepts which play a prominent role in specifying a particular meaning for each movement. Such features as the place, i.e. the area in which the object moves to complete a particular movement ,speed, direction, path, method, the nature of the moving object , force, and the way the movement is performed in terms of its iteration, non-iteration, or streamlined (حجازي 1998:163; داوود 2002:40-38). For examples:

وبعدها رايتہ يعدو بعيدا في هذا الاتجاه.

‘And then I saw him run off that way’

اخذ يرقص ويرقص لسماح الاخبار الجيده.

‘He started dancing and dancing for hearing the good news’

Verbs like (يرقص dance), (يعدو run off) in the examples above all are dynamic-related activities, they are performed by the doer and are extended in time and continuous so that we can describe the subject at any moment in which the verb occurs.

2.3 Accomplishment verbs

These kinds of verbs are known in Arabic as (افعال الاتمامات) ثالث (2007: 118) defines these verbs as:

الافعال التي تصف اوضاعا يتم تحقيقها في مده زمنييه تشكل امتدادا يفصل بين نقطه بدايه الحدث ونقطه نهايته وتتجز في هذه المده الزمنيه حركات متباينه لا تقع على جزء واحد من الموصوف اكثر من مره.

as exemplified by sentences like these:

٤٩. اكلت البنت فطيره

'The girl ate a pie'

٥٠. بنى محمد بيتا

'Mohammad built a house'

Verbs such as (اكلت ate), (بنى built), in the previous examples require a time before the situation described is realized. The pie, for example in (٤٩) is not said to be eaten until the girl eats the last piece. We also notice in example (٥٠) that the house is not built until it is completely built. Other verbs of this kind, are : صنع (make), حفر (dig), نسج (weave), خيط (sew), etc.

2.4 Achievement verbs:

These kinds of verbs are known in Arabic as (افعال الانجارات). Such verbs are also called Punctual verbs in some studies. التوكاني (1990:98) defines these kinds of verbs as:

هي الافعال التي تستغرق مده زمنييه قصيره تتقارب فيها نقطتا البدايه والنهائيه ان لم تلتحما في نقطه زمنييه واحده.

As in:

٨- مضغ الولد الشكولاته ثم ابتلعها.

'The boy chewed the chocolate and then swallowed it'

The verb (بلع swallow) is considered to be one of the verbs that indicates the meaning of punctuality. However, watching the action of swallowing shows that it does not need a durative period to take place, that is, it is impossible to determine its beginning, middle, or its end, unlike, for example the verbs: (اكل eat) and (شرب drink), etc.

The verb اكل, for example requires a set of processes before it can be achieved, and it usually consists of gradually chewing the food and ending with swallowing it, and also the verb شرب requires sipping the drink and then swallowing it, whereas بلع takes place inside the mouth, then it passes into the throat, reaching the stomach, and thus it is punctual, unlike اكل and شرب.

3. Aspectual features

These common aspectual features have been adopted by the majority of scholars as fundamental guidelines for distributing the various verbs of a language into clear and definite aspectual classes. A brief discussion of each feature with examples to show the possibility of applying these features into Arabic verbs is the main concern of this section.

3.1 [\pm static]

Stative verbs enable the speakers to interpret a situation as a constant state, with no changes or internal phases. In addition, the speakers do not overtly concentrate on the starting point or the end point of the state even if the speakers use the stative in the past (Saeed, 2003: 74), as instanced:

٩- مات الولد.

'The boy died'

More examples of such verbs include:

كره, hated; غضب, be nervous; فضل, prefer; فقد, lost; افتقر الى, lacked, etc.

3.2 [\pm dynamic]

The most common potential distinction within dynamic situation kinds is between processes and events. In processes, the speaker focuses on the internal structure of the dynamic event, whereas with events, we view the situation as a whole, notice:

١٠- انفجرت السيارة.

'The car blew up'

١١- ذهبت البنت الى السوق

'The girl went to the

market'

The verb (انفجر blew up) in (١٠) is a dynamic verb. The speaker here sees the event as a whole, while the verb (ذهبت went) in (١١) is also a dynamic but indicates a process with internal phases.

3.3 [\pm telic]

Telic vs atelic verbs indicate those processes which are viewed as possessing a natural completion. Such verbs are resultatives if they reach a successful conclusion. The verbs may label bounded (telic) or unbounded (atelic) processes, depending on the nature of their complements, as in:

١٢- كُتِبَ الْوَلَدُ رِسَالَةً.

'The boy wrote a letter'

١٣- يَكْتُبُ الْوَلَدُ بِاتِقَانٍ.

'The boy writes carefully'

In (١٢) the verb reaches into a result. Here, the speaker tells that the boy wrote a letter, whereas in (١٣) the speaker informs us that the boy writes carefully, and there is no result to reach, so, the first one is (+telic) while the second is (-telic) or atelic.

3.4 [\pm punctual]

Durative and Punctual are variations of dynamic situation types. Durative verbs denote a process or situation which keeps on for a period of time, whereas punctual verbs denote an event that seems to be instantaneous. Virtually, it involves no time (Saeed, 2003: 71). This case is illustrated in:

١٤- طَرَقَتْ هِنْدُ الْبَابِ.

'Hind knocked on the door'

١٥- نَامَ الْوَلَدُ.

'The baby slept'.

If we make a comparison between the time of the punctual verb (طرق knock) in (١٤) with that of the durative verb (نام sleep) in (١٥) it will be so short. The speaker does not concentrate on the internal phases of the punctual event.

4. The Syntactic Determinants of Aspectual Verbs in Arabic

In addition to the semantic aspectual features which are considered to be universally the basis for any aspectual distributions of verbs in all languages including Arabic. Some analytical factors seem to be essential in distributing Arabic verbs into Vendlar's universal four verb classes. These factors include:

4.1 Aspect and Definiteness

The aspectual types of certain Arabic verbs can be influenced by some analytical constructions or elements lie outside the verb itself. Alrashed (2012:150) argues that the sentence indicates a telic interpretation by default if it contains any verb other than motion verbs as well as a definite object, as in:

١٦- اكل علي التفاحه فى ساعة.

'Ali ate the apple in an hour'

The sentence would always indicate atelic interpretation when an indefinite or quantitatively indeterminate object is used. Sometimes, the Arabic definite object may be emphasised by the word *kull* 'all', which, as Alrashed (ibid:151) thinks, works in the same way as phrasal verbs in English regarding their order with the verb. First, 'kull' cannot occur after indefinite objects as illustrated in (أ ١٧). Moreover, it always occurs before the noun if used with indefinite objects as illustrated in (ب ١٧), whereas it can occur before or after the definite object as illustrated in (ب، آ ١٨).

١٧- (أ) *علي اكل تفاحا كله.

'Ali ate apples up'

(ب) المدير كافئ كل عامل

'The manager rewarded each worker.'

١٨- (أ) علي اكل التفاحه كلها

'Ali ate the apple up'

(ب) علي اكل كل التفاحه

'Ali ate up the apple'

What can be proved through the above examples is that there is a clear connection between definiteness and aspect in Arabic in a way that resembles phrasal verbs in English. Moreover, the quantifier 'kull' can appear with a pronominal in Arabic sentences, as we see in:

١٩- (أ) علي اكلها كلها

Ali-un akal-a-ha kull-a-ha

'Ali ate it up'

(ب) علي اكل كلها*

*Ali-un akal-a kull-a-ha

'*Ali ate up it'

The underlined pronoun (**-ha**) in (83 a) is cliticised onto to the verb 'akal'. It also functions as an agreement morpheme when it occurs on the quantifier 'kull' in a process known as clitic-doubling. Here, the aspect marker 'kull' marks perfectivity and expresses what Anderson (1971:389) calls a "holistic interpretation" for an event. For Anderson, the notion of telicity can be viewed in terms of "a holistic/ partitive interpretation". The "holistic interpretation" means that the direct object is completely influenced by the action reported by the verb, while with the "partitive interpretation" the direct object is not completely influenced by the action. The sentence in (٢٠) will be

grammatical if the quantifier 'kull' is substituted with the atelic marker as shown below:

٢٠- علي اكل بعضها

'Ali ate some of it'

4.2 Semi-lexical Verbs

There are a set of semi-lexical verbs that can be used as syntactic determinants to specify telicity in Arabic. These verbs are usually used with main verbs to help determine the point of time and whether the verb indicates the beginning, the middle or the end of an event/ action (like, بدأ begin; انتهى finish). In comparison with 'goal-oriented' verbs, these verbs function as supporting verbs that force the main verbs to be gerundive, as shown in :

٢١- أنهى أحمد قراءة المجلة في ساعة

'Ahmad finished reading the magazine in one hour'

When used with a verb that represents an atelic meaning like the one used in (٢٢), the need for such a semi-lexical verb is clearer.

٢٢- قاتل الجنود اعدائهم لمدة ساعتين

'The troops fought their enemies for two hours'

If we add the semi-lexical verb انتهى, the sentence will indicate a telic meaning as shown in (٢٣)

٢٣- أنهى الجنود قتال اعدائهم في ساعتين

'The troops ended their fighting with their enemies in two hours'

The semi-lexical verb 'finish' operates as an aspect that gives the sentence a telic meaning.

In traditional Arabic grammar books, there is often a set of verbs that do not appear to be grouped under a particular label. In other words, in grammar books, verbs such as (ما انفك، ما برح، ما فتى) are all used to convey the continuity of action are not grouped under a specific name / title or purpose. The title of a segment that addresses these verbs is like "ma-zala & manfak'a & ma-fate'a & ma-bariha" (Yaqout 1989: 45).

Another group of semi-lexical verbs are often used specifically to express the beginning of an action/event (such as, جعل، ja'al; شرع، shra'a; اذخ، tafiq; اأخذ، a'akhad). These verbs are usually referred to as أفعال الشروع. Wright (1967: 42) calls them as 'verbs of beginning.' These verbs behave similarly to the

previous collection, except for the fact that, as seen in (٢٤) below, they occur without particles.

٢٤- جعل يكتب الرواية

'He started writing the novel'

Finally, there is what is considered by traditional grammarians as أفعال المقاربة, also referred to by Wright (1967: 106) as "appropinquation verbs". These verbs are used to signify proximity to an event as something is about to happen (e.g. كاد, kada and اوشك, awshaks) as seen in (٢٥).

٢٥- كاد يمشى.

He was about to walk.

4.3 Prepositional Phrases

Like English, the prepositional phrases can play a major role in the aspectual classification of verbs in Arabic. Motion verbs, for example, which are not 'goal-oriented' such as (دفع push; سحب pull; جَرَّ drag) which are characterized as being inherently activity durative verbs, may undergo a change to telic accomplishment verbs that have end results or completed events in case of being modified by spatial prepositions such as (الى to and حتى till), as in:

٢٦- دفع الرجل العربيه لمدته ساعتين

The man pushed the cart for two hours.

٢٧- دفع العامل العربيه الى المصنع فى نصف ساعه

The worker pushed the cart to the factory in half an hour.

The above sentences prove that the structures around the verb phrase play a significant role in specifying the aspectual types of a verb, which, in its turn, provides different argument structures. We notice, for example, in (أ ٢٨), the aspectual type indicates an atelic meaning where the temporal structure of the verb has no ending point. In this case, the verb phrase represents a simple structure and, therefore, does not need to extend to the RESULT layer. Whereas in (ب) the verb phrase denotes a complex structure which requires the extension to the RESULT layer since it entails a process and an ending point. Another example that shows how an element inside the verb phrase takes part in governing the argument structure depending on the type of eventuality is given below:

٢٨ (أ) ركضت البنت لمدته ساعه

The girl ran for an hour.

(ب) -ركضت البنت ميلا فى ساعه

The girl ran a mile in an hour.

Since the verb (ركض run) is inherently an activity verb, so it yields an atelic meaning. However, the definite object (ميلا one mile) coerces the argument structure and the type of eventuality.

4.4 Partitive Meaning

Another determinant of aspectual types in Arabic could be those elements in the structure that may cause a 'partitive' or 'holistic' effect on the object. Comrie (1976:8) shows that the grammatical aspect is sensitive to the kind of case attributed to the object. This can give an indication that the syntax has a role in deducing the grammatical aspect, which, in its turn, is related to the aspectual type of a verb. In Arabic, the 'partitive' reading is possible and can be done by separate words outside the predicate. For example:

٢٩- اكل الولد من التفاح لمدته ساعتين

'The boy ate from the apples for two hours'

In the above sentence, The object (التفاح the apples) becomes genitive because it is preceded by the preposition(من from), and this changes the eventuality type of the verb (اكل ate) from telic/accomplishment to atelic/activity. Here, although the object is still definite, the aspectual type of the verb has been changed and in this time, it is concerned with another element around the structure.

Arabic has another means of expressing 'partitive' meaning. This is done thorough what Arab grammarians refer to as (البدال substitution). Traditionally, this process demands the replacement of an object by another object due to pragmatic reasons. One type of (البدال) is what is called as (بعض بدل (part of whole), as in:

٣٠- اكل التفاحه بعضها

He ate part of the apple.

It is important to mention that the notion of (البدال) cannot occur with indefinite objects, and that supports the argument that the sentence with a definite object always expresses a telic meaning; notice:

٣١- اكل تفاحا بعضه*

He ate some apples.

4.5 Perfective/ imperfective forms

Comrie (1976:19) states that it is a common phenomenon in languages that express the perfective and imperfective forms through grammatical markers that stative verbs in perfective forms can indicate ingressive meaning, that is, marking the inception of the state only, rather than the durative situation of that state. Thus, they are in this case achievements. They carry the features of non-durative telic situations. This dual aspectuality of state verbs seems to be very regular in Arabic. Examples in Arabic include (*مرض* to be sick; *نام* to sleep; *حضر* to be present). Although clearly indicating states, such verbs can also be achievements, marking the transition into the state. Hence, each of the three verbs mentioned has two possible translations into English as shown below:

- *مرض* = to be sick = to become sick
- *نام* = to sleep and = to fall asleep
- *حضر* =to be present = to come‘ (Dahlgren 1995:252)

This means that achievement verbs in Arabic can be divided into two groups, the first group is the one just discussed above, achievements that ‘share’ a word with a state, such as the verb (*نام* sleep) while the second group includes achievement verbs that do not ‘share’ the same word with a stative, such as (*فاز* win and *وجد* find). These verbs cannot indicate stative meaning. Hallberg (2010: 22) calls the latter group as ‘pure achievements’ to distinguish them from the stative-achievement group.

Another group of Arabic verbs with dual aspectuality are those verbs that can be both statives and activities. This is probably due to the nature of these verbs which denote ‘conceptually relative, non-discrete properties’ and, hence, they semantically permit a gradual slide within the feature. Verbs that contain u as mid-vowel in both the Perfect and the Imperfect forms are dominant in this group. Two examples are (*كَبُرَ* to be big; to grow and *كَثُرَ* to be plenty; to multiply). Such verbs are always intransitive (Badawi et al. 2005:60), though not all of these verbs can be activities. Possibly this is when the verb is indicating moral features, such as (*حَسُنَ* to be good‘ and *شُرُفَ* to be noble). According to Wehr (1994: 265) these verbs do not have the meaning of ‘to become good’ or ‘to become noble’.

5. The Adopted Model

The purpose of this section is to present a suitable model for the analysis of Arabic aspectual verbs. This suggested model depends on the categories of aspectual verbs as presented by Brinton (1988:28-9), with some modifications in their elements to make it more suitable for the purpose of analysing Arabic aspectual verbs. The suggested model tries to present a framework of those prominent elements that participate effectively in identifying and classifying Arabic aspectual verbs. Three categories are involved in this model. The first

category takes into account the semantic type of the verb, i.e. whether it is state, activity, etc. The second category concentrates on the semantic features of the verb. The last category deals with the syntactic factors that affect the process of identifying and classifying verbs into the aspectual classes, as shown in the figure below:

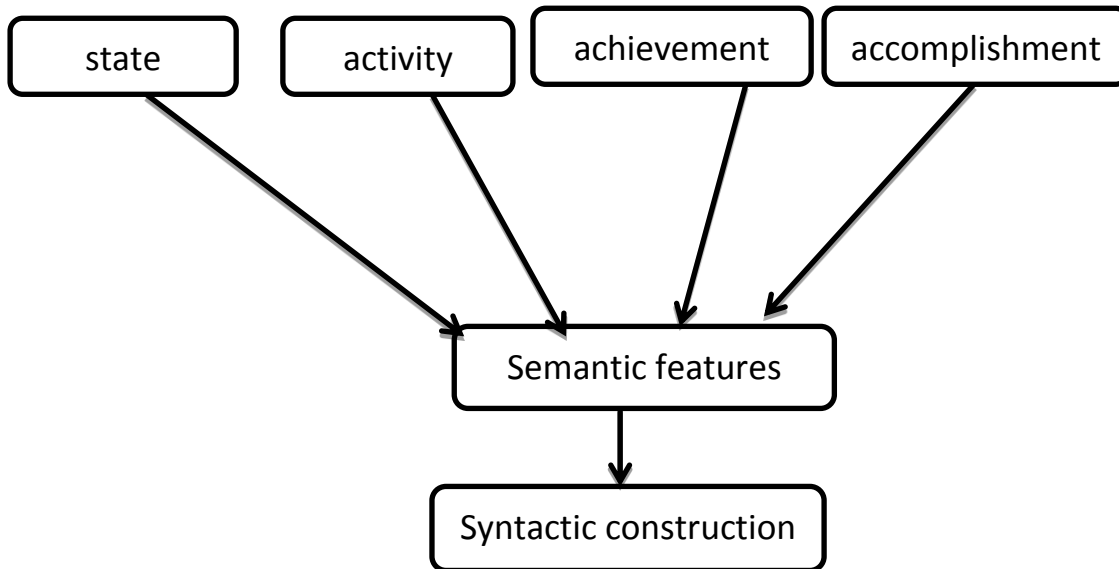


Figure (1) The Adopted Model of Aspectual Verbs in Arabic

6. Data

The data consist of aspectual verbs in the Arabic novel entitled “موسم الهجرة الى الشمال” “*Season of Migration to the North*” by Tayeb Salih. This novel will serve as the data source for the analytical part of the study. The corpus data is compiled manually from the above novel which are taken from the internet. Nine sentences containing aspectual verbs with different syntactic factors are selected randomly from the beginning, middle, and the end of the novel.

7. Analysis

What also has been noted through investigating the Arabic aspectual verbs is that some verbs have undergone the effect of some syntactic factors, which in turn, have contributed largely to the changing of the eventuality type of some verbs from one side or at least in effecting a particular aspectual feature of a

verb from the other side. These syntactic elements may lie outside or inside the verbs.

Concerning the changing of the semantic features of some predicates, consider the following sentences:

٣٢- سبعة اعوام وانا احن لهم واحلم بهم. (ص ٥)

٣٣- واحيانا نسري بالليل ما طاب لنا السري. (ص ٧٨)

٣٣- وبعد ان انهى جدال الحاضرين قرر ان ينسحب من المكان. (ص ٦٧)

The verbs (انحن, نسري, انهى) in the above sentences are characterised as being atelic/ unbounded sentences. No terminal points are needed to be reached. However, this feature is changed into telic due to the effect of particular syntactic elements, such as adverbial phrases as in (بالليل, سبعة اعوام) in sentences (٣٢, ٣٣) or semi lexical verbs as in (انهى) in sentence (٣٣). Such syntactic constructions contribute basically in changing the semantic feature of the above verbs to be (+telic), that is, they have to reach the endpoints.

The durative feature of some predicates can also be changed due to the effect of some syntactic factors, as in the sentence below:

٣٥- رأى المحلفون امامهم رجلا لا يريد ان يدافع عن نفسه. رجلا فقد الرغبة فى الحياه. (ص ٨٥)

The verb (فقد) is inherently a punctual verb, that is, it does not require an extended period of time. Hence, the syntactic components may cause a change in this punctuality in certain conditions. The verb (فقد) in (٣٥) is said to become durative as to the nature of object being added. The object here is (الرغبة) which is a mental object, i.e., not physical thing. So the verb carries the feature of durativity.

Concerning the verbs that are entirely changed from one aspectual class to another because of syntactic factors can be exemplified by the:

٣٦- ولقينا سياره حكوميه معطله حولها خمس عساكر وشاويش متدرعين بالبنادق. وقفنا. شربوا من مائنا واكلوا من زادنا واعطيناهم البنزين. (ص ١٣٤ - ١٣٥)

٣٧- ذهبت اليه ثانی يوم فی حقله، فوجدته مكبا يحفر الارض حول شجره ليمون. (ص ٢٢)

The verbs (اكل , شرب) in (٣٦) are inherently accomplishment verbs, so they yield telic meanings. However, the prepositional phrases (من زادنا , من مائنا) change the eventuality type of these verbs from telic/accomplishment to atelic/activity. However, in (٣٧) the verb (يحفر) is inherently activity verb. It carries the telic meaning. However, the adverbial phrase (حول شجره اليمون) coerces the type of eventuality from atelic activity to telic accomplishment.

Moreover, it should be noted that the perfective and imperfective forms of the verbs can also be an important syntactic factor in classifying predicates as shown in the following sentences:

٣٨- بَعَدَ باهله الى اطراف القرية ليتجنب ثرثره البشر. (ص ٣٨)

٣٩- وكان قد حضر رجل انكليزي يعمل في وزارة المالىه. (ص ٦٩)

٤٠- مرضت بنت محبوب بسبب ماحدث واوشكت على الهلاك. (ص ٩٧)

The verb (بَعَدَ) in (٣٨) which contains u as mid-vowel in both the Perfect and the Imperfect forms belongs to a group of dual aspectuality. Such verbs are classified as either state or activity verbs and this is due to the nature of these verbs which denote 'conceptually relative, non-discrete properties'. In (٣٩, ٤٠) the verbs (حضر , مرض) are state verbs which come in the perfective form. They mark the inception of the state only rather than the durative situation of that state. Therefore, they are classified as 'stative-achievement group' to distinguish

them from 'pure achievements'. They carry the features of non-durative telic situations.

8. Conclusions

Throughout this study, the researcher has come up with a number of findings:

1. Arabic verbs can be classified semantically in accordance with Vendler's proposal of distributing verbs into four aspectual classes: state, activity, accomplishment, and achievement. This distribution depends heavily on two basic elements to classify verbs appropriately. One is the semantic features that define the verbs and the other is the syntactic environment that surrounds the verbs.
2. Throughout investigating the Arabic aspectual verbs, it has been noted that the syntactic factors play a vital role in identifying and classifying the Arabic aspectual verbs. This effect is demonstrated through changing a particular aspectual feature of some verbs or in changing the entire eventuality class of other verbs.
3. Since Arabic has a unique structural system, the syntactic factors which affect the eventuality types in this language are somehow different from those which affect languages with different structural systems, such as English.

العوامل النحوية المؤثرة في افعال الحدث في رواية موسم الهجرة الى الشمال للطيب صالح

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الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى البحث في موضوع تصنيف افعال الحدث في اللغة العربية. وستحقق هذه الرسالة في العوامل التركيبية التي تؤثر في توزيع الافعال العربية ضمن التصنيف الرباعي العالمي لافعال الحدث المطروح ضمن ادبيات فندلر (1967). بادئا، سيبسط الضوء على انواع افعال الحدث الاربعه في اللغة العربية، ومن ثم سيتم التطرق الى الخصائص الدلالية والتي تعتبر بمثابة حجر الزاوية لاي تصنيف دلالي للافعال. وستكون هذه الدراسة مقتصره على البحث في العناصر التركيبية التي تؤثر بصورة كبيره في معرفه وتصنيف افعال الحدث في اللغة العربية.

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