A Diagnostic Chomskian View to Arabic Asymmetry

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Abstract

Agreement asymmetry is one of the significant linguistic phenomena that Arab and Western linguists (Ghaly,1995; Parkinson, 1995; Benmamoun,1998; Collins, 2001; Dayf, 1986) and Aoun, 1994) have tried to account for within the framework of the Government and Binding theory. They focused upon the number asymmetry in different varieties in Arabic. Most linguists assert that in different types of Arabic there is always gender agreement between the subject and the verb. This study aims at giving much evidence for the lack of gender agreement in Modern Standard Arabic(MSA), and at accounting this gender asymmetry within the framework of the Minimality Program (Chomsky, 1995). The sample consists of 37 sentences collected from some Arabic textbooks. To analyze the data collected, a qualitative diagnostic research design was adopted. One of the essential findings of this study is that there is no gender agreement in Verb-Subject-Object (VSO) sentences between the postverbal subject and the verb if the subject is (a) an unreal feminine Noun Phrase (NP), (b) a broken plural NP, (c) an inanimate collective NP, (d) a collective NP, (e) a regular sound feminine plural NP, (f) an irregular sound feminine plural NP, (g) an irregular sound masculine plural NP, and (h) a real feminine NP separated from its verb by any category. This study concludes that the head C in VSO sentences in MSA carries a weak gender feature represented as [-Strong]. Therefore, in VSO sentences, if the verb disagrees with its subject in gender, it will move from V to I and then to C because C is [-Strong]. A final conclusion is that the head I in VSO sentences in MSA carries a strong gender feature, represented as [+Strong]. Therefore, in VSO sentences, if the verb and its subject agree in gender, the verb will move from V to I; it will not move further.

Keywords: gender asymmetry; minimality; head movement; weak and strong features

1. Introduction
Agreement asymmetry in different varieties of Arabic has been tackled by many Arab and Western linguists, such as Ghaly (1995), Benmamoun (1998), Mohammad (1999), Mahfoudi (2002), Bahloul (2002). Gender agreement has been given little or no attention. A considerable amount of research has been conducted to set an account for number rather than gender asymmetry. Only Ghaly (1995) introduced a modest attempt to examine gender agreement in QurʔanIc Arabic within the framework of Government and Binding, a theory that has been utterly modified by Chomsky. However, the focus of interest in this study is to find the grammatical cases in Arabic grammar that allow gender disagreement between the verb and the post – verbal subject in VSO sentences in MSA such as the example illustrated below, and then to account these cases within the framework of the Minimality Program (Chomsky,1995)

hadarat   Ir-rIdʒaalu
[came.3.fem.sg.past]   [the-men.3.mas.pl.nom.]
''*The men came*.''   (Al-Said, 2006, p.119)

2. Theoretical Framework
The Minimalist Program (MP) (Chomsky, 1995) depends on two main economy principles: Economy of Representation and Economy of Derivation. Economy of Representation means that we have only two main levels of representation: Logic Form (LF) and Phonetic Form (PF) (Radford, 1997; Roberts 1997). The MP (Chomsky, 1995) disregards the other levels of representation, Surface Structure (SS) and Deep Structure (DS). There are some principles working at LF, such as Chain Uniformity Principle and the Shortest Movement Condition. Chain Uniformity Principle means that the head and the foot of the chain should have the same phrase structure (Ouhallo, 1999; Radford, 1997). The Shortest Movement Condition, for Chomsky (1995), means that a constituent should move from one position to another in the shortest possible steps. Economy of derivation involves three basic principles: (1) the Full Interpretation Principle, (2) the Procrastinate Principle, and (3) the Principle of Greed. For Radford (1997), the Full Interpretation Principle states that ''the Logic Form (LF) representation for a given expression must contain all and only those semantic features which determine linguistic aspects of the meaning of the expression,'' (p.261) and at Phonetic Form (PF) there are only the phonetic features that determine pronunciation. Ouhalla (1999,) asserts that the basic idea underlying the Procrastinate Principle ''is that covert LF operations are less costly than overt operations.''(p.436) The Principle of Greed states that a category moves in order to satisfy its own morphological requirements (Ouhalla, 1999; Roberts, 1997). Both economy of derivation and economy of representation are regarded as the most important pillars of the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995; Crystal, 2003).

But before examining gender disagreement in VSO sentences in (MSA), much light should be shed on the theory of head movement (Chomsky 1993; 1995) which has been illustrated and explained in Ghaly (1995), Hornstein (2001); Roberts (1997), and Ouhalla (1999). Radford (1997) points out that the theory of head movement implies two different types of movement: INFL – movement and Verb – movement. As for I – movement (see 1 below), the auxiliary verb moves from the head V position inside the Inflectional Phrase (IP) to the head Complementizer inside the CP (Complementizer Phrase); the auxiliary leaves behind a trace (i.e. a silent copy of itself). Auxiliary inversion in Modern Standard English (MSE) supports the notion of I – movement. The

V – movement (See 2 below) means that the verb moves from the head V position inside VP to the head I position inside the IP. The theory of V – movement is supported by a close examination of Early Modern English (EME).
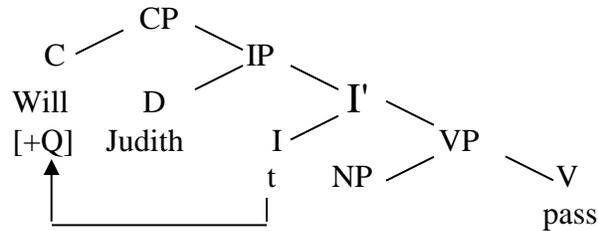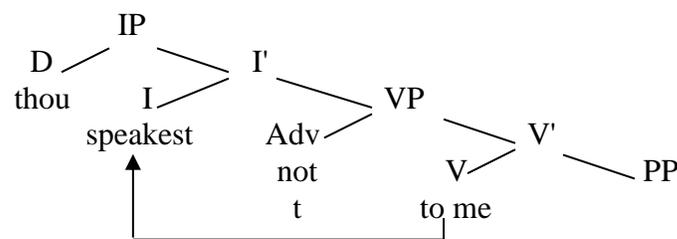

Figure 1. [I to C movement]

Figure 2. [V to I movement]

3. Review of Literature

Ghaly (1995) investigates the problem of subject-verb agreement in VSO sentences in Qurʔanic Arabic within the framework of *Government and Binding* (Chomsky, 1982). She was the first to draw attention to the gender disagreement between the verb and its post-verbal subject, in addition to number disagreement, in VSO sentences in Qurʔanic Arabic. Ghaly (1995) also argues that Qurʔanic Arabic is basically a VSO variety of Arabic. Ghaly contends that there are two types of VSO sentences in Qurʔanic Arabic. In the first type, on the one hand, there is gender agreement between the subject and the verb. In the second type, on the other hand, there is neither number nor gender agreement. She points out that both types (i.e. of VSO sentences) involve the rule of verb - raising in the syntax because agreement is strong in Arabic. In the first type, the verb moves from its head V position inside the VP to the head I position inside the IP forming V_1 (i.e. [[V] + I]). The verb will remain inside the IP, and will not move further. The head I still governs its post-verbal subject. This accounts for gender agreement in VSO sentences in Qurʔanic Arabic. The example in (1) illustrates a VSO sentence in which we have only gender agreement between the verb and its subject.

 (1)

yafrahu	-l-muʔmInuun	bI nasrI-l-laahI	
[3. sg. mas. pres]	[3.pl.mas.nom]	[prep.] [NP.gen.]	
get happy	the- believers	with God's victory	

"*The believers get happy with the victory granted by Allah.*"   (Ghaly1995:7)

On the other hand, in the second type of VSO sentences, the verb moves from its head V position inside the VP to the head I position inside the IP, then it moves further to the head C position outside IP. Thus, for Ghaly (1995), the further movement of the verb leads to the non-

presence of the gender agreement between the post-verbal subject and the verb because [I] no longer governs its post-verbal subject. The example in (2) illustrates a VSO sentence in which we have neither number nor gender agreement between the verb and its post-verbal subject.

(2)

   dʒaaʔat-hum   rusulu-hum   bI-l-bayyinaatI

   [3.sg.fem.past]   [3.pl.mas.nom.]   prep. [3.pl.fem.gen.]

   came to- them   messengers-their   with. clear proofs

   ''Messengers of their own came unto them with clear proofs.'' (Ghaly1995, p.10)

   According to Veenstra (1998) and Aoun et al (1994, p.195), ''full agreement actually obtains in both orders (in Standard Arabic), but agreement (i.e. number agreement) gets 'lost' under further verb raising in VS structures.'' For Aoun et al. (1994), in VS sentences in Standard Arabic, the verb moves to a position called focus (F). For Aoun et al (1994, p.24), the term focus is defined in terms of the notions ''presupposition and assertion''; the presupposition part of a sentence is the part that constitutes an assumption shared by the speaker and the hearer. The movement of the verb from I inside the IP to the *focus* position in the FP leads to the loss of number agreement. Thus, the syntactic derivation of an SVO sentence, such as (3), will be as (4) illustrates; and the syntactic derivation of a VSO sentence, such as (5), will be as (6) illustrates.

(3)

  ʔal -ʔawlaadu   katab-uu   -l- wadʒIba

  [3.mas.pl.nom.]   [3.mas.pl.past]   3.mas.sg.acc

  the.boys.   wrote.   the.assignment

   ''*The boys wrote the assignment*.''

(4)

               Agreement gained

      SV: [IP sub$_j$ V$_i$ + I [VP t$_j$ t$_i$ …]]   (Aount et al., 1994, p.195)

 (5)   kataba   -l-ʔawlaadu   −l− wadʒIba

     [3.mas.sg.past]   [3.mas.pl.nom]   3.mas.sg.acc

     wrote.   the.boys.   the.assignment

     ''*The boys wrote the assignment*.''

(6)

             Agreement gained

    VS: [FP F+ [V$_i$ + I]$_k$ [IP sub t$_k$ [VP t$_j$ t$_i$ …]]]

            Agreement lost   (Aount et al., 1994, p.195)

   Going a little bit further than Aoun (1994), Benmamoun (1998) argues that since number the number feature is an interpretable and intrinsic feature of the noun (Chomsky, 1995), the merger

of the subject and the verb amounts to endowing the verb with number features. This in turn prevents spelling out the number feature on the verb by an affix; ˙otherwise number would be spelt-out twice which is redundant. But Benmamoun has not explained why we have this redundancy in SVO sentences. Mohammad (1999) argues that a null-PF pronoun exists in the [Spec, IP] position in Arabic VSO clauses which is responsible for the default third-person masculine singular agreement in expletive clauses, as well as the default singular agreement in VSO regular clauses. The main idea behind Mohammad's analysis is that in SVO sentences an incorporated null pronoun with the appropriate features is enumerated from the lexicon and generated in the canonical subject position (i.e. Spec, VP) which is then manifested on the verb morphologically as agreement markers. This pronoun then triggers agreement for number between the highest verbal projection and the subject. As for the other Φ-features, they are checked at LF. Mohammad's account can be summed up as follows:

(7)

      (a) SVO:
           [IP Sub**1**   V**2** + I   [VP   t**1**   t**2**…]]
      (b) Expletive VSO:
           [pro Expl**l**   V**1** + I   [VP   Sub t**1**…]]
      (c) Regular VSO:
           [pro V**1** + I   [VP   Sub t**1**…]]

Mahfoudhi (2002) claims that agreement asymmetry in MSA is a phenomenon related to PF conditions that have nothing to do with the computation/narrow syntax. This claim is based on theoretical and empirical reasons. First, the number agreement feature which gets dropped in VSO sentences cannot be operative in the narrow syntax. It is due to the fact that the number feature has no real effect on meaning, which is conveyed by the DPs. Besides, these features are erased entirely not in part in Chomsky (2000). Actually, the features erased at the computation are, however, visible at PF (Mahfoudhi, 2002). Secondly, there is some related evidence from phonological processes that the reduction of the number of syllables satisfies what we may call, following Boeckx (2006), a general economy principle that operates at the interface levels.

Soltan (2007) assumes that agreement is a syntactic relation that takes place at a distance rather than in a spec-head configuration. In addition, he assumes that T has three non-interpretable features: Φ-features (for person and number features only), CLASS feature (which appears as a gender feature), and an EPP (Extended Projection Principle) feature. He argues that full agreement is actually agreement with VP internal pro-subject, as (7a) shows. As for the preverbal DP, it is base-generated in its surface position to satisfy the EPP feature on T. Partial agreement, on the other hand, is due to the fact that in VS sentences, the v*P (sic) internal subject position is occupied by a lexical DP rather than a pro. Further, T has no Φ or EPP features, as a lexical option for this particular dialect. CLASS, however, is an obligatory feature on T. Thus, partial agreement is due to agreement between the lexical DP and the CLASS feature on T as (7b) shows.

(7)   Agree
        a. [CP C [TP DP T EPP/φ/CLASS [v*P *pro* v* [vP V …]]]]

        b. [CP C [TP T DEFAULT/CLASS [v*P DP v* [vP read the book]]]]

(Soltan, 2007; Smith, 2003; Postal, 2007; Lasnik, 1999; Mahmoud, 1996; McCloskey, 1986).

4. Research problem and questions

The basic problem that this study addresses is that the linguistic literature shows that there is always gender agreement in VSO in MSA. However, a close careful examination of some Arabic textbooks will prove the opposite. To address such a problem, this research study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the main cases in which there is no gender agreement in VSO sentences MSA?
2. Why is there always gender agreement in MSA in SVO rather than VSO sentences?
3. How can gender asymmetry in VSO sentences, if any, be accounted within the framework of the Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1995)?

5. Research methods

This study is based on a diagnostic descriptive research design. The data on which this study depends are first collected from various Arabic grammar textbooks, and classified into seven types of VSO sentences: (1) VSO sentences with an unreal feminine NP subject, (2) VSO sentences with a separating category between the NP subject and the verb, (3) VSO sentences with a broken plural subject, (4) VSO sentences with a collective NP subject, (5) VSO sentences with collective gender NP subject, (6) VSO sentences with an irregular and regular sound masculine plural NP subject, (7) VSO sentences with an irregular and regular sound feminine plural NP subject, and (8) VSO sentences with static verbs.

6. Results

Before starting to describe that data collected, we will briefly shed some light upon gender and the various forms of plural NPs in MSA. This is actually due to the fact that we will be exposed to several issues concerning gender and the plural NPs while describing the data collected. Therefore, we should know how an NP is marked for masculine or feminine. Further, we should know the major types of feminine and masculine NPs in addition to the major types of plural NPs. According to Al-Hamady (2000), Shinaawy (2000), and Ata (2000), feminine NPs in Modern Standard Arabic have three main suffix markers: (1) -t + vowel (e.g. Fatimatʊ, FatImata, and FatImatI); (2) -a (e.g. Salma, 'bʊʃra = good omen' and 'ðamʕa = thirsty people'); and (3) -aaʔ (e.g. 'saharaaʔ = desert' and 'samaaʔ = the sky'). Most Arab grammarians divide feminine NPs into two general groups: (1) real feminine NPs and (2) unreal feminine NPs. Real feminine NPs, according to Al-said (2006) and NIʕmat (1973) , refer to an NP that denotes a human being, or an animal that gives birth or lays eggs, such as 'Imraʔatʊ = a lady' and 'baqaratʊ = a cow'. Unreal feminine NPs, according to Zeyad (2006) and Ibraham (2005), refer to a group of words that the Arabs categorize as feminine. These words, however; do not denote a human being or an animal that gives birth or lays eggs, such as 'saharaaʔ = desert' and 'mInd datʊ = table'. According to Al-Hamady (2000), Shinawy (2000), and Ata (2000), in MSA there are three types of plural NPs: (1) Sound Masculine Plural (2) Sound Feminine Plural and (3) Irregular Plural. Sound Masculine plural refers to a word that denotes more than two persons and that ends with / -u:n / or / -i:n /, for example, 'muʔmInu:n = believers' and 'muhsIni:n = beneficent persons'. Sound feminine plural refers to the plural feminine words that end with the suffix '-aat', such as 'mudarIsaat = female teachers' and 'ʔumahaat = mothers'. Irregular plural refers to the words that denote more than two persons, and that do not end with any of the suffixes that mark either sound masculine plural or sound feminine plural.

6.1. Unreal feminine np subject and optional gender agreement

(1)

Inkasarat	Il-kaʔsu
[3.fem.sg.past.]	[3.fem.sg.nom.]
broke.	the-glass

‘‘The glass broke. إنكسرت الكأس"   (Al-said , 2006, p.122; Salih, 2002)

(2)

Inkasara	-l-kaʔsu
[3.mas.sg.past.]	[3.fem.sg.nom.]
broke.	the-glass

‘‘The glass broke. إنكسر الكأس"   (Al-said, 2006, p.22)

(3)

tatlaʕu	Iʃamsu
[3.fem.sg.pres.]	[3.fem.sg.nom.]
rises	the-sun

‘‘The sun rises. تطلع الشمس"   (NIʕmat,1973, p. 45)

(4)

yatlaʕu	Iʃamsu
[3.mas.sg.pres]	[3.fem.sg.nom]
rises	the-sun

‘‘The sun rises. يطلع الشمس"   (NIʕmat, 1973,p. 45)

(5)

Intahat	Il-harbu
[3.fem.sg.pres.]	[3.fem.sg.nom.]
came to an end	the-war

‘‘The war came to an end. إنتهت الحرب"   (Ibraham, 2005, p.60)

(6)

Intaha	-l-harbu
[3.mas.sg.past]	[3.fem.sg.nom.]
came to an end	the-war

‘‘The war came to an end. إنتهي الحرب"   (Ibraham, 2005, p.60)

(7)

* ʔakala	fatImatu
[3.mas.sg.pres]	[3.fem.sg.nom]
ate.	Fatimatu

‘‘Fatimatu ate. أكلَ فاطمة *"

In (1), (3), and (5) above the verbs 'Inkasarat = broke', 'tatlaʕu = rises' and 'Intahat = came to an end' carry a feminine suffix and are followed by unreal feminine NP subjects, 'ʔal-kaʔsu = glass', 'ʔaʃamsu = the sun' and 'ʔal-harbu = the war' respectively. In these sentences, we can notice that the verbs and the NP subjects agree in gender. In (2), (4), and (6), on the other hand, the verbs carry a masculine feature and are followed by unreal feminine subjects. There is no gender agreement in these sentences; however, these sentences are not ruled out. They are accepted in Modern Standard Arabic.   The sentence in (7) starts with a verb carrying a masculine feature, and is followed by a real feminine NP subject. As a consequence, the sentence

is ruled out. The sentence in (7) proves that only unreal feminine NP subjects can be preceded by a verb that carries a masculine feature. These facts can be summed up in the following formulas:

(8)
a. V [mas] + unreal feminine NP
b. V [fem] + unreal feminine NP
c.*V [mas] + real feminine NP

6.2. The separating category between the verb and the subject
(9)
nadʒahat   fI   -l-ImtIhanI   suʕaadu
[3.sg.fem.past]   prep.   [3.sg.mas.gen.]   [3.sg.fem.nom.]
succeeded   in   the-exam   Suʕaadu
‘‘Suʕadu succeeded in the exam. نجحت في الإمتحان سعاد’’   (Al-Said, 2006, p.122)

(10)
nadʒaha   fI   -l-ImtIhanI   suʕaadu
[3.sg.mas.past]   prep.   [3.sg.mas.gen.]   [3.sg.fem.nom.]
succeeded   in   the-exam   Suʕaadu
‘‘Suʕadu succeeded in the exam. نجح في الإمتحان سعاد ’’   (Al-Said, 2006, p.122)

(11)
safara-t   fatImatu
[3.sg.fem.past]   [3.sg.fem.nom]
travelled   Fatimatu
‘‘Fatimatu travelled. سافرت فاطمة’’   (NIʕmat, 1973, p. 45)

(12)
*safara   fatimatu
[3.sg.mas.past]   [3.sg.fem.nom]
travelled   Fatimatu
‘‘Fatimatu travelled. سافر فاطمة’’*

(13)
safara-t   ʔams   fatImatu
[3.sg.fem.past]   adv. of time   [3.sg.fem.nom]
travelled   yesterday   Fatimatu
‘‘Fatimatu traveled yesterday. سافرت أمس فاطمة’’   (NIʕmat, 1973, p.45)

(14)
safara   ʔams   fatImatu
[3.sg.mas.past]   adv.of time   [3.sg.fem.nom]
travelled   yesterday   Fatimatu
‘‘Fatimatu traveled yesterday. سافر أمس فاطمة’’   (NIʕmat, 1973, p. 45)

(15)
ɣadarat   ʔams   Il-banaatu
[3.sg.fem.past]   adv.of time   [3.pl.fem.nom]
left   yesterday   the girls
‘‘The girls left yesterday. غادرت أمس البنات’’   (Zeyad, 2006, p. 6)

(16)

      ɣadara   Ɂams   Il-banaatu
      [3.sg.mas.past]   adv. of time   [3.pl.fem.nom]
      left   yesterday   the girls
      ‘‘The ship left yesterday. غادر أمس البنات ’’   (Zeyad, 2006, p.6)

In fact, (9) represents a VSO sentence that starts with a verb carrying the feminine suffix '-t'. This verb is followed by a prepositional phrase, 'fI -l-ImtIhanI = in the-exam', that is followed by a real feminine NP subject. Both the subject and the verb agree in gender. In (10), the real feminine NP subject 'suʕaadu' and the verb do not agree in gender. They are still separated by the prepositional phrase 'fI -l-ImtIhanI = in the exam.' In (11), the real feminine NP subject 'fatImatu' is preceded by the verb 'safara-t = travelled' that carries the feminine suffix '-t'. Both the subject and the verb agree in gender. They are not separated by any category. The sentence in (12) is ruled out as the real feminine NP subject is preceded by a verb that carries a masculine feature.   In (13), the real feminine NP subject, 'fatImatu', and the verb, 'safara-t = travelled', are separated by an adverbial phrase, 'Ɂams = yesterday'; the subject and the verb agree in gender. In (14), the real feminine NP subject and the verb are separated. However, they do not agree in gender. The verb carries a masculine feature; whereas the subject carries a feminine feature. In (15), the real feminine NP subject 'Il-banaatu = the girls' is separated from its verb by the adverbial phrase 'Ɂams = yesterday'; both the subject and the verb agree in gender. In (16), on the other hand, the real feminine NP subject does not agree in gender with its verb. However, the sentence is not ruled out. The sentences above point out that gender agreement between the verb and the subject in VSO sentences is optional provided that the subject is a real feminine NP preceded by any category that separates the subject from the verb. The examples above can be summed up in the following formulas:

(17)

      a. V [mas] + XP (1) + real feminine NP.
      b. V [fem] + XP + real feminine NP.
      c.*V[mas] + no XP + real feminine NP.

6.3. Broken plural subject and optional gender agreement

(18)

      hadara   Ir-rIdʒalu
      [3.mas.sg.past]   [3.mas.sg.nom]
      came   the-men
     ‘‘The men came. حضرَ الرجال ”   (Al-said, 2006, p.122; Trask, 1993)

(19)

      hadarat   Ir-rIdʒalu
      [3.fem.sg.past]   [3.mas.sg.nom]
      came   the-men
     ‘‘The men came. حضرت الرجال ’’

                       (Al-said, 2006, p.122; Williams, 1998)

(20)

      dʒaɁa   -l-dʒunuudu
      [3.sg.mas.past]   [3.pl.mas.nom.]

came   the-soldiers
‘‘The soldiers came. جاء الجنود”   (Mukhtar , 1988, p.341; Tucker, 2007)

(21)
    dʒaʔat   Il-ʒunuudu
    [3.sg.fem.past]   [3.pl.mas.nom]
    came   the-soldiers
      ‘‘The soldiers came. جاءت الجنود”   (Mukhtar ,1988, p.341)

(22)
    sarat   ʔa-θakala
    [3.fem.sg.past]   [3.fem.pl.nom]
    walked   the mothers who are bereaved of children
    ‘‘The mothers, who are bereaved of their children, walked away.’’
    ”سارت الثكالي“ (Mukhtar ,1988, P.341; Al-ʕabdu, 2007; Baker, 1970).

(23)
    sara   ʔa-θakala
    [3.mas.sg.past]   [3.fem.pl.nom]
    walked   the mothers who are bereaved of children
    ‘‘The mothers, who are bereaved of their children, walked away.’’سار الثكالي
                                                    (Mukhtar, 1988, P.341)

    In (18) and (20) there is gender agreement between the verbs ‘hadara = came’ and ‘dʒaʔa = came’ which carry masculine features, and the masculine irregular plural NP subjects, ‘Ir-rIdʒalu = the men’ and ‘ʔa-dʒunuudu = the soldiers’ respectively. In (19) and (21), on the other hand, there is no gender agreement between the masculine broken plural NPs – ‘Ir-rIdʒalu = the men’ and ‘ʔa-dʒunuudu = the soldiers’ – and the verbs ‘hadarat = came’ and ‘dʒaʔat = came’ respectively. The two verbs carry the feminine suffix ‘-t’. Unlike (18), (19), (20), and (21), the examples in (22) and (23) deal with feminine broken plural NP subjects. In (22), the feminine broken plural NP subject, ‘ʔa-θakala = the bereaved women’ agrees in gender with the preceding verb, ‘sarat = walked away’. In (23), on the other hand, the same feminine broken plural NP subject is preceded with a verb that carries a masculine feature. The examples above assert that the gender feature carried by the verb can be masculine or feminine if this verb is followed by a feminine or masculine broken plural. The examples above imply two main rules that can be summed up in the following the formulas:
(24)
    a. V [mas] + masculine broken plural
    b. V [fem] + masculine broken plural
    c. V [mas] + feminine broken plural
    d. V [fem] + feminine broken plural
6.4 Collective nouns and optional gender agreement
(25)
    dʒaʔa   -l-qawmu
    [3.sg.mas.past]   [3.pl.mas.nom]
    came   the-people
    ‘‘The people came. جاء القوم”   (Zeyad, 2005, p.6; Sokarno, 2005)

(26)

     dʒaʔat   Il-qawmu
     [3.sg.fem.past]   [3.pl.mas.nom]
     came   the-people
     ''The people came.جاءت القوم"   (Zeyad, 2005; Eid, 1975; Fareh, 1995)

(27)

     dʒaʔat   In-nIsaaʔu
     [3.sg.fem.past]   [3.pl.fem.nom]
     came   the-ladies
     ''The ladies came.' جاءت النساء"   (Zeyad, 2005, p.6)

(28)

     dʒaʔa   ʔan-nIsaaʔu
     [3.sg.mas.past]   [3.pl.fem.nom]
     came   the-ladies
     ''The ladies came. جاء النساء"   (Zeyad, 2005, p. 6)

The sentences in (25), (26), (27), and (28) deal with two different types of collective nouns. The verb 'ʒaʔa' in (25) above carries a masculine feature and is followed by a collective noun that agrees with the preceding verb in gender. In (26), on the other hand, the verb carries a feminine feature and is followed by the same collective noun; however, the sentence is not ruled out. In (27), the NP subject is a collective noun with a feminine feature; and is preceded with a verb that has the same feminine feature. But, in (28), the same collective noun is preceded by a verb that carries a masculine feature. According to Sidaawy (1999), a collective noun in MSA is the one that implies the plural sense (i.e. it implies more than two persons), but it does not have a singular form, such as 'gayʃ = army', 'ʃaʕb = people', and 'nIsaaʔ = women'. The examples above indicate that collective nouns in VSO sentences in Modern Standard Arabic can be preceded by a verb that carries a gender feature which is different from the one carried by the collective noun itself. In other words, the masculine collective noun can be preceded by a verb carrying a feminine feature; and the feminine collective noun can be preceded by a verb carrying a masculine feature. These facts can be summed up as follows:

(29)

     a. V [mas] + masculine collective noun
     b. V [fem] + masculine collective noun
     c. V [mas] + feminine collective noun
     d. V [fem] + feminine collective noun

6.5 Inanimate collective nouns and optional gender agreement

(30)

     ʔawraqa   ʔa-ʃagaru
     [3.sg.mas.past]   [3.pl.mas.nom]
     put forth leaves   the trees
     ''The trees put forth for leaves.أورق الشجر"   (Zeyad, 2005, p.6)

(31)

     ʔawraqat   I-ʃagaru
     [3.sg.fem.past]   [3.pl.mas.nom]

put forth for leaves   the trees
‘‘The trees put forth for leaves. أورقت الشجر ’’   (Zeyad, 2005, p.6)

The examples above in (30) and (31) include an animate collective noun (i.e. ‘ʔa-ʃagaru = the trees’). Before describing the sentences above, let's shed some light upon inanimate collective nouns. Actually, for J. Sidaawy (1999, p.64), ‘‘an inanimate collective noun is the one that implies more than two things; and its singular form always ends with the feminine suffix –t ’’ as the table below illustrates.

(32)

Plural	**Singular**
ʃagaru 'trees'	ʃagaratu 'one tree'
tamru 'figs'	tamratu 'one fig'
tuffahu 'apples'	tuffahatu 'one apple'

                                                                      (Sidaawy, 1999, p.64)

In (30) above, the verb 'ʔawraqa = put forth for leaves' carries a masculine feature and is followed by an animate collective noun that carries the same gender feature. In (31), on the other hand, the same inanimate collective noun (i.e. ʔa-ʃagaru = the trees) is preceded by a verb that carries a feminine suffix (i.e. -t). It indicates that the gender feature carried by the verb is optional (i.e. masculine or feminine) if it is followed by an inanimate collective noun. The facts demonstrated above can be summed up in the following formulas:

(33)
    a. V [mas] + masculine inanimate collective noun
    b. V [fem] + masculine inanimate collective noun

6.6. Irregular and regular sound masculine plural
(34)
    yaqrʔu   -l-banu:n
    [3.mas.sg.pres]   [3.mas.pl.nom]
    read   the-sons
    ‘‘The sons are reading. يقرأ البنون ’’   (Hassan, 1992, p.80)
(35)
    taqraʔu   -l-banu:n
    [3.fem.sg.pres]   [3.mas.pl.nom]
    read.   the-boys.
    ‘‘The sons are reading.تقرأ البنون ’’   (Hassan, 1992, p.80)
 (36)
    ʔasraʕa   -l-muhaarIbu:n
    [3.mas.sg.past]   [3.mas.pl.nom]
    ran away   the-warriors
    ‘‘The warriors ran away.أسرع المحاربون ’’   (Hassan, 1992, p. 82)
(37)
    * ʔasraʕat   Il-muhaarIbu:n
     [3.fem.sg.past]   [3.mas.pl.nom]
     ran away   the-warriors
     ‘‘The warriors ran away.أسرعت المحاربون ’’*   (Hassan, 1992, p.82)

The examples in (34), (35), (36), and (37) involve two main types of sound masculine plural: regular and irregular. Let's shed some light briefly on the types of sound masculine plural before describing the sentences in (34-37). Regular sound masculine plural (RSMP) is the one which is formed by adding the suffixes / -i:n / or / -u:n / to the singular form. For example, in (38a) we can add the suffixes / -u:n / or / -i:n / to the singular words 'muhaarɪbu = a warrior' and 'mudarɪsu = a teacher'. In these examples, the sound masculine plural will be formed without exposing the singular form to any changes as the examples in (38a&b) show. The irregular sound masculine plural (ISMP) is the one whose singular form is exposed to some changes while being formed. For example, the word 'ɪbɪn = son' undergoes some changes while being transformed into a sound masculine plural. The initial half-close front vowel (i.e. / ɪ /) is deleted, and the second / ɪ / is replaced with a front open vowel (i.e. / a /) as the example in (38c) shows. Another example is the word 'ʔard '. To transform this word into a sound masculine plural, we inserted a front open vowel / a / after the consonant /r/. It means that the singular form undergoes changes as (38d) shows.

(38)

Singular	**Meaning**	**RSMP**	**Meaning**
a.muhaarɪb	'warrior'	muhaarɪbu:n / muhaarɪbi:n	'warriors'
b.mudarɪsu	'teacher'	mudarɪsu:n /mudarɪsi:n	'teachers'
Singular	**Meaning**	**ISMP**	**Meaning**
c. ɪbɪn	'son'	banu:n / bani:n	'sons'
d. ʔard	'land'	ʔaradu:n / ʔaradi:n	'lands'

Let's get back to the examples (34), (35), (36), and (37). In (34) the ISMP 'ʔal-banu:n = the boys' is preceded by a verb that carries a masculine feature. That is to say, both the verb and the IMSP agree in gender. But, in (35) the ISMP is preceded by a verb that carries a feminine feature. That is, the verb and the ISMP do not agree in gender. However, the sentence is not ruled out. In (36) the RSMP 'ʔal-muharɪbu:n = the warriors' is preceded by a verb. Both the verb and the RSMP agree in gender. As for (37), it is excluded as the verb, 'ʔasraʕat = ran away', and the RSMP, 'ʔal-muhaarɪbu:n = the warriors' do not agree in gender. Thus, we can simply conclude that the gender feature carried by the verb is optional if it is followed by ISMP; whereas RSMP triggers gender agreement with the verb as the formulas in (39) show:

(39)

    a. V [mas] + ISMP
    b. V [fem] + ISMP
    c. V [mas] + RSMP
    d.*V[fem] + RSMP

6.7 Irregular and regular sound feminine plural

(40)

wasalat	ɪt-taalɪbaatu	ɪla	-l-madrasatɪ
[3.fem.sg.past]	[3.fem.pl.nom]	[prep.]	[3.fem.sg.gen]
reached	the-students.	to	the-school

    ''The students reached the school. وصلت الطالبات إلي المدرسة''   (Zeyad, 2005, p.6)

(41)

wasala	-t-taalɪbaatu	ɪla	-l-madrasatɪ
[3.mas.sg.past]	[3.fem.pl.nom]	[prep.]	[3.fem.sg.gen]

reached   the-students.   to   the-school

‘‘The students reached the school. وصل الطالبات إلي المدرسة''   (Zeyad, 2005, p.6)

(42)

ʔaʕlanat   It-talhaatu   -l-harba

[3.fem.sg.past]   [3.fem.pl.nom]   [3.fem.sg.acc]

declared   Talhaas   the-war

‘‘The Talhaas declared war.أعلنت الطلحات الحرب''   (Hassan, 1992, p.82)

(43)

ʔaʕlana   -t-talhaatu   -l-harba

[3.mas.sg.past]   [3.fem.pl.nom]   [3.fem.sg.acc]

declared   the Talhaas   the-war

‘‘The Talhaas declared war. أعلن الطلحات الحرب'' (Hassan, 1992; Kayne, 1994;Khalil, 1999).

The sentences in the examples above involve two types of sound feminine plural: regular and irregular. The regular sound feminine plural (RSFP) is the one that ends with the feminine suffix '-aat' and whose singular form is a feminine proper noun as the example (44a) shows; or a common noun that ends with the feminine suffix '–t' as the example (44b) shows. The irregular sound feminine plural (ISFP) is the one whose singular form violates one of these two conditions. For example, in (44c) the word 'Talhaat' is a sound feminine plural; however, its singular form implies a masculine noun rather than a feminine proper noun.

(44)

Singular	Meaning	RSFP	Meaning
a. Zaynab	'Zaynab'	Zaynabaat	'Zaynabs'
b. taalIbatu	'a student'	taalIbaatu	'students'
Singular	**Meaning**	**ISFP**	**Meaning**
c. Talha	'Talha'	Talhaat	'Talhas'

In (40), the RSFP 'ʔat-talIbaatu = the students' is preceded by a verb that carries the same feminine feature. In (41), on the other hand, the same RSFP 'ʔat-taalIbaatu = the students' is preceded by a verb that carries a masculine gender feature. In (42), the ISFP 'ʔat-talhaatu' is preceded by a verb that carries the same feminine feature. In (43), on the other hand, the ISFP 'ʔat-talhaatu' and the preceding verb do not agree in gender. Thus, both RSFP and ISFP can be preceded by a verb carrying a masculine or feminine feature, as (45) shows:

(45)

    a. V [mas] + RFSP

    b. V [fem] + RFSP

    c. V [mas] + IFSP

    d. V [fem] + IFSP

6.8 Static verbs and optional gender agreement

(46)

    a. nIʕma   -l-marʔatu   hIndun

    [3.mas.sg]   [3.fem.sg.nom]   [3.fem.sg.nom]

    to be good   the-lady   Hindun

    ‘‘Hindun is a good lady. نعم المرأة هند''   (Ibn-Hisham, 1986, p.165)

    b. nɪʕmat   ɪl-marʔatu   hɪndun
      [3.fem.sg]   [3.fem.sg.nom]   [3.fem.sg.nom]
      to be good   the-lady   Hindu
      ''Hindu is a good lady. نعمت المرأة هند''   (Ibn-Hisham, 1986, p.165)
    c. nɪʕma   ʔar-raʒulu   zaydun
      [3.mas.sg]   [3.mas.sg.nom]   [3.mas.sg.nom]
      to be good   the-man   Zaydun
      ''Zaydun is a good man. نعم الرجل، زيدُ''   (Ibn-ʕaq:l, 1986, p.165)
  *d. nɪʕmat   ʔar-radʒulu   zaydun
    [3.fem.sg]   [3.mas.sg.nom]   [3.mas.sg.nom]
    to be good   the-man   Zaydun
    ''Zaydun is a good man. نعمت الرجل، زيدُ''*

(Muhyi -l-Din, 1986; Munn, 1993; Al-Anbaary, 1978; Al-Khammash, 2007; Al-Shamsaan, 2007).

Let's get back to the examples in (46). In (46a), the verb ''nɪʕma = to be good'' has a masculine feature; and is followed by a NP carrying a feminine feature, ''ʔal-marʔatu = the lady'' In (46a), there is no gender agreement between the verb and the post-verbal subject. In (46b), on the other hand, the verb ''Nɪʕmat = to be good'' has a feminine feature; and is followed by a NP carrying a feminine feature as well. It indicates that the feminine NP subject can be preceded by a static verb carrying masculine or feminine feature. In (46c), the static verb ''nɪʕma = to be good'' is followed by a masculine NP subject, ''ʔar-radʒulu = the man''. In (46d), the sentence is ruled out as the masculine NP subject ''ʔar-radʒulu = the man'' is preceded by a static verb carrying a feminine feature. The examples in (46a,b,c,&d) prove that only feminine NP subject can be preceded by a static verb carrying a masculine or feminine feature. The masculine NP subject, on the other hand, cannot be preceded by a static verb carrying a feminine feature. These facts can be summed up in the following formulas:

(48)
    a. St.V [mas] + feminine NP subject
    b. St.V [fem] + feminine NP subject
    c. St.V [mas] + masculine NP subject
    * d. St.V [fem] + masculine NP subject

7. Discussion

The sentences discussed in the above section into can be divided into two groups: gender-matching sentences and gender-mismatching sentences. Gender-matching sentences refer to the ones in which the post-verbal NP agrees with the preceding verb in gender as the formulas below show:

(49)
    1. V[fem] + XP + real feminine NP
    2. V[fem] + unreal feminine NP
    3. V[fem] + feminine broken plural
    4. V[mas] + masculine broken plural
    5. V[fem] + feminine collective noun
    6. V [mas] + masculine collective noun

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7. V[fem] + RSFP
8. V[fem] + ISFP
9. V[mas] + RSMP
10. V[mas] + ISMP
11. V[mas] + masculine inanimate collective noun
12. St.V[fem] + feminine NP subject
13. St.V[mas] + masculine NP subject

Gender-mismatching sentences refer to the sentences in which the post-verbal NP can be preceded by a verb that carries a mismatching feature, as the formulas below illustrate:
(50)
1. V [mas] + XP + real feminine NP
2. V [mas] + unreal feminine NP
3. V [mas] + feminine broken plural
4. V [fem] + masculine broken plural
5. V [mas] + feminine collective noun
6. V [fem] + masculine collective noun
7. V [mas] + RSFP
8. V [mas] + ISFP
9. V [fem] + ISMP
10. V [fem] + masculine inanimate collective noun
11. St. V[mas] + feminine NP subject

To explain the sentences in (50) within the framework of the Minimalist program, I will follow Chomsky (1993, 1995) that the lexical items are inserted into the lexicon carrying their features. In addition, I will follow Ghaly (1995) in arguing that in VSO sentences the verbs which lack number and gender agreement with their subjects will move from V to I and then to C. Furthermore, I will follow Ghaly (1995) and Aoun (1994) in arguing that the verbs that have only gender agreement with their subjects will move from V to I. But I argue that the head C, in VSO sentences in MSA, carries a weak gender feature, represented as [-Strong]; whereas the head I carries strong gender feature, represented as [+Strong]. By the weak gender feature (i.e. [-Strong]) carried by the head C, I mean that the head C is the only position that can host a verb that disagrees with its subject in gender. By the strong gender feature (i.e. [+Strong]) carried by the head I position, I mean that the head I should host a verb that agrees with its subject in gender. Accordingly, the syntactic derivation of the sentence in (51) will be as (52) illustrates. In (51), the verb has no gender agreement with its subject. Therefore, it moves from V to I and then to C to check its [-Strong] feature. However, if the verb and its post-verbal subject agree in gender, the verb will move from V to I; and will remain inside IP. It will not move further. The verb moves to I to check it [+strong] gender feature.
(51)

dʒaʔa	n-nIsaaʔu	Ila	-l-madrasatI
[3.sg.mas.past]	[3.pl.fem. nom]	[prep.]	[3.fem.sg.gen.]
came	the-ladies.	to	the-school

‘‘The ladies came to the school. جاء النساء إلي المدرسة"

(52)
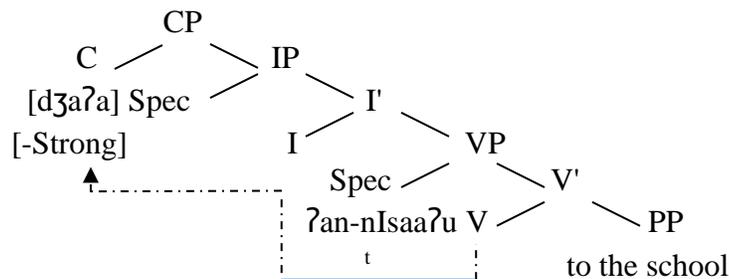
8. Conclusion

This study concludes that there is no gender agreement in VSO sentences between the post-verbal subject and the verb if the subject is (a) an unreal feminine NP, (b) a broken plural NP, (c) an inanimate collective NP, (d) a collective NP, (e) a regular sound feminine plural NP, (f) an irregular sound feminine plural NP, (g) an irregular sound masculine plural NP, and (h) a real feminine NP separated from its verb by any category. This study also concludes that the head C in VSO sentences in MSA carries a weak gender feature represented as [-Strong]. Therefore, in VSO sentences, if the verb disagrees with its subject in gender, it will move from V to I and then to C because C is [-Strong]. A final conclusion is that the head I in VSO sentences in MSA carries a strong gender feature, represented as [+Strong]. Therefore, in VSO sentences, if the verb and its subject agree in gender, the verb will move from V to I; it will not move further.

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