

Subject-verb Agreement in Arabic, Spanish, and English: Typological View

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a typological comparison of subject-verb agreement in three languages (i.e. Arabic, Spanish and English) that belong to different language families. We essentially show that although these three languages share several important properties of subject-verb agreement (e.g., agreement is realized as suffixes), they diverge with respect to many other aspects. For instance, in Arabic, the word order and the type of the subject (i.e., a pronoun vs. a full DP) affect subject-verb agreement. On the other hand, subject-verb agreement in Spanish and English is insensitive to either condition. However, unlike the case in English, the verb in Spanish displays rich agreement with its subject. The paper concludes that although subject-verb agreement might be a universal phenomenon, the determinants of its morphosyntactic realization are definitely language-specific.

Keywords: Subject-verb agreement, Arabic, Spanish, English, pro-drop.

Introduction

Subject-verb agreement is a major morpho-syntactic phenomenon that has been heavily investigated in many world languages (Mallinson and Blake 1991; Nicole, et al. 1997; Jarrah 2019a).¹ Although it is widely viewed as a "syntactic process" (Bocket al. 1999), it "is subject to a variety of influences both syntactic and non-syntactic" (Haskell and MacDonald, 2003: 760). According to Eberhard (1999) and Bock, et al. (2004), among many others, subject-verb agreement offers an insight into the syntactic account of mechanisms of language processing, production and acquisition. Given that such mechanisms may not be captured through focusing on the patterns of subject-verb agreement in a single language or languages that belong to the same language family, there exit many calls in the related literature to explore this phenomenon through typological analysis where more languages (belonging to different language families) are examined (see Comrie 1988, Baker 2010, Bonilla 2015). Such a typological analysis provides conceptual and empirical gains which are important for the general study of how languages are related and even evolved (Culbertson and Legendre 2011). This is mainly supported by the view that similarities and differences in agreement systems are indicative of how languages are contacted and interacted. This paper is a continuation of such efforts, exploring subject-verb agreement patterns in three distinct languages, namely Modern Standard Arabic (A Semitic language), Spanish (A Romance language), and English (A Germanic language). In addition to highlighting how these three languages are similar to and/or different from each other with respect to subject-verb agreement and the main operating constraints, this paper makes available empirically-drawn findings which can be useful for learning/teaching subject-verb agreement in the three languages. Recent related literature proposes that among the best methods to teach/learn a foreign language is through taking the native language of a student as a departure point for his/her study of the structure of other languages (particularly with

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The following symbols are used in this research. ϕ = phi-features (Number, Gender, and Person); 1,2, and 3 = person; ACC = accusative; ECM = Exceptional Case Marking constructions; F = feminine; GEN = genitive; IND = indefinite; M = masculine; NOM = nominative; MSA = Modern Standard Arabic; PL = plural; PRRT= participle; SG = Singular.

reference to similarities and differences between them) (Ramat 2011).

The following discussion is structured as follows. Section 2 explores the main aspects of subject-verb agreement in Modern Standard Arabic. Sections 3 and 4 investigate these aspects in Spanish and English, respectively. Section 5 is the conclusion.

2. Subject-verb agreement in Modern Standard Arabic

Subject-verb agreement in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) has attracted much attention from researchers. This attention is mainly ascribed to the fact that subject-verb agreement in MSA, unlike the case in many other languages, can be rich where the verb fully expresses the grammatical features (Person, Number, and Gender; known as ϕ -features) of its subject or poor in which case the verb expresses some of the ϕ -content of its subject. The main factors that determine the type of agreement (rich vs. poor) are related to the word order as well as the type of the subject, i.e. a pronominal category or a full DP (see Harbert and Bahloul 2002, Jarrah 2017a,b).

In MSA, there are two predominate word orders, i.e. VSO and SVO (Mohammad, 1990, 2000, Benmamoun 2000, 2017). Consider the following two sentences:

- | | | | | |
|-----|----|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| (1) | a. | rakala | ʔal-walad-u | ʔal-kurat-a |
| | | kicked.3SG.M | the-boy-NOM | the-ball-ACC |
| | | 'The boy kicked the ball.' | | |
| | b. | ʔal-walad-u | rakala | ʔal-kurat-a |
| | | the-boy-NOM | kicked.3SG.M | the-ball-ACC |
| | | 'The boy kicked the ball.' | | |

These two word orders are interchangeably used with slight differences in meaning (FassiFehri, 1993, Al-Balushi 2011, Jarrah 2019b). A point that is important to mention here is that the word order determines the type of subject-verb agreement in MSA, a phenomenon well-known as subject-verb agreement asymmetries (see, e.g., Aounat al., 2010). In the SVO word order, the verb agrees fully with the subject in all ϕ -content (see (2a,b)). On the other hand, in the VSO word order the verb only agrees with the subject in Gender and Person (see (2c,d)).

- | | | | | |
|-----|----|------------------------------|----------------|--------------|
| (2) | a. | ʔal-fataat-u | rakal-at | ʔal-kurat-a |
| | | the-girl-NOM | kicked-3SG.F | the-ball-ACC |
| | | 'The girl kicked the ball.' | | |
| | b. | ʔal-fatajaat-u | rakal-n | ʔal-kurat-a |
| | | THE-girls-NOM | kicked-3PL.F | the-ball-ACC |
| | | 'The girls kicked the ball.' | | |
| | c. | rakal-at | ʔal-fataat-u | ʔal-kurat-a |
| | | kicked-3SG.F | the-girl-NOM | the-ball-ACC |
| | | 'The girl kicked the ball.' | | |
| | d. | rakal-at | ʔal-fatajaat-u | ʔal-kurat-a |
| | | kicked-3SG.F | the-girls-NOM | the-ball-ACC |
| | | 'The girls kicked the ball.' | | |

The verb fully agrees with its subject when the latter precedes it; otherwise the verb does not inflect for the number of its subject. In sentence (2d) the verb *rakalat* appears in the singular form, although the post-verbal subject is plural. The examples in (2) clearly indicate that word order is strongly interfaced with subject-verb agreement patterns in MSA. If the verb shows full agreement with the subject in a VSO clause or displays an impoverished agreement with

its subject in an SVO clause, the grammaticality of the resulting sentences would degrade, as shown in the following ill-formed examples:

- (4) a. *rakalu ?ar-ridʒa:l-u ?al-kurat-a
 kicked.3PL.M the-men-NOM the-ball-ACC
 With the intended meaning: 'The men kicked the ball.'
- b. *?ar-ridʒa:l-u rakala ?al-kurat-a
 the-men-NOM kicked.3SG.M the-ball-ACC
 With the intended meaning: 'The men kicked the ball.'

Another property of MSA subject-verb agreement is that when the verb appears in the present tense (or the imperfective), the agreement morphemes appear on the verb as prefixes and suffixes, not only as suffixes as is the case when the verb appears in the past form. Consider the following examples where the verb appears in the present form (and see the examples in (3) above for the past form of the verb in MSA):

- (5) a. ya-rkul-u ?ar-radʒul-u ?al-kurat-a
 M-kick.3.SG the-man-NOM the-ball-ACC
 'The man kicks the ball.'
- b. ?ar-radʒul-u ya-rkul-u ?al-kurat-a
 the-man-NOM M-kick.3.SG the-ball-ACC
 'The man kicks the ball.'
- (6) a. ta-rkul-u ?al-fataat-u ?al-kurat-a
 F-kick.3SG the-girl-NOM the-ball-ACC
 'The girl kicks the ball.'
- b. ?al- fataat-u ta-rkul-u ?al-kurat-a
 the-girl-NOM F-kick.3SG the-ball-ACC
 'The girl kicks the ball.'

See Benmamoun (2000: 20-21) for the full paradigms of subject-verb agreement in the past and present for MSA.

Having shown the correlation between word order and subject-verb agreement in MSA, let us now examine the second factor that determines the form of subject-verb agreement in Arabic, i.e. the pronominalization of the subject.

Bahloul and Harbert (1993), among others, show that when the subject in MSA is a pronoun, the verb must display full agreement with it, irrespective of the word order used, as evidenced in the following examples.

- (7) a. rakala huwa ?al-kurat-a
 kicked.3SG.M he the-ball-ACC
 'He kicked the ball.'
- b. huwa rakala ?al-kurat-a
 he kicked.3SG.M the-ball-ACC
 'He kicked the ball.'
- c. akal-u humm ?al-kurat-a
 kicked-3PL.M they.M the-ball-ACC
 'They kicked the ball.'
- d. humm akal-u ?al-kurat-a
 they. M kicked.3PL.M the-ball-ACC

'They kicked the ball.'

In examples (7), the verb expresses the full ϕ -content of the subject. In such cases, word order is immaterial to the subject-verb agreement. Note that if the verb fails to display the full ϕ -content of the subject, the resulting sentences would be ungrammatical, as shown in the following ill-formed examples:

- (8) a. *rakala humm ?al-kurat-a
 kicked.3SG.M they.M the-ball-ACC
 Intended: 'They kicked the ball.'
- b. *humm rakala ?al-kurat-a
 they.M kicked.3SG.M the-ball-ACC
 Intended: 'They kicked the ball.'

The facts of subject-verb agreement in MSA, drawn from examples (1-8), are summarized in Table (1):

Table 1. Subject-verb agreement asymmetries in MSA

Word order	A full DP subject	A Pronominal subject
VSO	Partial agreement (In Gender and Person)	Full agreement
SVO	Full agreement	Full agreement

The affinity between the type of the subject (i.e. a pronoun vs. a full DP) provides an answer to the question of why MSA is a pro-drop language. When the subject occurs in a pronominal form, the verb should express the full ϕ -content of the subject, a situation that makes the morphological realization of the pronominal subject somehow redundant as the nature of the pronominal subject can be straightforwardly determined through the morphological form of the verb.

An additional important point that bears mentioning here is that MSA maintains overt case markers on nominal entities, something that is argued to be the main reason for the multiplicity of word orders used in this language (Mohammad 2000). In addition to SVO and VSO word orders, other (marked) word orders can be used, provided that certain conditions on information structure of the given sentence are met (Moutaouakil 1989; Jarrah 2019b). For instance, in the OVS word order, the verb should bear a resumptiveclitic that co-refers with the fronted object that functions as a topic. Consider the following sentence:

- (9) ?al-kurat-u rakal-at*(-ha) ?al-fataat-u
 the-ball-NOM kicked-3SG.F-it the-girl-NOM
 'The ball, the girl kicked it.'

The question that arises here is whether the object resumptiveclitic on the verb is an agreement marker or not. Given that this clitic should appear on the verb and expresses the same ϕ -content of the fronted object, it can be suggested that this clitic is an agreement suffix (see, Shlonsky, 1997 for discussion and Aoun et al., 2010, among others, for a different view). Following this suggestion, the verb agrees with the subject and the object in the OVS word order. The same observation carries over to the OSV word order, in which case the verb agrees with the subject and the fronted object, as shown in the following example:

- (10) ?al-kurat-u, ?al-fataat-u rakal-at-ha
 the-ball-NOM the-girl-NOM kicked-3SG.F-it
 'The ball, the girl kicked it.'

On the other hand, the verb does not carry an agreement marker of the fronted object in OSV or OVS word orders, especially when the direct object is an indefinite entity, expressing new-information content, as shown by the following examples:²

- (11) a. kurat-an rakal-at ?al-fataat-u
 the-ball-ACC.IND kicked-3SG.F the-girl-NOM
 'It is a ball that the girl kicked.'
- b. kurat-an ?al-fataat-u rakal-at
 the-ball-ACC.IND the-girl-NOM kicked-3SG.F
 'It is a ball that the girl kicked.'

In view of this, it can be postulated that in the VSO and SVO word orders, the verb only agrees with the subject (either fully or partially, depending on the word order and the type of the subject). On the other hand, in other (marked) word orders, the verb agrees with the subject and might agree with the fronted object when the latter appears in NOM. Case.

The last point to discuss before concluding this section is the fact that MSA does not have infinitive forms of verbs which do not express any agreement with the subject. The verbs in this language express agreement with their subjects in all contexts including Exceptional Case Marking (ECM) constructions and control constructions, an observation that places MSA (and in fact other Arabic dialects) in a unique position, compared to other languages such as English and Spanish.³ The examples in (12) show this fact; ((12a) is an ECM construction, whereas (12b) is a control construction:

- (12) a. xa:lid-un yiri:du ?al-sajjidat-a
 Khalid-NOM want.3M.SG the-Madam-ACC
 ?an taðhab ?ila ?as-su:q-i
 to go.3SG.F to the-market
 'Khalid wants the woman to go to the market.'
- b. xa:lidun jiri:du ?an yaðhab
 Khalid.NOM want.3SG.M to go.3SG.M
 ?ila ?as-su:q-i
 to the-market-ACC
 'Khalid wants to go to the market.'

The embedded verb in the two examples in (12) agree with their (understood) subjects in all ϕ -features, even though they occur in contexts of which the verb in other languages does not show any agreement with the subject. This strongly indicates that subject-verb agreement in Arabic is insensitive to the type of the clause, e.g. ECM, control constructions, or an embedded clause.

In the next section, we discuss the subject-verb agreement patterns in Spanish. As we have referred to at the beginning of the paper, typological comparisons of the structural phenomena between languages that belong to different language families are important for analytic and pedagogical purposes.

² Note that when the verb does not agree with the fronted object (or does not carry a resumptive clitic of the fronted object), the direct object bears ACC. Case, whereas when the verb agrees with the fronted object, the latter bears NOM. Case. See Ouhalla (1997) for a proposal. Note also that we gloss the unannation morpheme -n as IND (i.e. indefinite). However, this needs rethought as Jarrah and Zibin (2016) note.

³ The related literature argues that in ECM constructions the subject receives Accusative case from the matrix verb which is located outside the domain of the embedded clause, hence the reason for naming these structures as ECM, given that the subject is exceptionally assigned Case from outside the domain of its clause (Radford, 2009).

3. Subject-verb agreement in Spanish

Spanish is a language that has rich morphological agreement. It is a pro-drop language (Zagona, 2002). In finite declarative sentences, the subject may either precede or follow the predicate (which includes the verb and the object, in cases of a transitive verb), as shown in the following examples, taken from Zagona (2002: 27):

- (13) a. Escribió la carta mi hermana.
wrote the letter my sister
"My sister wrote the letter."
b. Mi hermana escribió la carta
my sister wrote the letter
"My sister wrote the letter."

The subject may appear between the verb and the object, as the following sentence shows:

- (14) Escribió mi hermana la carta.
wrote my sister the letter
'My sister wrote the letter.'

According to Zagona (2002), the word order in (14) is marked, whereas those in (13) are unmarked. Zagona (2002: 27) mentions that 'V-S-O sequences in finite declaratives may be less natural than S-V-O and VO-S orders'. This fact is significant as it reveals that Spanish and MSA maintain two predominate word orders.

In non-finite clauses, post-verbal subjects are typically allowed, as shown in the following examples, taken from Zagona (2002: 28) (the non-finite clause is bracketed).

- (15) a. [Llegada ella] empezó la fiesta.
arrive-pprt.F.SG s he.NOMbegan the party
b. *[ella llegada] empezó la fiesta.
she.NOM arrive-SG.F began the party
'(With) her arrived, the party began.'

The subject must appear to the right of the non-finite verb, a matter that indicates that the flexibility of word order in Spanish is ruled by the finiteness of the verb.

As for subject-verb agreement, Spanish is considered one of the rich languages in this regard. The verb agrees with its clausal subject in all ϕ -features. According to Zagona (2002), most person/number suffixes are unambiguous in that there are dedicated morphemes inflected for person and number. Table 2 illustrates subject-verb agreement in Spanish in declarative mood (for Number and Person):

Table 2. Subject-verb agreement in Spanish in the declarative mood

<i>cantar</i> 'sing'	Indicative
1SG	<i>Canto</i>
2 SG	<i>Cantas</i>
3SG	<i>Canta</i>
1PL	<i>cantamos</i>
2 PL	<i>cantáis</i>
3 PL	<i>Cantan</i>

Furthermore, sentences with a pronominal subject display the same subject–verb agreement patterns (regardless of the pronoun being overt or not).

- (16) Cantaron (ellos).
sang.3PL they.NOM
"They sang."

Like MSA, the pronominal subject is often dropped except for emphatic situations. This dropping is motivated because of the rich agreement between the verb and the subject (see Holmberg 2005; Neeleman and Szendrői 2007; Biberauer et al. 2009 and Camacho 2013).

Full agreement between the verb and the subject is also obligatory in copular sentences (with an identificational interpretation that requires agreement with the predicative element). Consider the following examples (Zagona, 2002: 32):

- (17) El culpable [soy(/*es) yo].
the culprit is.1SG/is.3SG I.NOM
'The culprit is me.'

The same observation extends to passive sentences where the verb displays full agreement with the (raised) object. This is shown for passives composed of *ser* "be" + participle and *se*+verb (the following examples are taken from Zagona, 2002: 32):

- (18) a. Esos libros fueron vendidos.
those books were sell-PPRT.M.PL
'Those books were sold.'
b. *Esos libros fue vendido(s).
those books were sell-PPRT.M.(PL)
Intended: 'Those books were sold.'

It is worth mentioning that constructions with non-referential subjects (corresponding to English *it*, *there*), have invariant 3rd singular verb forms, as clearly shown in the following examples (Zagona, 2002: 31):

- (19) a. Parece que los libros han llegado.
seems-pr.3SG that the books have arrived
'It seems that the books have arrived.'
b. *Parecen que los libros han llegado.
seems-3PL that the books have arrived
Intended: 'It seems that the books have arrived.'

The pair in (19) is actually indicative of the notion that the expletive has a fixed Φ -content which is morphologically realized on the verb.⁴

As for the ECM constructions, many researchers argue that Spanish does not maintain ECM constructions. In Spanish, when the subject of the main verb is different from the subject of the embedded verb, the main verb takes a finite complement, either the verb is finite (or inflected) (the case found in the indicative mood) as in (20a), or subjunctive as in (20b). (The examples are taken from Tattam, 2007: 12; note that no gloss is provided for the examples in (20) in the original source)

⁴Alternatively, it can be postulated that the expletive has no Φ -content, a matter that leads the verb to surface with the default form of agreement. This is not the case in Arabic, where expletives have variant Φ -content, hence the verb can show different Φ -content even if the clausal subject is expletive.

(20) a. Juan me dijo [CP [C que] estaba enfermo]

'John told me that he was sick. '

b. María espera [CP [C que] Juan se cure pronto]

'Mary hopes that John gets well soon. '

This situation is taken by some as evidence that there are no ECM constructions in Spanish (where the higher node within the embedded ECM clause is TP rather than CP).

On the other hand, when the subject of the main verb and the embedded verb are the same, the main verb takes a non-finite complement. This type of complement contains a non-finite (or infinitival) verb, as shown in (21). The embedded clause is an IP as there are no complementizers for non-finite complements in Spanish.

(21) Juan quiere [IP curarse pronto]

'John wants to get well soon. '

This indicates that when the subject of the main verb and that of the embedded verb are the same (i.e. referring to the same entity), the second verb in sequence (i.e. the embedded verb) is not inflected for agreement of the subject, one case where the verb in Spanish does not agree with its subject.

With this being the case, MSA is both different and similar to Spanish. When the embedded verb has a different subject than that of the matrix clause, then the verb agrees with it in the two languages. On the other hand, if the subject of the main clause is understood to be the subject of the embedded verb, then the embedded verb still agrees with the subject in MSA, but not in Spanish.

The discussion in this section shows that Spanish has two predominate word orders, namely SVO and VOS, whereas VSO is viewed as a marked word order. The verb agrees fully with its subject, regardless of the word order used. Furthermore, Spanish does not have (strict) ECM constructions where the embedded subject takes its Case from the matrix verb. The verb in the Spanish ECM counterpart constructions is finite and agrees with its subject. In control constructions, the embedded verb does not agree with its subject when the latter is also the subject of the matrix verb; otherwise the embedded verb displays full agreement.

In the following section, subject-verb agreement in English is explored.

4. Subject-verb agreement in English

Modern-day English is widely viewed as a language that has an impoverished agreement system (Hudson 1999; Koenenman and Zeijlstra, 2014). In this language, the verb shows partial agreement with the subject, as shown in the following examples:

(22) a. Tom/Alice speaks Italian.

b. They/I/you/ Tom and Alice speak Italian.

In (22a), the subject *Tom* is [3SG.M]; the verb *speaks* does not express this full ϕ -content (i.e. the verb does not express the Masculine [M] Gender of the subject), resulting in the obvious poor agreement between the subject and the verb. The morphological form of the verb is not an indication of the ϕ -content of the subject. The only potential manifestation of morphological agreement is the use of the suffix *-s* when the subject is singular. The suffix *-s* is not used on the verb when the subject is a plural, as (22b) clearly demonstrates. An obvious generalization that can be drawn here is that when the subject is singular, the suffix *-s* is used on the verb. This generalization is however directly dismissed when considering instances where the suffix *-s* is not used when the subject is the speaker (*I*), whose content is [1SG.]. Additionally, the suffix *-s* is not either used with singular *you*. In view of this, it can be proposed that the

verb shows poor agreement with its subject only when the latter is singular and 3rd person. If the subject is plural, 1st person, or 2nd person, the verb shows no agreement with the subject. In the latter situations, the verb holds the same form that is free of any agreement.

Obviously, the generalization we can formulate here is that the verb in English shows poor agreement with the subject when the subject is [3SG]. The morphological form of the verb in such situations does not indicate whether the subject is Feminine or Masculine.

One point that might cast doubt on this generalization is the fact that the suffix *-s* is not used when the verb appears in the past tense, where the verb (apart from some auxiliary verbs) does not show any agreement whatsoever with the subject, as shown in the following illustrative examples:

- (23) a. Tom/Alice spoke Italian.
b. They/I/you/Tom and Alice spoke Italian.

Some researchers remark that the suffix *-s* is not an agreement morpheme but a tense marker (see Kayne 1989 and related work). However, the problem of Kayne's (1989) assumption is that the suffix *-s* is used only when the subject is [3SG]. On the other hand, it can be suggested that this suffix is an amalgamation of tense+agreement.

A richer subject-verb agreement in English can be found in a closed set of verbs, namely the verbs *to have* and *to be*. These verbs display some Φ -content of the subject.

- (24) a. Tom/Alice is speaking Italian.
b. Tom and Alice/they/you/I are speaking English.

- (25) a. Tom/Alice/I was speaking Italian.
b. Tom and Alice/they/you were speaking Italian.

- (26) a. Tom/Alice/Tom and Alice has/had spoken Italian.
b. They/you/I/ Tom and Alice have/had spoken Italian.

The subject-verb agreement patterns displayed by the verbs *to be/to have* led some researchers to postulate that these verbs, unlike lexical verbs, move to Tense (T) in the overt syntactic cycle, resulting in the agreement-tense manifestation of these verbs (see, Chomsky 1995; Radford 1997 and 2009). Researchers who work within the Minimalist program (Chomsky, 1995) assume that there is a specialized syntactic projection for Tense, labeled as TP. Verbs (lexical or functional) do not enter the relevant syntactic tree adjoining to the head of TP but rather in a lower projection, e.g., the head of VP. Lexical verbs remain in situ, whereas *to have* and *to be* verbs move to the head of TP (though head movement) (see Adger 2003). According to Holmberg and Roberts (2013), the verb moves to T when the former has a rich Φ -content; otherwise, it remains in situ in the audible syntax.⁵

Furthermore, there are some situations in English where the agreement between the subject and the verb is prohibited; any manifestation of agreement leads to sentence being ungrammatical. An example of this situation is

⁵ Movement of *to have* and *to be* verbs to Tense can be empirically supported with reference to the position of time adverbs. With *to have* and *to be* verbs, time adverbs occur to the right of the verb while they occur to the left of the lexical verb:

- (I) a. Tom **is** always in school at 9 PM.
b. Tom always **speaks** quickly.
c. Tom **has** recently moved to Paris.
d. Tom recently **moved** to Paris.

The position of the adverb *always* with respect to the verb in boldface is an important clue for the fact that agreement and tense are interfaced in English. The relevant point here is that in English there is no manifestation of verb-object agreement. The verb does not agree with the object. In this sense, English represents a case of languages where agreement between the subject and the verb is improvised and limited to some situations where tense and agreement are interfaced.

ECM constructions. Consider the following examples:

- (27) a. My brother wants her to **go** (*goes) home early.
 b. University board members believe the students to **be** (*are) innocent.

The two verbs in boldface in (27) are ECM verbs where the verb does not agree with the subject, even if the matrix clause is in the present tense, unlike the cases we find with verbs in main clauses. Additionally, the ECM verbs do not show any tense-related information (Cowper, 2005). The tense of the embedded sentence is delimited by the tense of the matrix clause. For instance, if the tense of the matrix clause is the present tense, the tense of the ECM clause is either present or future. On the other hand, if the tense of the matrix clause is the past tense, the ECM clause can be in the past, present, or future. The embedded clause cannot be in past while the matrix clause is in the present tense.

5. Conclusion

This paper explores the subject-verb agreement patterns in MSA, Spanish, and English. Table 3 presents the main findings of this study.

Table 3. Subject-verb agreement patterns in English (E), Spanish (S), and Arabic (A)

L	VSO	SVO	Pronominal subject	ECM	Control	Object agreement
E	N/A	Poor agreement (in present)	Poor agreement (in present)	No agreement	No agreement	No agreement
S	Full agreement	Full agreement	Full agreement	N/A	No agreement	No agreement
A	Poor agreement	Full agreement	Full agreement	Full agreement	Full agreement	In OSV or OVS and the object is definite

Table (3) shows that subject-verb agreement patterns are not the same in the three languages. In English, verbs show poor agreement with their subjects in sentences with present tense. In Spanish, verbs express full agreement with their clausal subject, which results in making Spanish a pro-drop language, given that the ϕ -content of the subject can be determined through the morphological form of the verb. In Arabic, the picture is complicated as there are several factors that determine the pattern of subject-verb agreement. First, in the unmarked word order VSO, verb agrees partially with the subject- no number agreement is maintained on the verb. In SVO, the verb agrees fully with its subject. Secondly, the verb must agree with its pronominal subject irrespective of the word order used. Additionally, we have shown that in the marked word orders OSV and OVS the verb agrees with the subject and may maintain an agreement marker (or a resumptiveclitic) with the fronted object as long as the latter is definite and shows NOM Case.

This discussion indicates that any learners of MSA must take into account the robust correlation between the word order and the corresponding pattern of subject-verb agreement. The position of the subject in relation to the verb is important, a factor that is not manifested, for example, in Spanish where the verb fully agrees with the subject, irrespective of the word order. The form of the subject (a pronoun vs. a full DP) is also important to consider. Additionally, an Arabic language learner must take into account the tense of the verb in order to yield the appropriate subject-verb agreement pattern.

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توافق الفعل مع الفاعل في العربية والإسبانية والإنجليزية

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ملخص

تقدم هذه الدراسة تحليلاً تقابلياً لتوافق الفعل مع الفاعل في لغات ثلاث مختلفة تنتمي لعائلات لغوية مختلفة، وهي العربية والإسبانية والإنجليزية، ونوضح من خلال هذا البحث أن هذه اللغات الثلاث تتشارك فيما بينها العديد من خصائص توافق الفعل مع الفاعل، ولكن بنفس الوقت تتباعد بما يتعلق بالجوانب الأخرى، ونجد في اللغة العربية أن ترتيب الكلمات المستخدمة ونوع الفاعل الذي يؤثر على ما إذا كان الفعل يوافق الفاعل أو المفعول به، وأما في اللغة الإسبانية والإنجليزية نجد أن توافق الفعل مع الفاعل لا يخضع لأي من هذين الشرطين، ومع هذا نجد أن هنالك توافقاً ثرياً بين الفعل والفاعل في اللغة الإسبانية على عكس اللغة الإنجليزية.

الكلمات الدالة: توافق الفعل مع الفاعل، العربية، الإسبانية، الإنجليزية، حذف الفاعل.

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