The Zero Copula in Russian and Arabic Sentences as Compared with English

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Abstract: *Research in linguistics is marked by an analysis of linguistic data in the terms of linguistic units ranging from morphemes to sentences even to discourse. Apart from such data, there is a linguistic fact that a certain unit is absent from the data but its absence can be understood from the arrangement of other linguistic data. In morphology, linguists are familiar with zeromorpheme, where a non-existent morpheme is added to convert a word class into another. Since syntax deals with words as the smallest unit, the absence of certain word may mark a linguistic phenomenon.*

*In English, the absence of relative pronoun which is understood in the sentence the answer I received was satisfying. This fact can be traced through a comparison with The answer, which I received, was satisfying. In English syntax, a subject and a verb play an important role, where anyone of them cannot be absent from a sentence. In Arabic the copulative verb is represented by kāna*كان *as found in kāna l-jawwuxārran* كان الجوحارا *(was-the weather- hot) The weather was hot. The verb kāna*كان *in a certain condition is not present. The same case happens in Russian. The sentence Tatyana bylastudientкататянабуластудентка (Tatyana-was-a student) Tatyana was a student. has a copulative verb byl where in a certain condition it is omitted.*

This paper deals with the absence of copulative verb in Arabic and in Russian known as zero copula where such a case does not appear in English. Furthermore, it is also concerned with verb conjugation, which is not found in English. It is important to know that Russian belongs to an analytic language and English is a synthetic one whereas Arabic shows both characteristics.

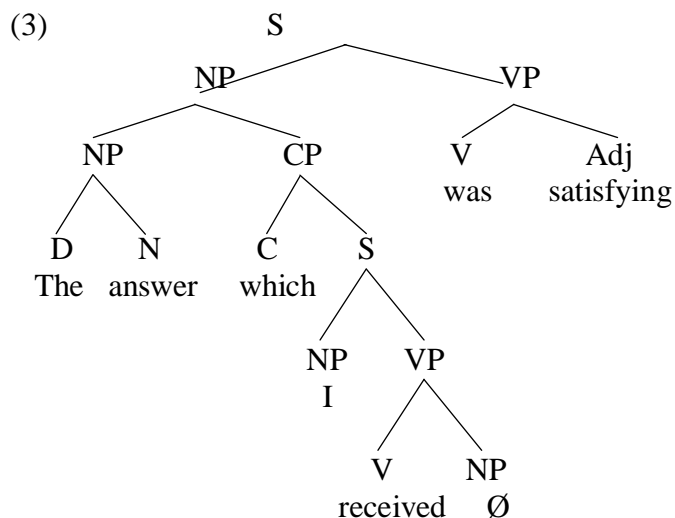**Keyword:** *copulative verb, case, conjugation, zerocopula.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The existence of linguistic data such as morphemes, phrases, clauses, sentences, and discourse is very important in language research. These data are described, classified, manipulated, and analyzed in order that a linguistic phenomenon be understood. Through these data any linguistic processes can be determined and even some other hidden and nonexistent data can be predicted and explained. Consider the followings:
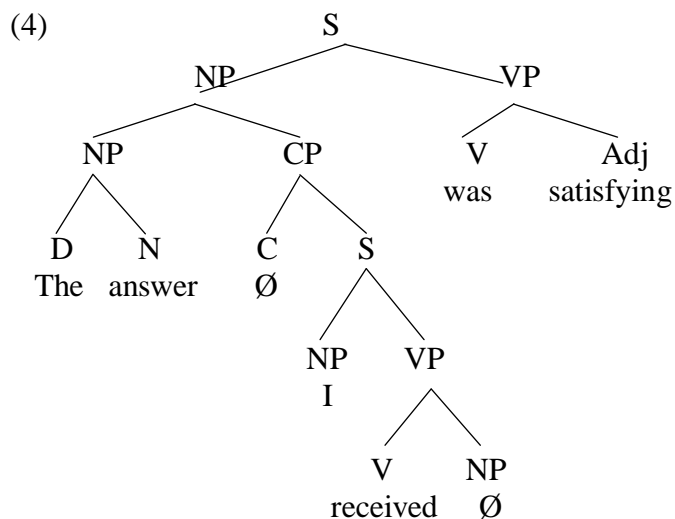
(1) *The answer, which I received, was satisfying.*
(2) *The answer I received was satisfying.*

In (1) the word *which* is possible to eliminate so as to produce (2). The absence of the relative pronoun or connector (Gelderen, 2010:) *which* does not affect the ability of the clause *I received* to attach to the head word *answer.* Sentence (1) can be diagrammed in the following.

From (3) it is clear that the connector *which* together with sentence S (others name it a clause), which consists of a noun phrase (NP) defined as something built round noun and a verb phrase (VP) defined as something built round verb comprise a connector phrase (CP). The VP consists of a verb and an embedded object *answer* resulting in a null NP Ø.

(3)

```
                    S
          NP                VP
      NP       CP       V        Adj
     D    N   C    S    was    satisfying
   The answer which   
                    NP   VP
                    I
                       V       NP
                     received   Ø
```

In the same way, sentence (2) can also be diagrammed in the following:

(4)

```
                    S
          NP                VP
      NP       CP       V        Adj
     D    N   C    S    was    satisfying
   The answer Ø   
                    NP   VP
                    I
                       V       NP
                     received   Ø
```

In this diagram the null NP is embedded with the N *answer* whereas the connector is nonexistent represented by null connector Ø. Thus, both embedded part and zero part are marked by Ø.

The zero linguistic element in the above sentence shows its function as a connector. This phenomenon may happen in other languages. In Arabic, for example, there is a copulative verb that joins an NP and a VP, where the VP can be absent. In English a sentence must have two obligatory elements i.e. an NP and a VP. These two elements may be embedded in a clause but their existence is, ofcourse, able to be explained. On the contrary those two elements are not a must in Arabic. A sentence can have no verb. Consider the following:

(5) *L-madīnatu ʔāmiratun.* المدينة عامرة

    the town-busy
    The town is busy.

The above sentence definitely has no verb. In fact, there is an agreement between the two elements the topic *l-mubtada ʕ* and comment *habar*. The topic or NP is feminine and the comment Adj. is also feminine with the suffix *-tu(n)*.

(6) *Kānat l-madīnatu ʔāmiratun.* كانةالمدينة عامرة
    was-the town-busy
    The town was busy.

The verb *Kānat*in the above sentence also indicates an agreement with both the topic and comment. In short, the sentence in (5) and (6) have shown the nonexistent linguistic element or zero element.

A zero linguistic element is also found in Russian. The Russian copulative verb sometimes appear in a sentence and is sometimes absent from it. The followings may explain the case.

(7) *Tatyana studientka.* татянастудентка
Tatyana-a student
Tatyana is a student.

Sentence (7) shows no verb in it. The sentence consists of two NPs *Tatyana* and *studienka.* Without a comparison with another sentence (minimal pair analysis) the zero linguistic element is not found. Thus, sentence (7) should be compared with the following:

(8) *Tatyana bylastudientka*татянабуластудентка
Tatyana-was-a student
Tatyana was a student.

Sentence (8) above reveals an element, which is absent in (7). The copulative verb *byla* is absent from sentence (7). This is then called the zero part of the sentence or zero copula.

The above mentioned phenomenon i.e. the zero copula is interesting to study since in English such a case is not found. This paper tries to see the presence and the absence of copulative verbs in Arabic and in Russian and their role in syntax. It also tries to investigate the agreement or concord among sentence elements in those languages.

2. COPULATIVE VERB

The following section discusses the copula in English, Russian, and in Arabic, which covers their forms, absence in sentences, and their agreement to other syntactic functions.

2.1. English Copula

In English, verbs are distinguished depending on what object or subject they select (Gelderen, Elly, 2010:72). Verbs that select an object are called transitive verbs i.e. mono and ditransitive. Verbs that select a subject predicate, others called it subject complement, are called copulative or linking verbs. The subject predicates or the subject complements are mainly realized by an Adj.P.

(9) He is pleasant.

An NP. or a PP. can be a subject predicate when it makes a claim about the subject such as the followings.

(10) He is a nice person.

(11) He is in the garden.

The above sentences use *is* as the copula, which agrees to its subject. In English the copula agrees to the subject in number and person. See the following table.

Table 1. *English Copula in Different Tenses (adapted from Quirk, 1985:130)*

Person	Singular			Plural		
	Past	Present	Future	Past	Present	Future
First Person	was	am	will be	were	are	will be
Second Person	were	are	will be	were	are	will be
Third Person	was	is	will be	were	are	will be

Some verbs may take the position of *be* such as *become*, *look*, *appear*, *feel*, etc. These verbs are also called copulative verbs. The position of the copulative verb in English comes directly after the NP, which is the subject of the sentence.

2.2. Russian Copula

Unlike in English, in Russian a copulative verb can come before or after an NP as the subject of the sentence or even it can come at the end of a sentence. As we know Russian belongs to an

analytical language where the order of words isrelatively free. Cinque, Guglielmo and Kayne, Richard S.(2005:402) present the following verbal sentences as an illustration.

(12)   Učeniki prinesli cvety.
pupils.nom brought flowers.acc
'The students have brought flowers.'
(13)   Cvety prinesli učeniki.
         flowers.acc brought pupils.nom
         'Students brought the flowers.'
(14)   Cvety učeniki prinesli.
         flowers.accpupils.nom brought
         'It was flowers that the students have brought.'
(15)   Učeniki prinesli cvety.
         pupils.nom brought flowers.acc
         'It was students who brought the flowers.'
(16)   Učeniki prinesli cvety.
         pupils. nom brought flowers.acc
         'The students have (already) brought flowers.'

The words in the above sentences take different positions with the same syntactic functions. The function of each word is marked by the case. This fact is also found in the sentence containing a copulative verb such as the following.

(17) Ya budu gatov. Я буду гатов.   (Potapova, Nina 1959:171)
     I will ready
     I will be ready.

(18) Budu ya gatov. Буду я гатов.
     will I ready
     It will be me who will be ready..
(19) Gatov budu ya. Гатов буду я.
     ready will I.
     It will be ready of me .

The above mentioned sentences show different position of the copulative verb *budu*in the future form, which agrees with the subject in the nominative form *ya*я known as conjugation. With a conjugation,a subject in nominative case can be left out. Thus, without the subject *ya*я, the sentence is well understood.

(20) Budu gatov. Буду гатов.
     will ready.
     (I) Will be ready.

Other conjugations of Russian copulative verb can be seen in the following diagram.

Table 2. *The Conjugation of Russian Copulative Verbin Future Tense (Lexus, 1997:28)*

Person	Singular	Plural
First Person	budu-буду I	budem-будем budyem
Second Person	budyesh-будешь you (familiar)	budyetye-будуете you (familiar)
Third Person	budyet-будет he/she/it	budut-будут they

The conjugation of Russian copulative verb in the future tense consider number and person. In (20) the number is singular and the person is first person. The first person plural conjugation of Russian copulative verb is *budyem*будем, which means *we*. Thus, sentence (20) can have the first person plural subject *we*, which results in:

(21) Budyem gatov. Будем гатов.
     will ready

(We) will be ready.

The subject of the sentence *we* is conjugated with the copulative verb. Thus it can be omitted as seen in (21).

In addition to the conjugation of Russian copulative verb in future tense, the conjugation in past tense considers number and gender. It does not consider the person. This fact can be seen in the following table.

Table 3. *The Conjugation of Russian Copulative Verb in Past Tense(Lexus, 1997:28)*

Masculine	Feminine	Neuter	Plural
byl-был	byla-была	byla-было	byli-были
he	she	it	they

As mentioned before, the conjugation makes it possible to omit the subject in the sentence when it has been understood as a result of mentioning before. Thus, the sentence:

> (22) Byla studyent. Была студунт.
> was student
> *(She) was a student.*

is clearly understood to have the subject third person feminine *she*. If the subject is the third person masculine the conjugation will be *byl*был, which means *he*. In the case of the conjugation in plural form, there is no distinction of gender so the same form of copulative verb *byli*были is applied to all genders. The sentence:

> (23) Byli studyent. Были студент.
> were student
> *(They) were students.*

can convey the subject of feminine, masculine, or mixed.

In contrast to the subject omission, the Russian copula is omitted in the present tense. As a result both the subject and the complement in the present tense are always present. The following sentences show a zero copulaor the omitted copula.

> (24) Ana na rabotye. Она на работе.   (Ooms, Miriam,1994:35)
> She at work.
> *She (is) at work.*

> (25) Ya tozhe studyent. Ятожестудент.   (Ooms, Miriam,1994:51)
> I also student.
> *I (am) also a student.*

The zero copula indicates something present i.e. the presence of the tense. The agreement occurs between the subject and the complement indicating gender and number.

2.3. Arabic Copula

If a copula can occupy different positions in Russian as a result of its analytical language, Arabic shows a bit different characteristic. This language is also classified as an analytical language but to some degree it still considers a word order or arrangement. The Arabic*kāna*كانcan move freely in a sentence in two positions, where in Russian the copula can occupy three positions i.e. initial, medial, and final. The following positions of Arabic copula are possible:

> (26) Kāna l-jawwu xārranكان الجوحار   (Badawi, El Said, 2002:400)
> was the weather hot.
> *The weather was hot.*

> (27) L-jawwu kāna xārranالجوكان حارا
> theweather was hot.
> *It was the weather that was hot.*

The copula presents at initial position of the already connected subject and complement as in (26). It indicates a certain grammatical meaning i.e. the past tense form. The copula *kāna*كان can also

appear in between the subject and complement. It really links or joins them as in (27). Arabic belongs to a VSO language where the VP precedes the NP.

Arabic knows two kinds of sentences i.e. nominal and verbal sentence or *l-jumlatu l-ismiyyatu* النَسمية الءسمية الجملةand *l-jumlatu –lfi'liyyatu* الجملة الفعلية. Besides the copula*kāna*كان appears in nominal sentences like in (26) and in (27), it can also appear in a verbal sentence. We can compare the following sentences

(28) Yadzhaku Zaidun. زيد يضحك   (Thahir, In'aam Ismail, 2009:6)
laughing Zaid
Zaid is laughing.

(29) Kāna Zaidu yadzhaku. يضحك كانزيد
was Zaid laughing
It was Zaid, who was laughing.

From the above mentioned sentences, we know the default is sentence (28) whereas sentence (29) belongs to a derived sentence. Thus, sentence (27) is also a derived sentence.

For a nominal sentence, the absence of a copula or the zero copula in Arabic means a different thing. It indicates the simple present tense. Consider the following.

(30) L-jawwu bāridun. بارد الجو   (Thahir, In'aam Ismail, 2009:6)
the weather cold
The weather is cold.

Although there is no copula in the above sentence, there is still an agreement i.e. agreement between the subject and the complement. In the sentence the agreement is between the third person masculine singular noun and the third person masculine singular adjective. The following sentence shows the agreement between the subject l-bintuالبنت and the complement jamīlatunجميلة indicating third person singular feminine.

(31) L-bintu jamīlatun. جميلة البنت
the girl beautiful
The girl is beautiful.

In addition to the zero copula, the presence of copula indicates tenses i.e. the past tense such as *kāna*كانin (26) and in (27). Furthermore, its inflective form *yakūnu*يكون is used to indicate the future tense. Consider the following sentence.

(32) Sayakūnu hunā. هنا سيكون   (Thahir, In'aam Ismail, 2009:7)
will (he) be here.
He will be here.

In the above mentioned sentence, the copula contains the element of third person singular masculine pronoun and the future time. All of them are integrated in the verb or the copula known as conjugation. In other words the Arabic conjugation involves gender, number, and person. The following table shows conjugation of the copula in imperfective or future tense (Abu-Chacra, Faruk 2007:109.)

Table 3. *The Conjugation of Arabic Imperfective Copula*

Person and Gender	Singular	Dual	Plural
3.m	yakūnu يكون will be	yakūnāni يكونان will be	yakūnūna يكنون will be
3.f	takūnu تكون will be	takūnāni تكونان will be	yakunna يكن will be
2. m	takūnu تكون will be	takūnāni تكونان will be	takūnūna تكونون will be
2. f	takūnīna تكونين will be	takūnāni تكونان will be	takunna تكن will be
1. m. f.	'akūnu أكون will be	-	nakūnu نكون wilbe

In sentence (32) the prefix *sa-* س indicate the future tense where the rest of the word indicates third person masculine (See table 3.)

The special use of Arabic copula is seen in the derived sentence as in (29). The sentence containing a subject and a complement in the present tense i.e. with the zero copula, can be emphasized with the use of imperfective copula.

(33) Yakūnu l-jawwu jamīlu inda mā tasyaqu l-syamsuيكون الجو جميلا عند ما تشرق الشمس(Thahir, In'aam Ismail, 2009:7)
was the weather beautiful when rises the sun.
The weather is beautiful when the sun rises.

The sentence shows the use copula for emphasis.

As Arabic copula is used in future tense and it involves conjugation, the copula in the past tense or in the perfective form also conjugates with the subject of the sentence considering the person, number, and gender. The following table indicates the conjugation of the copula with its person, number and gender.

Table 4. *The Conjugation of Arabic Perfective Copula*

Person and Gender	Singular	Dual	Plural
3.m	kāna كان was	kānā كانا were	kānū كانو were
3.f	kānat كانت was	kānatā كانتا were	kunna كن were
2. m	kunta كنت was	kutumā كنتما were	kuntum كنتم were
2. f	kunti كنت was	kuntumā كنتما were	kuntunna كنتن were
1. m. f.	kuntu كنت was	-	kunna كن were

The use of the copula *kāna*كان is exemplified in sentence (26) and (27). In the following sentence all the words i.e. the copula, subject, and the complement agree one to another.

(34) Kānat Zaidatu jamīlatun. كانتزيدةجميلة
wasZaidah beautiful
Zaidah was beautiful.

The above sentence is the default form of Arabic sentence where it follows VSO principle. The derived sentence is the one like (27).

3. CONCLUSION

From the above discussion we can conclude that there is a copula in English, Arabic, and Russian. In English the copula agrees with person and number whereas in Arabic and Russian it agrees with person, number, and gender. Arabic and Russian copula is sometimes absent indicating the present tense while in English it is always present. The position of English copula is the middle, the Arabic copula is the initial and the middle, and the Russian copula is the initial, the middle, and the final position. In Arabic and in Russian there is a conjugation, which makes it possible to omit the subject of the sentence whereas in English there is no such a thing that a subject always present in a sentence.

The discussion on syntax becomes interesting because certain things can be expressed in different ways. This fact results in the idea of the default and derived sentence.

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