

**Passive Voice and related structures:  
An analysis of ?an-syncretism in Arabic**

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Arabic is a Semitic language with rich and complex morphology, nonconcatenative root-pattern morphology. Makkan Arabic (henceforth MA), is one of the modern vernaculars of Arabic that has a morphological passive formed by affixing the morpheme ?an- to a transitive verb. However, this construction is ambiguous since it is not confined to passive constructions (Retsö 2006) but encodes both active and passive structures.

In this paper, I discuss the different structures encoded by ?an- in MA and classify them into four distinct constructions on the basis of four main diagnostics as shown in table (1). The diagnostics indicate that the different structures involving ?an- appear to be determined based on the animacy of the deleted external argument and the intentional vs. unintentional nature of the action depicted by the verb. This in turn is determined by the semantics of the root from which the verb is derived.

Table (1)

?an-structures	Compatibility with different diagnostics				Type of construction
	By x-self	Causer PP	Agentive Adverb	Instrumental PP	
al-fustaan <b>?anshagg</b> DEF-dress tear.PAST.3SG.M 'The dress tore'	√	√	X	X	Anticausative
al-walad <b>?atgahar</b> DEF-boy feel upset.PAST.3SG.M 'The boy felt upset'	X	√	X	X	Middle Psych
al-walad <b>?atrawwash</b> DEF-boy wash. PAST.1SG 'the boy washed himself'	√	X	√	√	Middle Reflexive
al-ħaarīs <b>?angatal</b> DEF-guard was killed.3SG.M 'The guard was killed'	X	X	√	√	Passive

My account for the different structures encoded by ?an- is cast within the framework of Distributed Morphology (Halle and Marantz 1993). ?an- syncretism is analyzed in terms of ?an- appearing under the highest verbal projection which can be either Voice or little v depending on the root type. I classify the roots into four classes: agentive, cause-unspecified, psych, and inherently reflexive. When the root in √P is cause-unspecified or psych, ?an- always appears under little v and the external argument in the specifier of vP, a CAUSER or an EXPERIENCER, is suppressed resulting in an anticausative or a middle psych structure, respectively.

On the other hand, when the root in √P is agentive or inherently reflexive, ?an- appears under Voice and the AGENT in the specifier of VoiceP is suppressed resulting in a passive reading with agentive roots and a middle reflexive reading with inherently reflexive roots. I conclude that ?an- marks transitivity alternations in Arabic. My analysis of ?an-syncretism in MA provides

support for a tripartite internal structure of verb phrases (Harley 2013; Alexiadou 2014) as well as for the existence of category-neutral roots of several classes (Alexiadou 2010).

## **Bibliography**

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