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Agreement Mismatches in Arabic Existential Constructions

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***Abstract*—This paper provides a syntactic analysis of agreement mismatches in Classical Arabic existential constructions. Such constructions display notable mismatches in agreement among the expletive, associate and T. The agreement mismatches raise significant challenges for standard assumptions regarding Case and ϕ-features checking and valuation. The paper proposes that these agreement issues can be resolved by assuming that the associate is assigned Partitive Case by the verb, and that the associate bears interpretable ϕ-features which do not require checking. Furthermore, it is argued that T lacks a Case feature, but carries default third person singular masculine ϕ-features. These features are checked, though not valued, by the expletives, which themselves bear uninterpretable valued ϕ-features. The present proposal is not directly applicable to agreement mismatches in non-existential constructions due to differences in the ϕ-features realized on the verb, although future research may extend the analysis to account for both construction types within a unified framework.**

***Index Terms*—agreement mismatches, expletive, associate, ϕ-features, Classical Arabic**

I. Introduction

Although numerous syntactic universal theories have been proposed to minimize language-specific rules, deviations from their predictions continue to emerge. Ongoing and systematic revisions of these theories to account for such anomalies are what sustain and advance the field.

Arabic[1], among other languages, is known for agreement mismatches between the verb and the subject in VS word order (Aoun et al., 1994; AlShammiry, 2016; Alshammari, 2023; Althawab & Alsanadi, 2024; Ellafi, 2024; Fakih, 2016, 2022; Fehri, 1993; Mohammad, 1990, 2000; Soltan, 2007). Classical Arabic (henceforth Arabic) also exhibits anti-agreement in existential constructions. In existential sentences, the verb, expletive and associate can be in disagreement relationship. Unless stated otherwise, all the Arabic data in this paper is collected by the author. The occurrence and eligibility of the data have been verified and established through an acceptability judgment task, which will be discussed in detail in the next section.

(1)	kana	θamma-ta	rijalun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	man.3Pl.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were men in the garden"				
(2)	kana	θamma-ta	rajulun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	man.3SG.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a man in the garden"				
(3)	kana	θamma-ta	nisaʔun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	women.3Pl.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were women in the garden"				
(4)	kana	θamma-ta	imraʔatun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	woman.3SG.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a woman in the garden"				

Such agreement mismatches pose problems to Case and ϕ-features checking and valuation. In recent minimalist framework[2] (Chomsky, 1998; Chomsky, 1999; Chomsky, 2004; Radford, 2009), Case assignment and *T* agreement go hand in hand. The *T* probe is unable to assign Case to a goal that fails to enter into an Agree relation with it. Put differently, assigning a Case is a reflex of probe/ goal agreement.

The present paper touches briefly on agreement facts in declarative non-existential constructions in Arabic and focuses primarily on agreement mismatches in existential constructions. Due to agreement differences between non-existential and existential constructions, the proposed account in this paper only works for existential constructions. Shedding light on non-existential constructions will also help illustrate how previous accounts on agreement facts in non-existential constructions fail to account for agreement mismatches in existential constructions.

This paper is organized as follows: section two explains the Arabic existential data collection and establishes the eligibility of the data, section three describes agreement facts in Arabic non-existential constructions, section four tackles

[1] The paper is concerned with Classical Arabic.
[2] A theoretical framework that aims to explain syntactic structure using the most economical "minimal" set of principles and operations possible.

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agreement mismatches in Arabic existential constructions and demonstrates how they are different from those in non-existential constructions. This section also states the questions that should be addressed. Section five reviews previous accounts on agreement facts in Arabic non-existential constructions and explains why they cannot be adopted to account for agreement facts in existential constructions. Section six reviews preexisting analyses on existential constructions in general and explains why they cannot be extended to account for agreement facts in Arabic existential constructions. Section seven puts forward the proposal, and section eight concludes.

II. The Arabic Existential Data

This section examines the occurrence of Arabic existential sentences and evaluates their eligibility through an acceptability judgment task, which forms the basis of the proposed analysis. The following eight sentences were selected for the judgment task and underpin the analysis, as they provide comprehensive coverage and capture the range of disagreement patterns observed in Arabic existential constructions, enabling the development of a precise and well-defined account.

(5)	kana	θamma-ta	rijalun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	man.3Pl.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were men in the garden"				
(6)	kana	θamma-ta	rajulun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	man.3SG.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a man in the garden"				
(7)	kana	θamma	rijalun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-MAS	man.3Pl.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were men in the garden"				
(8)	kana	θamma	rajulun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-MAS	man.3SG.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a man in the garden"				
(9)	kana	θamma-ta	nisaʔun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	women.3Pl.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were women in the garden"				
(10)	kana	θamma-ta	imraʔatun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	woman.3SG.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a woman in the garden"				
(11)	kana	θamma	nisaʔun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-MAS	women.3Pl.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were women in the garden"				
(12)	kana	θamma	imraʔatun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-MAS	woman.3SG.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a woman in the garden"				

The eight target sentences were presented individually in Arabic within A Qualtrics-based judgment task survey. Participants were instructed to rate each sentence on a seven-point Likert scale, where a rating of 1 indicated that the sentence was fully acceptable in Arabic, and a rating of 7 indicated that the sentence was unacceptable or disallowed. The survey was structured into two blocks. The first block presented a yes/no informed consent question, only participants who consented to take part were directed to the second block, which contained the rating items.

A. Participants

All participants were undergraduate students enrolled in level 7 or level 8 of the Arabic Language and Literature program at Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University. This particular population was selected on the basis of their advanced proficiency in the Arabic language, which they had developed through rigorous academic training through the course of their studies.

A total of 53 individuals completed the survey. The responses of eleven participants were subsequently excluded from the analysis based on the following screening criteria:

1- Participants who did not provide ratings for all eight target sentences were removed from the dataset.

2- Participants who appeared to have responded carelessly were likewise excluded. Indicators of non-serious engagement included implausible rating patterns and survey completion times below the established minimum threshold of one minute.

B. The Results

Prior to examining the results, a threshold value on the rating scale was determined to distinguish acceptable (attested) from unacceptable (unattested) ones. As no crosslinguistically agreed-upon method exists for establishing such a cut-off point, a threshold of 3 was adopted for the purposes of this study. Accordingly, sentences with a mean rating of 3.0 or

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below were classified as acceptable and attested, while sentences with a mean rating of above 3.0 were classified as unacceptable and unattested.

The results of the acceptability judgment task indicate that all eight sentences were judged to be acceptable and attested by the participants, as each sentence received a mean rating below 1.20 (Figure 1). Specifically, mean ratings ranged from a minimum of 1.00 to a maximum of 1.19, values that fell considerably below the established threshold of 3.0.

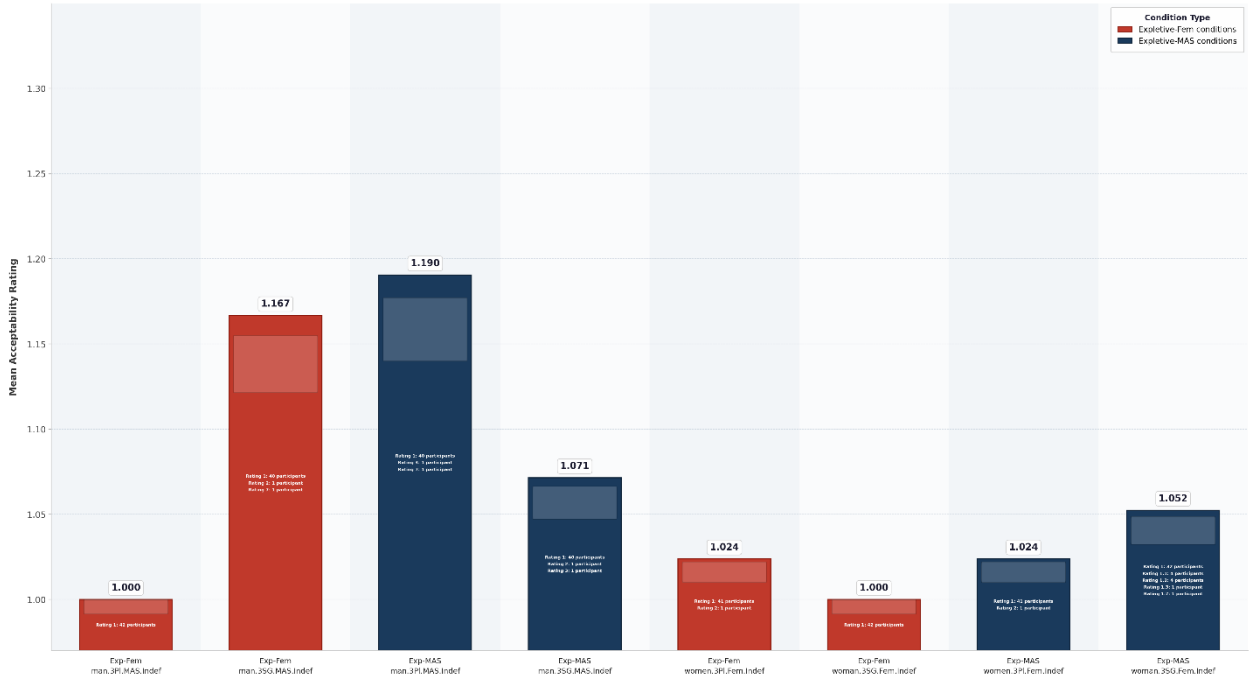


Figure 1. Acceptability Ratings of Sentences 5-12 by Expletive Genger Condition

In the chart, the y-axis represents mean ratings, while the x-axis corresponds to the individual target sentences. The bars are arranged in the same order as the examples (5-12), with example (5) represented by the leftmost bar and example (12) represented by the rightmost bar. Red bars represent sentences containing the feminine expletive *θammata*, while blue bars represent sentences containing the masculine expletive *θamma*. Mean ratings are listed above each bar and detailed information regarding individual participants' ratings is provided inside each bar.

III. Agreement in Arabic Non-Existential Constructions

Arabic exhibits agreement facts in declarative non-existential constructions that are different from those in existential constructions (Aoun et al., 1994; AlShammiry, 2016; Alshammari, 2023; Fakih, 2016, 2022; Fehri, 1993; Mohammad, 1990, 2000; Soltan, 2007). In SV word order, the subject agrees fully with the verb.

(13) al-rijalu kanu fi al-ħadikah
Def-man.3Pl.MAS.NOM be.PSt.Pl.MAS in Def-garden
"the men were in the garden"

(14) al-rajulu kana fi al-ħadikah
Def-man.3SG.MAS.NOM be.PSt.SG.MAS in Def-garden
"the man was in the garden"

(15) al-nisaʔu kunna fi al-ħadikah
Def-women.3PL.Fem.NOM be.PSt.Pl.Fem in Def-garden
"the women were in the garden"

(16) al-marʔatu kanat fi al-ħadikah
Def-woman.3SG.Fem.NOM be.PSt.SG.Fem in Def-garden
"the woman was in the garden"

When the subject precedes the verb, a full ɸ-features agreement between the subject and the verb is observed as exemplified in (13-16). However, in VS word order, the subject agrees with the verb partially.

(17) kana al-rijalu fi al-ħadikah
be.PSt.SG.MAS Def-man.3Pl.MAS.NOM in Def-garden
"the men were in the garden"

(18) kana al-rajulu fi al-ħadikah
be.PSt.SG.MAS Def-man.3SG.MAS.NOM in Def-garden
"the man was in the garden"

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(19) kanat al-nisaʔu fi al-ħadikah
be.PSt.SG.Fem Def-women.3PL.Fem.NOM in Def-garden
"the women were in the garden"

(20) kanat al-marʔatu fi al-ħadikah
be.PSt.SG.Fem Def-woman.3SG.Fem.NOM in Def-garden
"the woman was in the garden"

When the subject follows the verb, an impoverished agreement between the subject and the verb is noticed where the verb only agrees with the subject in gender and person but not in number. As illustrated in (17-20), in VS word order, the verb always bears third person singular features[3]. It is worth mentioning that such agreement mismatches in VS occurs with different classes of verbs not only with the different forms of the noninchoative unaccusative verb "*be"*. Various analyses have been proposed to account for anti-agreement in VS word order in Arabic (Aoun et al., 1994; AlShammiry, 2016; Alshammari, 2023; Fakih, 2016, 2022; Fehri, 1993; Mohammad, 1990, 2000; Soltan, 2007). However, for one reason or another, none of them can be adopted to account for agreement mismatches in Arabic existential constructions as will be clarified in section five.

IV. Agreement in Arabic Existential Constructions

This paper primarily aims to explain within minimalist framework how Case and ϕ-features checking and valuation proceed in existential sentences. In Arabic, Existence can be expressed by four different expletives: *judʒ͡ʒəd, hunak, θamma and θammata*. This paper focuses on the last two since they interestingly carry some agreement features. The first two words *judʒ͡ʒəd* and *hunak* lack such agreement features. It is worthy of note that *hunak* is the equivalent of English *there* as they behave identically. Unlike the other three Arabic expletives *judʒ͡ʒəd, θamma and θammata*, it can be used as a locative word just like the English *there*. The other expletives *judʒ͡ʒəd, θamma* and *θammata* cannot be used as locative words.

(21) *iðhab θamma/ θammata
go.Imperative locative
"go there"

(22) *iðhab judʒ͡ʒəd
go.Imperative locative
"go there"

(23) *θamma/ θammata muʃkelah θamma/ θammata
expletive problem locative
"there is a problem there"

(24) iðhab *hunak*
go.Imperative locative
"go there"

Examples (21-24) show that *judʒ͡ʒəd, θamma* and *θammata* cannot be used as locative words. On the other hand, example (12) shows how *hunak* can be a locative word.

Returning to agreement features, unlike *judʒ͡ʒəd* and *hunak,* the expletives *θamma* and *θammata* carry agreement features. The expletive *θamma* is masculine whereas *θammata* is feminine (al-Ghalayini, 1993). The morpheme *ta* attached to the end of the expletive *θamma**ta*** is what causes the expletive to be feminine. The suffix *ta* (might occur in different forms: "t", "tu", "tun" or "h" depending on the Case of the host) is an active gender-changing morpheme in Arabic. When suffixed to masculine verbs, nouns and adjectives, it changes the gender of the word from masculine to feminine.

(25) zawdʒ͡
husband.MAS

(26) zawdʒ͡a-ta
wife-Fem.Acc

(27) ʔakal
eat.MAS

(28) ʔakala-t
eat-Fem

(29) dʒ͡amil
beautiful.Mas

(30) dʒ͡amila-tun
beautiful-Fem.Nom

The above examples show that when the morpheme *ta*, or any of its different forms, is suffixed to nouns (25-26), verbs (27-28) and adjectives (29-30), it changes the gender of the host from masculine to feminine.

[3] In the case of a singular subject, the verb agrees with it in number because the verb is always singular in VS.

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With the expletives in questions established, it is now convenient to repeat the existential sentences tested in the acceptability judgement task in section two and examine their agreement facts.

(31)	kana	θamma-ta	rijalun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	man.3Pl.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were men in the garden"				
(32)	kana	θamma-ta	rajulun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	man.3SG.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a man in the garden"				
(33)	kana	θamma	rijalun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-MAS	man.3Pl.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were men in the garden"				
(34)	kana	θamma	rajulun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-MAS	man.3SG.MAS.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a man in the garden"				
(35)	kana	θamma-ta	nisaʔun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	women.3Pl.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were women in the garden"				
(36)	kana	θamma-ta	imraʔatun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-Fem	woman.3SG.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a woman in the garden"				
(37)	kana	θamma	nisaʔun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-MAS	women.3Pl.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there were women in the garden"				
(38)	kana	θamma	imraʔatun	fi	al-ħadikah
	be.Pst.SG.MAS	expletive-MAS	woman.3SG.Fem.Indef	in	Def-garden
	"there was a woman in the garden"				

As far as word order is concerned in existential constructions, the noninchoative unaccusative verb *kana* surfaces in a sentence-initial position followed by the expletive and the associate, respectively. Unlike VS declarative non-existential constructions where the verb agrees with the subject in person and gender but not in number, the verb in existential constructions always bears the features third person singular masculine regardless of what features the expletive and the associate carry. Comparing (31,33), (32, 34), (35, 37) and (36, 38), the expletives *θamma* and *θammata* can be used interchangeably. Examples (31), (35) and (36) show clearly that the verb does not have to agree with the associate. In (31), the verb bears third person singular masculine (which is the case across all examples) whereas the associate bears third person plural masculine. In (35), the verb only agrees with the associate in person while in (36), it agrees with the associate in person and number.

According to recent minimalist program (Chomsky, 1998; Chomsky, 1999; Chomsky, 2004; Radford, 2009), Case assignment and *T* agreement go hand in hand. The *T* probe cannot assign Case to a goal with which it does not agree. The agreement mismatches between the verb, expletive and associate observed in (31-38) raise several questions:

a- What checks the uninterpretable Case features of the associate?
b- Does *T* have Case features?
c- What Checks or values the ϕ-features on *T*?
d- Do the expletives have interpretable or uninterpretable ϕ-features? And, if they have uninterpretable ϕ-features, how are they checked?
e- Do the expletives have Case features?

Before presenting the proposal and addressing these questions, the following section reviews previous analyses of agreement mismatches in Arabic VS word order. Then it examines existing analyses of existential constructions and demonstrates why they cannot be adopted to account for the agreement facts observed in Arabic existential constructions in (31-38).

V. Previous Accounts on the Agreement Facts in Arabic Non-Existential Constructions

This section reviews previous analyses that have been proposed on the agreement facts in Arabic non-existential constructions. The purpose of presenting them is to show why these analyses cannot be extended to account for the agreement facts in existential constructions. Additionally, it explains why some of these analyses fail to account for the agreement facts observed in Arabic VS word order.

A large body of research has tackled the problem of subject-verb agreement in Arabic (Ackema & Neeleman, 2003; Aoun et al., 1994; Al-Balushi, 2025; Benmamoun, 2000; Mohammed, 1990, 2000; Ouhalla, 1994; Sahawneh & Al-Daher, 2025; Soltan, 2001, 2014, 2007). Mohammed's (1990, 2000), Soltan's (2001) and Ouhalla's (1994) accounts for the agreement mismatches between the subject and the verb in VS word order in Arabic are similar in spirit. They suggest that in VS word order the verb is agreeing with a covert expletive pronoun. The features on the verb are not dictated by the surface subject but rather by an expletive pronoun which always carries the features third person singular masculine.

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Such approach fails to account for all the aspects of anti-agreement in Arabic. It fails to account for the gender match between the subject and verb when the subject is feminine (39). It cannot be the case the verb receives its feminine feature from the covert expletive pronoun because the expletive pronoun carries third person singular masculine features.

(39) kanat al-marʔatu fi al-ħadikah
be.PSt.SG.Fem Def-woman.3SG.Fem.NOM in Def-garden
"the woman was in the garden"

Along similar lines, it does not account for the agreement mismatches observed in the presence of a conjoined NP with the first member being feminine either.

(40) raqasat al-bintu wa al-rajulu
dance.Pst.SG.fem Def-girl.3SG.fem and Def-man.3SG.MAS
"the girl and the man danced"

In the presence of a conjoined NP starting with a feminine member, the verb has the features of third person singular feminine. These features cannot be dictated by the covert expletive pronoun because the expletive pronoun carries third person singular masculine features. This type of analysis also fails to account for the agreement facts observed in Arabic existential constructions. It does not account for the agreement features occurring on the expletives. If the features on the verb are dictated by the covert expletive pronoun, then what dictates the features on the expletives?

In an attempt to explain the agreement facts in VS word order in Arabic, Aoun et al. (1994) propose that the subject and the verb agree in both word orders: SV and VS. However, in VS word order, due to various syntactic operations such as verb raising, the agreement gets lost. This analysis cannot be generalized as it seems to be structure-specific and ad hoc at best. Just like previous accounts, this type of analysis cannot handle the agreement facts in Arabic existential constructions because it does not touch on the checking and valuation of the features on the expletives.

In his (2004) and (2007) research papers, Soltan proposes the following structure to explain the agreement facts in VS word order:

(41)

[CP C[TP T Default/ Class[vP DP v[VP]]]]

Agree

He assumes that *T* does not have ϕ-features, but rather it has default ϕ-features with no agreement with the post-verbal subject. He also assumes that *T* does not have EPP feature which allows the subject to remain in situ. As for Case assignment, he assumes that the subject's Nom Case is assigned by the verb. However, such an analysis is ruled out by recent minimalist literature as mentioned earlier: Case assignment and *T* agreement go hand in hand (Chomsky, 1998; Chomsky, 1999; Chomsky, 2004; Radford, 2009). Even if the relationship between Case assignment and *T* agreement is ignored, this approach cannot be adopted to account for the agreement mismatches in existential Arabic constructions as, siding with the previous accounts, it does not explain the checking and valuation of the features on the expletives.

Ackema and Neeleman (2003) and Benmamoun (2000) have had their share of discussing syntactic agreement in Arabic. They suggest that agreement alternation in VS word order is a PF phenomenon. Although the characterization of configuration is developed differently, in both accounts, the agreement weakening occurring in VS is a result of PF merger. These analyses cannot be extended to account for the agreement mismatches in existential constructions for two reasons:

a- The expletives have nowhere to be incorporated in these analyses.

b- The features that the verb bears in existential constructions are different from those in non-existential constructions.

None of the abovementioned analyses can be adopted to account for the agreement facts observed in existential constructions. Similarly, as will be discussed in the following section, preexisting cross-linguistic accounts of existential constructions cannot be adopted to account for the agreement facts observed in Arabic existential sentences.

VI. Previous Accounts on the Agreement Facts in Arabic Existential Constructions

Groat (1995) argues against Chomsky's (1991) proposal that *there* is an LF affix that needs to adjoin to something (the associate) at LF in order to be interpretable. He proposes that *there* is interpreted as null and it bears Case features but not ϕ-features since it occupies case position but lacks agreement features. The expletive *there* will check the strong features on *T* since it is inserted in Spec, AgrSP before Spell-out, and the associate in VP will raise at LF to adjoin *there* to check its ϕ-features against N-features of AgrS. This approach cannot be taken to account for the Arabic existential constructions for two reasons: 1- For Groat, the associate checks ϕ-features on AgrS, so agreement mismatches are predicted to be impossible 2- He assumes that the expletive does not have ϕ-features which is not the case in Arabic expletives under investigation.

Cardinaletti (1997) hypothesizes a connection between Case and agreement in existential sentences known as the Nominative Agreement Hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, agreement in existential sentences is determined by the Case carried by the expletive. If the expletive has Nominative Case, then the agreement is with the expletive. However, when the expletive is Case-ambiguous, the agreement is with the associate. This account obviously cannot be adopted because Arabic expletives in question are at best Case-ambiguous, and, as the examples show, the associate does not show an agreement with the verb.

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According to Chomsky (2000, 2004), *T* assigns Nominative Case to the associate and receives ϕ values from the associate which shows as agreement morphology in the verb. It proposes that the expletive is base-generated in Spec, TP and that it does not have Case nor ϕ-features. This apparently cannot be adopted to account for the agreement facts in Arabic existential constructions for two reasons: 1- Lack of agreement between the verb and the associate 2- The expletives show defective ϕ-features (only gender) which leads to the assumption that they have a full set of ϕ-features most of which are covert.

Deal (2009) argues that *there* is externally merged low in Spec, vP. In answering why Spec, vP, she argues that *there* is contentful; it has uninterpretable features that are checked against its associate. For these features to be checked, the checking relation must be maximally local. The expletive *there* is an agreement mediator that migrates the associate's features to a high position to be checked which allows the associate to remain low. This approach cannot be adopted to account for agreement in Arabic existentials for two obvious reasons:

a- Expletives cannot check their features against the associates because they can be used interchangeably meaning that they do not show agreement with the associates

b- The existence of agreement mismatches between the verb and the associate.

To account for definiteness restriction in *there* constructions, Kayne (2018) argues that *there* is base-generated DP-internally. This account predicts that *there* would have the same ϕ-features as the associate which is not true in Arabic existentials. It does not address agreement mismatches between the verb and the associate either. Therefore, it cannot be extended to cover Arabic existential constructions.

None of these theories can account for the agreement facts observed in Arabic existential constructions. The next section proposes an account that can capture the observed anomalies.

VII. The Proposal

This section proposes a syntactic account of the observed anomalies, drawing on the research questions outlined earlier. As the results of the present acceptability judgment task empirically demonstrate, the agreement mismatches between the verb, expletive and associate in Arabic existential sentences pose problems to Case and ϕ-features checking and valuation. According to recent minimalist framework (Chomsky, 1998; Chomsky, 1999; Chomsky, 2004; Radford, 2009), since the ϕ-features on *T* are realized on the verb, and the verb does not enter into an Agree relation with the associate, the associate's uninterpretable Case features cannot be checked. Other possible options are: 1- The associate bears default Case, as a result, does not require Case checking 2- The verb assigns Partitive Case to the associate. If the Case checking problem of the associate can be eliminated, the remaining issue concerns the expletive and *T*. The discussion therefore turns to default Case and investigates whether the associate is eligible for default Case assignment.

In some theories, DPs cannot be sent to Spell-out without their NOM Case feature checked whereas their ACC feature is waiting to be checked covertly. In an Agree-based theory, all Case features are checked in the same component. However, caseless DPs can survive through LF and PF if they do not have uninterpretable features that require checking (Schütze, 2001). Case Filter is known to be the power that enforces structural licensing requirements. Nonetheless, since no LF or PF crash will be caused by the fact that a DP might lack Case features, the Case Filter cannot be morphologically motivated. This implies that a DP can get structural licensing without receiving Case, or even that structural licensing is not required at all for some DPs (i.e., nonarguments).

Schütze (2001) argues for the existence of default Case in all languages. The default Case for many languages is NOM including Arabic (Ouhalla, 1994). According to Schütze (2001), different processes can motivate morphological Case marking: 1- Case can be assigned by syntactic head 2- It can also surface by matching a semantically related constituent 3- A Case that is syntactically assigned to a head (i.e., D) could extend to other constituents within the same projection (DP). When none of these mechanisms has applied, default Case marking arises. Therefore, it can be stated that a DP is identified with a default Case in an environment where all these mechanisms are ruled out (Schütze, 2001).

The following discussion examines whether the environment under consideration provides motivation for default Case marking. It is worth repeating that default Case in Arabic is NOM (Ouhalla, 1994). In existential constructions, there is a potential Case assigner which is the finite *T*. However, Schütze (2001) argues that, in some languages, the post-copular NP might be an instance of default marking. This may arise in contexts where there is a mismatch in Case between the post-copular NP and the other DP, namely the expletives *θamma* and *θammata* in the construction under investigation. However, there is no evidence that the expletives bear Case. Consequently, it is impossible to determine whether the associate and the expletive match in Case, given that the Case properties of the expletive are unknown. It follows that the associate cannot be assigned a default Case.

Turning to Partitive Case, unaccusative verbs cannot assign structural accusative Case to their objects. However, this does not mean that they cannot assign Case altogether. They can assign Partitive Case to their objects which is an inherent Case (Belletti, 1988). This can be seen in the following examples from Finnish.

(42) a. Pöydälla on kirjoja.
on the table is (some) books.part.Pl
"There are some books on the table"
b. Helsingistä tulee kirjeitä.
from Helsinki comes (some) letters.part.Pl

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"There come some letters from Helsinki" (Belletti, 1988, p. 2)

In these examples, the unaccusative verb assigns Partitive Case to its object. In Finnish, a preverbal NP can bear Partitive Case when the verb is unaccusative.

(43) Vieraita tulee.
guests.part,Pl come.3SG
"Guests are coming" (Belletti, 1988, p. 39)

In the example above, the subject which has an inherent Partitive Case does not trigger verbal agreement on the verb. The verb contains the unmarked features of third person singular. This indicates that agreement between the subject and the verb is not required for the verb to assign Partitive Case to the associate.

Under Partitive Case assignment, Case and theta assignments are conjunctive: for an NP to receive Partitive Case, the verb must both Case-mark and theta-mark the NP, a condition satisfied in the present paper's examples.

One might argue that copulas are semantically vacuous and therefore incapable of theta-marking NPs. This view is plausible in cases involving predicative adjectives (e.g., He is happy), where the copular verb does not appear to contribute to the semantic content. However, in existential constructions, the copular verb expresses an existential meaning ("exist"), which cannot be considered semantically vacuous. In fact, there are several researchers who adopt the Partitive Case analysis, partially because of this reason (Bentley et al., 2015; Freeze, 1992; McNally, 1997, 2011, 2016).

Therefore, building on Belletti's (1988) account and following Lasnik's (1995) analysis where he suggests that the associate in English existential constructions is assigned Partitive Case, it is concluded that there is nothing that can go against assigning Partitive Case to the associate in Arabic existential constructions.

Turing to *T*, under the assumption that *T* bears uninterpretable ϕ-features and interpretable Case features, it is necessary to determine how these features are checked and valued. Since *T* may or may not bear a Case feature depending on the theoretical account (Chomsky, 2000), and given that the associate is assumed to be assigned Partitive Case by the verb, it is assumed that *T* in Arabic existential sentences lacks a Case feature. In such cases, Case on the DP is checked via agreement with *T* bearing a full ϕ-set.

As for ϕ-features on *T*, Ouhalla (1994) explores the idiosyncratic agreement system in Arabic where in SVO word order the subject agrees fully with the verb while in VSO the verb displays a third person singular feature. He concludes that the features displayed by the verb are the default. However, the features realized on the verb in VSO declarative non-existential sentences are different from those carried by the verb in existential constructions (compare 17-20 to 31-38). In non-existential constructions, the verb always bears third person singular features meaning that it agrees with the subject in person and gender but not in number. On the other hand, the verb in Arabic existential constructions always bears third person singular masculine features meaning that the gender match between the subject and the verb in non-existential constructions is not attested in existential constructions.

Building on Ouhalla (1994), it can be assumed that the *T's* ϕ-features in Arabic existential sentences are the default. This makes this account structure-specific due to the differences between the ϕ-features on the verb in non-existential constructions and those on the verb in existential constructions. Now, it is necessary to determine what checks these features.

An accurate determination requires an exploration of the ϕ-features of the expletives and the associate. The expletives *θamma* and *θammata* can be used interchangeably. However, the specifications of ϕ-features on the associate yield different semantic interpretations which indicate that they are interpretable and do not require checking (Chomsky, 1998). Since the specifications of ϕ-features on the expletives do not contribute to the semantic interpretation (the semantics at LF), the features are uninterpretable and need to be checked (Chomsky, 1998). It is suggested that uninterpretable valued features can check other uninterpretable features but not value them. Henceforth, the uninterpretable ϕ-features on the expletives are valued and they can check but not value the ϕ-features on *T*. Assuming uninterpretable valued features on expletives contradicts Chomsky's (2004) proposal that valuation and interpretability go hand in hand, and aligns with Pesetsky and Torrego's (2007) proposal which suggests a dissociation between valuation and interpretability.

Sobin (2014) tackles the agreement mismatches between the verb and the associate in existential sentences such as *there's cars in the parking lot*. He concludes that these associates are in a default position and bear no Case feature. He proposes that *there* may be assigned a gratuitous person and number value such as third-singular. In sentences where the verb does not agree with the associate, T_{fin} probes, Case-marks and moves *there* to Spec, *TP*. His assumption that *there* has ϕ-features that require checking aligns with and supports the validity of our proposal.

VIII. Conclusion

This paper explores existential constructions in Arabic and accounts for the patterns they exhibit. In particular, it addresses the agreement mismatches observed between the expletive, associate and *T*. It proposes that these agreement asymmetries can be explained by assuming that the associate is assigned Partitive Case by the verb and that it bears interpretable ϕ-features which does not require checking. With respect to *T*, it argues that it lacks a Case feature but carries default third person singular masculine ϕ-features. These features are checked, but not valued by the expletive, which itself bears uninterpretable valued ϕ-features.

The present proposal does not readily extend to agreement mismatches in non-existential constructions, owing to differences in the ϕ-features specifications of the verb in the two construction types. However, future research may

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explore modifications to the analysis that would allow it to accommodate both existential and non-existential constructions within a unified framework.

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