

Cognate Object Constructions in Najdi Arabic: An HPSG Approach

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Abstract—Cognate object constructions (COCs) are known for their idiosyncratic properties in that they consist of an intransitive verb that takes an NP whose head is a verbal noun that is semantically and morphologically cognate to the verb. In Arabic literature, this topic is considered one of the understudied linguistic phenomena. Therefore, this paper attempts to contribute to the ongoing linguistic research by exploring COCs in one of the Arabic varieties, namely Najdi Arabic (NA). This paper illustrates the main properties that are shared by all COCs in NA. It also provides a theory-neutral description of the syntactico-semantic properties of one of the COC types, namely the particular event COC. In addition, it offers an analysis of the common core properties of all COCs and the syntactico-semantic properties of particular event COCs using the approach of Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG).

Index Terms—cognate object constructions, particular event COC, Najdi Arabic, non-transformational, HPSG

I. INTRODUCTION

Cognate object constructions (COCs) have received considerable attention among various linguists (e.g., Alqurashi, 2020; Al-Sammak, 2012; Farkas, 2020; Madkhali, 2017; Melloni & Maisini, 2017; Pereltsvaig, 1999; Pereltsvaig, 2002; Willson, 2019).

Generally, COCs can be described as constructions in which a verb and a postverbal noun have the property of being semantically and morphologically cognate (Macferland, 1995; Madkhali, 2017), as in (1) from Najdi Arabic (NA). In this example, it can be noticed that the cognate object (CO) *ḍʿeħk* ‘laugh’ is morphologically and semantically related to the verb *ḍʿħakan* ‘laughed’.

1. *l-bana:t* *ḍʿħakan* *ḍʿiħk* *ʕa:li* *b-s²-s²af*
DEF-girls laughed laugh loud in-DEF-class
‘The girls laughed a loud laugh in the class.’

To the best of researchers’ knowledge, little attention has been paid to this construction in Arabic, more specifically, to the local varieties of Arabic. Consequently, it remains rather unclear what the nature of COCs is in such varieties. This paper attempts to fill this gap and contributes to current linguistic research by describing and providing a syntactic analysis of COCs in NA using the framework of Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG).

However, it should be kept in mind that this study focuses on the syntactico-semantic properties of all COCs in general and the COCs that have particular event readings in particular. Therefore, a full discussion of the other types of COCs lies beyond the scope of this paper.

The remaining part of the paper proceeds as follows: section [II] presents an overview of the theoretical framework, section [III] and its subsections describe COCs in NA, section [IV] provides an analysis of COCs in NA, and section [V] concludes this paper.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

HPSG is a theory of non-transformational generative grammar developed by Sag and Pollard in 1987. It aims to provide a precise analysis of grammatical phenomena (Abeillé & Brosley, 2021; Müller, 2015). Grammar in HPSG is seen as a system that contains linguistic types, constraints that set restrictions on these types, and features that identify the basic properties of the types (Müller, 2020).

Linguistic objects and constraints in HPSG are described by feature descriptions, which are known as Attribute-Value-Matrices (AVMs) (Müller, 2015). For a better understanding of how HPSG describes linguistic objects by using AVM, a partial lexical entry of the verb *gabal* ‘met’ from NA has been provided.

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8. *gal* *l-razel* *gulen* *yareb*
 said.3ms DEF-man saying strange

Literally: 'The man said a strange saying'

9. *t'ah* *l-walad* *t'ehah* *guwejah*
 fell.3ms DEF-boy fall strong

Literally: 'The boy fell a strong fall.'

Concerning sentences (7) and (8), Massam (1990) argued that these sentences should be distinguished from COCs because verbs, such as *yana* 'sing' and *gal* 'say', can take non-cognate nouns as their objects, as in (10) and (11). On the other hand, unaccusative verbs, as in (9), do not select non-cognate nouns as their objects. This can be seen by the ungrammaticality of (12) in which the verb *t'ah* 'fell' is followed by the non-cognate noun *bazxah* 'fall'.

10. *yana* *r-razel* *θalaθ* *gas'aed* *la-f-faʕer* *l-maʕruf*
 sung.3sm DEF-man three poems for-DEF-poet famous
 'The man sang three poems by the famous poet.'

11. *gal* *kalamen* *yareb*
 said.3ms saying strange
 Literally: 'He said a strange saying.'

12. **t'ah* *l-walad* *bazxten* *guwejah*
 fell.3ms DEF-boy fall strong
 Literally: 'The boy fell a strong fall.'

Taken together, it could be argued that the CNs in (7) and (8) are ordinary direct objects that happen to be morphologically cognate to the verb. On the other hand, there is no sufficient evidence for excluding CNs with unaccusative verbs, as in (9), from being COCs.

Therefore, it seems plausible that COC in NA is restricted to be an intransitive verb, whether it is unergative or unaccusative, followed by an NP whose head is semantically and morphologically cognate to the verb. Therefore, no further discussion will be provided in this paper about the constructions in which the verb is either monotransitive or optionally transitive since they lie beyond the scope of this paper.

Given this, the essential properties that all COCs in NA must share can be summarized as follows:

- The verb in the COC is an intransitive verb.
- The verb and the CO must be semantically cognate.
- The verb and the CO must be morphologically cognate.
- The verb in the COC does not select non-cognate NPs.

This section has demonstrated the properties that are shared by all COCs in NA. The subsequent section concerns how COCs in NA can be classified into different types based on their semantic readings.

B. COCs Types in NA

Based on the semantic readings of COCs in NA and following Sailer's (2010) classification, COCs in NA have been classified into four types: particular event COCs, concrete resultant COCs, generic event COCs, and abstract resultant COCs. The motivation for adapting this classification is that each semantic reading of the COCs seems to correlate with specific syntactic properties in NA. The following are examples of each type of COC.

13. *nama-t* *ʔumi* *nomah* *zainah* (particular event COC)
 sleep-3fs mother-POSS.1s sleep good
 'My mother slept a good sleep.'

14. *l-bent* *s'araxa-t* *s'arxah* *ʕaljah* (concrete resultant COC)
 DEF-girl screamed-3fs scream loud
 'The girl screamed a loud scream.'

15. *namna* *nomat* *ʔahl* *l-kahf* *b-l-ʕed* (generic event COC)
 slept-1p sleep companions DEF-cave in-DEF-Eid
 Literally: 'We slept the sleep of the companions of the cave in the Eid.'

16. *s'ah-at* *l-bent* *s'jah* *gahar* (abstract resultant COC)
 cried.3fs DEF-girl cry oppression
 'The girl cried an oppression cry.'

This paper focuses on the first type of COC, namely particular event COC. Thus, the subsequent section describes the syntactico-semantic properties of particular event COCs.

C. Particular Event COC in NA

For the particular event COC, the CO refers to the same action denoted by the verb. For instance, the CO *rakδʔ* 'running' in (17) refers to the same action denoted by the verb *rkδʔa-t* 'ran.3fs'. According to Mittwoch (1998) and Sailer (2010), the semantic representation of sentence (17) is shown in (18).

17. *rkδʔa-t* *l-bent* *rakδʔ* *sereʕ*
 run.3fs DEF-girl running fast
 Literally: 'The girl ran a fast running.'

18. $\exists e(\text{reka}\delta^? \text{ 'run' } (e) \text{ Arg1}(e, l\text{-bent 'the girl'}) \wedge \text{sere}\zeta \text{ 'fast' } (e))$

In (18), the event reading of COCs in NA has been modeled using the event variable *e* (Parsons, 1990). The semantic representation in (18) states that there is an event *e* that is a *rak* $\delta^?$ 'running' event in which *l-bent* 'the girl' is the participant, and this event has the property of being *sere* ζ 'fast'.

According to Sailer (2010), one of the empirical tests for this reading is the possibility of a manner paraphrase. It can be observed that (17) is semantically equivalent to (19), which has an intransitive verb followed by an adverbial. Hence, sentence (19) has the semantic representation shown in (18).

19. *rk* $\delta^?a\text{-}t *l-bent* *b-ser* ζ *ah*
 ran.3fs DEF-girl in-fast$

Literally: 'The girl ran in a fast way.'

A COC that has an event reading follows the description of COCs presented in Mittwoch (1988) in which it is neither an argument nor an adjunct but a realization of the Davidsonian event argument of the verb (i.e., it represents the event itself).

One of the noticeable syntactic properties of particular event COCs in NA is that they are, in most cases, modified by an adjective. This property is one of the fundamental properties that distinguish COCs from other similar cognate constructions, namely cognate infinitive constructions (CICs). Particular event CO and cognate infinitive (CI) are both postverbal nouns that are semantically and morphologically cognate to the verb and denote the same event as the verb (Madkhali, 2017; D éz, 2021). What distinguishes particular event COs from CIs is that CIs occur unmodified and unqualified, whereas particular event COs should be modified (Alawadh, 2023; D éz, 2021). Consider the CIC example in (20).

20. *reka* $\delta^?$ *Khalid* *rak* $\delta^?$
 run.3ms Khalid running

'Khalid ran.'

(Alawadh, 2023, p. 70)

Another point regarding the modification of particular event COs is that, without being modified, particular event COs would be considered semantically tautological and would not serve any apparent purpose (Kuno & Takami, 2006). To illustrate more, sentence (21), which does not have a CO, has the semantic representation shown in (22). When a CO has been added with no modification, as in (23), it will have the same semantic representation as in (22).

21. *nam* *l-walad*
 slept-3ms DEF-boy
 'The boy slept.'

22. $\exists e(\text{nam 'sleep' } (e) \text{ Arg1}(e, l\text{-walad 'the boy'}))$

23. *??nam* *l-walad* *nomah*
 slept-3ms DEF-boy sleep
 '??The boy slept a sleep.'

Sometimes particular event COs may be used without being modified in cases where the sentence has an implied meaning. This is illustrated by (24) in which the sentence here has the implied meaning that the running event was fast.

24. *Wa* *Allah* *yahu* *reka* $\delta^?$ *rak* $\delta^?ah$
 and Allah he run.3ms running

Literally: 'I swear to Allah he ran a running.'

The implied meaning: 'I swear to Allah he ran a fast running'

It is plausible to argue that a particular event COC cannot occur without specifying how the action took place, either explicitly or implicitly. Consequently, particular event COCs, as in (23), are likely to be ungrammatical or at least syntactically odd (with the assumption that the CO here has no implied meaning). Taken together, the typical structural pattern for particular event COCs in NA is V + ADJ + CO.

Particular event COs in NA also seem to be similar to the eventive COs in English, where they tend to be indefinite (Kim & Lim, 2012; Sailer, 2010). This explains why sentence (25) is ungrammatical.

25. **nama-t* *?um-i* *n-nomah* *z-zainah*
 sleep-3fs mother-POSS.1s DEF-sleep DEF-good
 '*My mother slept the good sleep.'

Regarding pronominalization, it seems that this type of CO is non-referential. Therefore, it cannot be pronominalized, as illustrated by (26). In this example, the CO is underlined, and the clitic pronoun is marked in bold.

26. **nama-t* *?um-i* *nometin* *zainah* *wa* *sugbah* *b-safah* *namet-ah* *axt-i*
 sleep-3fs mother-POSS.1s sleep good and after in-hour sleep-it sister-POSS.1s
 '*My mother slept a good sleep then after an hour my sister slept it.'

However, pronominalization is possible in cases where the pronouns refer to the whole event (Real-Puigdollers, 2008). This is demonstrated in (27) where the clitic pronoun in the word *mn-ah* 'from it' refers to the entire sleeping event rather than the CO *nomah zainah* 'good sleeping' alone.

27. *nama-t* *?umi* *nomah* *zainah* *wa* *ma* *gama-t* *mn-ah* *ella* *l-šas'er*
 sleep-3fs mother-POSS.1s sleep good and NEG awake.3fs from-it except DEF-evening
 'My mother slept a deep sleep and did not awake from it until the evening.'

However, finding some counterexamples for the properties mentioned above is possible since there is a chance to make these COs referential (Massam, 1990; Real-Puigdollers, 2008). However, they will denote a resultant object rather than an event in this case. This is shown in (28) in which the CO *nomah* ‘sleep’ refers to a specific sleeping that exists as a result of the action denoted by the verb rather than to the event itself. In addition, the manner paraphrase, which is considered an empirical test for particular event COCs, is not available because the CO does not modify the event adverbially. This explains why the CO in (28) is referential and definite. It is also not modified by an adjective.

28. *Ṗaxeran nemt n-nomah alii kent Ṗatamana-h*
 finally, slept.1s DEF-sleep that was.1s hope.1s-it
 Literally: ‘Finally, I slept the sleep that I was hoping for’

To sum up, the syntactic properties of the particular event COCs that have been discussed so far seem to go in line with the properties of COCs mentioned in Jones (1988), Mittwoch (1998), and Real-Puigdollers (2008). Typically, they are indefinite NPs that must be modified by an adjective. In addition, they can be paraphrased into adverbials but cannot be pronominalized.

IV. COGNATE OBJECT CONSTRUCTION IN NA: ANALYSIS

This section attempts to provide a suitable analysis of COC in NA using the framework of HPSG. Subsection [A] offers an analysis of the common core properties that all COCs must have. Then, subsection [B] provides an analysis of the syntactico-semantic properties of particular event COCs in NA.

A. The Overall Analysis of COC in NA

This section seeks to provide a general constraint that contains the essential properties that all COCs in NA must have. A proper analysis should account for the following properties:

- The verb in COCs must be intransitive.
- The verb cannot select non-cognate NPs.
- The verb and the CO must be morphologically cognate.
- The verb and the CO must be semantically cognate.

Concerning the status of COs in NA, some linguists treat COs as typical arguments (e.g., Macfarland, 1995), and some as adjuncts (e.g., Jones, 1988). Another possibility is that COs can be treated as a special kind of complement. In this section, we attempt to figure out which analysis is suitable for COs in NA.

Sailer (2010) proposes an HPSG analysis for COC in English. He analyzes COCs using lexical rules because valence alternations are best to be analyzed using them (Abeille’ & Brosley, 2021; Müller, 2006). To explain more, in COCs, the valence of intransitive verbs changes to require two arguments instead of one. Hence, lexical rules are used to generate COCs, which require two arguments, from intransitive verb constructions.

(29) presents the lexical rule formulated by Sailer for COC in English. The input in this lexical rule is an intransitive verb that has one argument. The output is a verb with two arguments in which the second argument is semantically cognate to the verb, as indicated by the identical values of the MAIN features of the verb in the input and the CO in the output.

29. *cognate-object-construction-lexical-rule (coc-lr)* (Sailer, 2010, p. 204)

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{SYNS LOC} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{CAT} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{HEAD } \textit{verb} \\ \text{INDEX } e \\ \text{MAIN } \boxed{1} \end{array} \right] \\ \text{CONT} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{INDEX } e \\ \text{MAIN } \boxed{1} \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right] \\ \text{ARG-ST} \langle \boxed{2} \rangle \end{array} \right] \mapsto \left[\text{ARG-ST} \langle \boxed{2}, \text{NP} \left[\text{LOC} \left[\text{CONT} \left[\text{MAIN } \boxed{1} \right] \right] \right] \right] \right]$$

The account proposed by Sailer seems convincing and reasonable. However, morphological cognateness should be included in the analysis because, as discussed above, it is a fundamental criterion for considering a specific construction a COC. Thus, although this paper focuses on the syntactico-semantic properties of COCs, the morphological cognateness should be accounted for in the proposed lexical rule.

To catch the morphological cognateness, the feature CHARS, introduced in Bhuyan (2008), is used. The CHARS feature, which is a sub-feature of MORPH(OLOGY), displays the letters of the sign's root (i.e., the letters of the root of the word). In a NA COC, the value of the CHARS feature of the CO and the value of the CHARS feature of the verb must be identical. Given this, the updated lexical rule that covers the morphological cognateness is presented in (30).

30. *cognate-object-construction-lexical-rule (coc-lr)* in NA

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{MORPH} \mid \text{ROOT} \mid \text{CHARS } \boxed{1} \\ \text{SYNSEM} \mid \text{LOC} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{CAT} \left[\begin{array}{l} \textit{verb} \\ \text{INDEX } e \\ \text{MAIN } \boxed{1} \end{array} \right] \\ \text{CONT} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{INDEX } e \\ \text{MAIN } \boxed{2} \end{array} \right] \end{array} \right] \\ \text{ARG-ST} \langle \boxed{3} \rangle \end{array} \right] \mapsto \left[\text{ARG-ST} \langle \boxed{3}, \text{NP} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{MORPH} \mid \text{ROOT} \mid \text{CHARS } \boxed{1} \\ \text{SYNSEM} \mid \text{LOC} \left[\text{CONT} \left[\text{MAIN } \boxed{2} \right] \right] \end{array} \right] \right] \right]$$

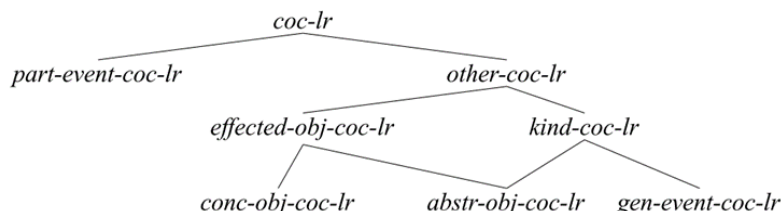
(30) now includes all the essential properties of COCs in NA. The verb in the construction is intransitive because the input requires only one argument (i.e., the subject). By means of lexical rules, intransitive verbs are used to generate a class of verbs that have two arguments in which the second argument is always a CO. This condition is guaranteed by

the constraint that the verb and the CO have identical values of CHARS features and identical values of MAIN features (i.e., they are semantically and morphologically cognate). (30) also successfully excludes CNs occurring with transitive and optionally transitive verbs from being COs.

Concerning the status of COs, we argue that a CO in NA is not the typical argument (i.e., direct object) of the verb but rather a special kind of complement. To differentiate it from the direct object, CO in NA is better analyzed as a non-canonical argument of the verb that is analyzed in HPSG as a member of the ARG-ST of the verb but not as a member of the COMP list. This analysis was initially proposed by Miller and Sag (1997) to account for Romance pronominal affixes. Borsley (2010) also uses the same account for the structure of clitics in Arabic.

The analysis discussed so far covers the similarities or the properties shared by the different types of COCs in NA. As for the differences among the types of COCs, Sailer (2010) proposes a hierarchical classification of COCs in English, as shown in (31), which can be used as a means of distinguishing between the types of COCs.

31. Type hierarchy of COCs (Sailer, 2010, p. 204)



In brief, the supertype of the hierarchy in (31) is the type *coc-lr* (*cognate-object-construction-lexical-rule*), which has the constraint given earlier in (30). The hierarchy also shows that COCs can be classified into two broad types. The first is the type of particular event COCs, while the second includes the other types of COCs. As discussed earlier, the paper here concentrates on the first type of COCs, whose analysis will be the concern of the subsequent section.

B. The Analysis of Particular Event COCs

For particular event COCs, a proper analysis should account for the properties that can be summarized as follows:

- Particular event CO represents the same event as the verb.
- It is always indefinite.
- It is obligatorily modified by an adjective.

Sailer's (2010) account for particular event COCs is shown in (32). The shared tag [4] of the INDEX value of the verb and the INDEX value of the CO indicates that the verb and the CO denote the same event. By the value (-) of the Boolean feature DEF(INITE), the CO is specified to be an indefinite NP.

32. *particular-event-coc lexical rule (part-event-coc-lr)* (Sailer, 2010, p. 205)

$$\left[\text{SYNS LOC [CONT [INDEX [4]]]} \right] \mapsto \left[\text{ARG-ST} \left\langle \dots, \left[\text{LOC} \left[\text{CAT|HEAD} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{PRED } + \\ \text{DEF } - \end{array} \right] \right] \right] \right\rangle \right]$$

In addition, Sailer considers this type of CO a predicative complement, as seen by the value (+) of the feature PRED (ICATIVE). It seems plausible to argue that COs of this type in NA are also predicative complements for the following reasons. The CO here shares the same argument (i.e., the subject) with the verb, which is a property of predicative NPs (Madkhali, 2017). To illustrate more, particular event COs denote events, and events are carried out by participants. In particular event COCs, the subject and the unexpressed subject of the CO are identical. Another reason for treating particular event COs as predicative NP is that they involve restrictions on determiners (Mittwoch, 1998). As discussed in section III, particular event COCs are restricted to constructions having the form of a verb + ADJ + CO, which means that this type of COC does not typically occur with determiners, such as demonstratives.

Having specified particular event COs to be predicative NPs, which are considered non-referential, the unavailability of being pronominalized has been accounted for since non-referential NPs cannot be pronominalized.

The aforementioned discussion on Sailer's lexical rule of particular event COCs suggests that this analysis is applicable to particular event COCs in NA. However, the CO in this type is always modified by an adjective. Such a property is an important one that needs to be involved in this analysis¹

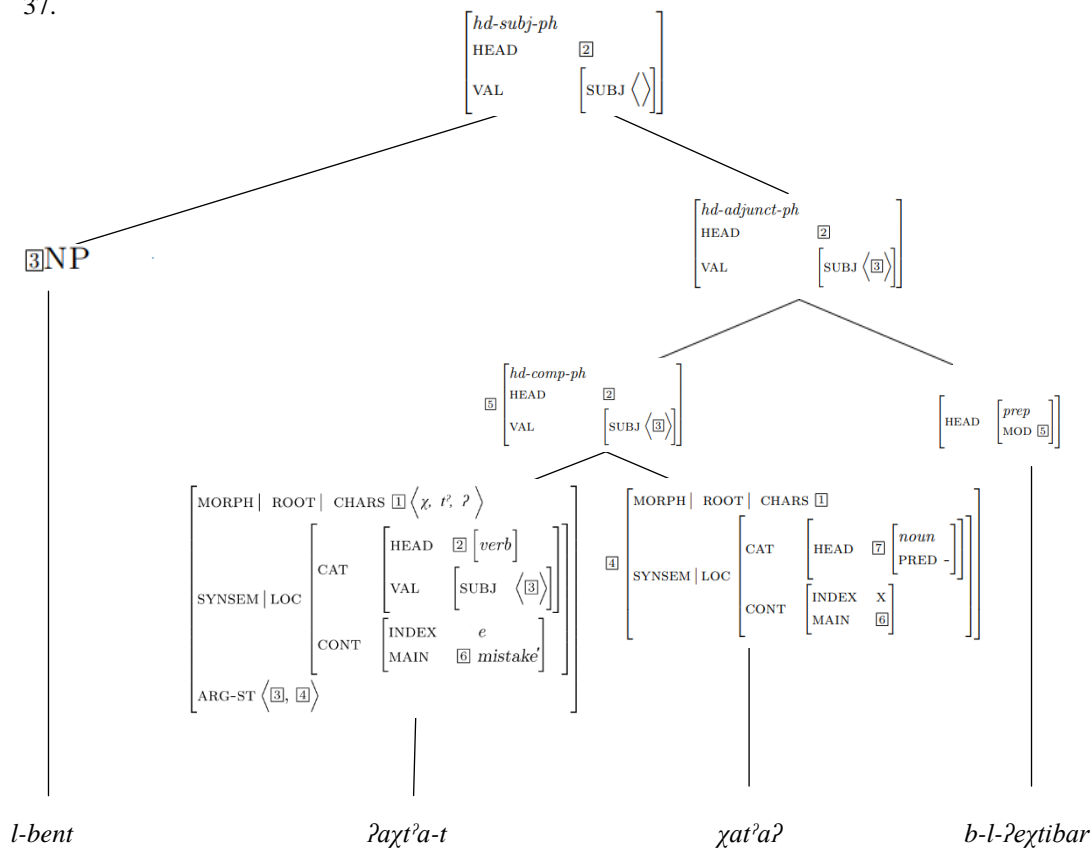
To accommodate this, the analysis of adjuncts proposed by Sato and Tam (2008) will be employed here to stipulate the condition that a particular event CO in NA must be modified by an adjective. This analysis introduces the feature

ADJ (UNCT)S, which specifies the adjunct that modifies the HD-DTR (i.e., head daughter), into the VALENCE feature of the HD-DTR. Given this, the modified lexical rule of particular event COCs in NA will be as presented in (33).

33. *part-event-coc-lr* in NA

¹ Sailer (2010) solved this problem using an independent principle, namely the Semantic Discernibility Principle, in which he stated that the semantic contributions of the daughters in a specific phrase must not be identical.

37.



The structure in (37) shows that the concrete resultant COC is more flexible than the particular event CO in that it can occur unmodified². In addition, the concrete resultant CO does not refer to an event but rather an object, as indicated by the value (x) of the INDEX feature. Another distinguishable property of concrete resultant CO is that it is a referential NP. Hence, the value of the PRED feature here is (-).

It appears plausible to argue that HPSG provides a useful analysis for COCs in NA. It allows us to catch the semantic and morphological cognateness between the verb and the CO by means of the structure-sharing feature. It also accounts for the fact that CO is a special kind of complement that is different from the ordinary direct object by specifying that the CO is a non-canonical complement that is a member of the ARG-ST but not a member of the COMP list.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper explores the syntactico-semantic properties of COCs in NA in general and the particular event COCs in particular. First, it illustrates the main properties that all COCs in NA share. Then, it offers a theory-neutral description of particular event COCs in NA. It also attempts to theoretically account for the main syntactico-semantic properties of COCs and particular event COCs using the framework of HPSG. We argue that COC consists of an intransitive verb that takes a non-canonical complement that is semantically and morphologically cognate to the verb. For the particular event COC, the paper shows that this kind of COC exhibits similar syntactico-semantic properties to those reported for COs that have event reading in the literature. This paper contributes to the topic of COs cross-linguistically and to the literature of Arabic in particular.

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² It should be noted that in this structure, the PP *b-l-?ex?ibar* 'in the exam' is an optional element that modified the whole VP rather than the CO alone, as is the case with the obligated modification in particular event COCs.

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