

Typological Studies in Language

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Verb Valency Changes

Theoretical and typological
perspectives

edited by

Albert Álvarez González and Ía Navarro

John Benjamins Publishing Company

TSL
120

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Arabic ‘labile verbs’ in form III

Lability or something else?

Alexander Letuchiy

National Research University, Higher School of Economics, Moscow

The article discusses labile (also known as ambitransitive) verbs in literary Arabic. I show that, though Arabic does not have a rich system of labile verbs, some existing cases of lability (labile verbs of form III) are particularly interesting from the typological point of view. Their unusual property is that the opposition between semantically causative vs. non-causative uses (and number of syntactic arguments) do not always correlate with syntactic (in)transitivity. Verbs of form III have both possible types of non-standard uses: transitive non-causative and intransitive causative uses, as well as the two standard uses (transitive causative and intransitive non-causative uses). I link this non-standard type of lability to some general features of voice and transitivity in Arabic. At the end of the article, some cases of lability outside form III are discussed.

1. Introduction

The tendency of languages to choose either valency increase or valency decrease to be grammaticalized has been discussed by theoreticians and typologists for a long time. For instance, Nichols et al. (2004) propose a classification of the world's languages based on their way of marking transitivity and valency change. They also show that these language types are areally and genetically motivated. While in some linguistic areas, such as Caucasus and South America, valency increase (illustrated by causativization in this article) tends to be grammatically marked, some other regions (e.g. Europe) show an opposite tendency: transitive verbs tend to be basic, while intransitive lexemes are derived by means of valency decreasing operations (most characteristically, anticausative).

According to Nichols and her co-authors, as well as according to studies by Haspelmath (1993), Letuchiy (2006, 2010) and others, lability (also known as ambitransitivity – ability of verbs to be transitive or intransitive with no additional morphological marking) is also genetically and areally motivated. For instance, in

Europe and Africa lability is much more widespread than in Native American languages. However, as follows from Letuchiy (2010), in all areas labile verbs are found. Asian languages do not behave uniformly in this respect: alongside languages with large classes of labile verbs, there are those which have almost no labile verbs.

Arabic (both the literary language and spoken dialects) belongs to the latter class. Labile verbs are found here only sporadically. Although they are sometimes mentioned in linguistic studies, such as Fassi Fehri (2012), more often authors of descriptions do not analyze labile verbs in detail. For instance, Benmamoun et al. (2010) analyze syntactic behavior of transitive verbs, including their ability to form passives and tests for subjecthood, but do not mention labile verbs. Saad (1982: 34–54) treats some verbs as transitive and intransitive at the same time if they have a transitive use which can be passivized and an intransitive non-passivizable one. However, his examples of transitive and intransitive verbs are cases of argument omission rather than cases of lability. He notices that verbs like *ʾakala* ‘eat’ behave as transitive when used with an object but manifest intransitive properties if the object is omitted. This type of phenomenon is labeled ‘A-lability’ by Dixon (1980), Kibrik et al. (2001) and others, though its typological distribution differs significantly from that of lability proper or P-lability (see Letuchiy 2006). A-lability is much more widespread and sometimes characterizes the whole verbal system of a language.

The present paper is focused on a subclass of Arabic labile verbs, namely, verbs of form III denoting symmetrical states like ‘be equal’, ‘be close’, ‘be similar’ and so on (most of them also have a dynamic reading, such as ‘get closer’). These verbs behave in a specific way regarding their syntactic transitivity. They are very close to the notion of lability employed by Nichols et al. (2004), Kulikov (1999), Letuchiy (2013), Kulikov & Lavidas (2014) in that the same form has both a causative use (e.g. ‘make equal, compare’) and a non-causative one (‘be equal’). At the same time, these verbs differ from the traditional concept of lability by their syntactic properties: their causative uses are not always transitive, and non-causative uses are not necessarily intransitive. Some verbs of the group have a transitive non-causative use and an intransitive causative use. For instance, in (1), the verb *sāwā* is used causatively (it means ‘make equal’ and has a causer participant ‘the law’), but is syntactically intransitive (the second, non-subject, syntactic argument with the semantic role of Theme is introduced by the preposition *bayna* ‘between’):

- (1) *Sāwā* (intransitive, causative): [Al-Hayat 1996]
al-qānūn-u y-usāw-i bayna al-žamīʿ-i.
 DEF-law-NOM 3SG.M-make.equal-PRS.IND between DEF-all-GEN
 ‘The law makes everyone equal.’

In contrast, Example (2) represents the non-causative (spontaneous) use of *sāwā* ('be, become equal'). Unexpectedly, the verb is transitive. The two symmetrical arguments occupy the positions of subject (*ad-dinār-u* 'dinar') and direct object (*akṭar-a min talāt-at-i dūlār-āt-in* 'more than three dollars').

- (2) *fī-mā kān-a ad-dinār-u fī 'ām-i* 1990
 in-what be.PST-3SG.M DEF-dinar-NOM in year-GEN 1990
y-usāw-ī akṭar-a min talāt-at-i dūlār-āt-in.
 3SG.M-be.equal-PRS.IND more-ACC from three-F-GEN dollar-PL-GEN
 'Based on the situation in 1990, dinar (was) equal to more than three dollars.'
 [Al-Hayat 1996]

Thus, I show that in Arabic there are labile verbs, yet they are not numerous and are rather peculiar both in semantic and syntactic respects. The data under analysis lead me to a more general question: how should we treat cases where a verb has two uses which differ in their (non)-causativity but exhibit a non-standard type of transitivity opposition¹?

All Arabic examples are taken from ArabiCorpus (arabicorpus.byu.edu). This corpus appears to represent different regional varieties of the literary language (for instance, the list of newspapers includes Al-Watan (Kuwait), Al-Ahram (Egypt) and Al-Hayat (different countries), but no dialectal data seem to be involved in the present analysis. I did my best to take most examples from Arabic newspapers in order to make them comparable to each other. After each example the part of the corpus (most often, the name of the newspaper) is given.

Since ArabiCorpus does not have a convenient mechanism to search for all uses of a lexeme, I mainly searched for several forms of each lexeme. The set of forms included 3SG F PAST (*qārabat*), 1PL PAST (*qārabnā*), 3SG M PRS (*yuqāribu*), and 3SG F PRS (*tuqāribu*). My judgments concerning frequency of lexemes are mainly based on these forms, though some other forms were also used to check my conclusions.

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, a brief sketch of theoretical and typological approaches to lability is given. Section 3 discusses some general features of transitivity and voice marking in Arabic. Section 4 is central for the paper: here labile verbs of form III are analyzed and their typological particularity is shown. In Section 5, I consider some cases of lability in Arabic outside form III. In Section 6, some typological parallels to the Arabic situation are addressed. In the Conclusions section, possible theoretical implications of the Arabic data are discussed.

1. Note that some authors, such as Saad (1982) do not consider Arabic verbs of symmetrical situations to be transitive at all, even if they have an accusative object. Saad points to the fact that verbs of this sort usually do not form passives. Our corpus data in principle confirm this claim, though Google search finds some passive forms of the verb *sāwā* 'be equal'.

2. Definition and distribution of labile verbs

2.1 The state of research

A labile verb is a verb which is able to be used transitively or intransitively without a morphological change. Among these verbs, the A-labile and P-labile types are distinguished.

Labile (sometimes also called ambitransitive) verbs have been overlooked by typologists for a long time. Although the definition of labile verbs was first proposed in 1940, by Jakovlev and Ashxamaf, linguistics lacked special typological or descriptive studies dedicated to lability.

There were only some works, such as Nedjalkov (1969) where the typological distribution of lability was analyzed. Nedjalkov, and later Haspelmath (1993), regard lability as a type of formal correlation between a transitive and an intransitive verb denoting one situation or semantically similar situations. For instance, in English, both the spontaneous and the externally-caused variants of the situation 'break' are denoted by the same lexeme *break* with no formal change in the verb form (cf. *The cup broke* vs. *I broke the cup*).

Along with lability, other grammatical and lexical types of transitive / intransitive correlation exist. Here belong the causative type, the anticausative type, suppletion, and equipollent oppositions. Nichols et al. (2004) propose one more type which they consider to be autonomous from the others, namely, the type with an auxiliary change.

In the last two decades lability has increasingly become a subject of typological research, as seen, for instance, in Haspelmath (1993), Comrie (2006), Creissels (2009), Letuchiy (2010, 2013), Kulikov & Lavidas (2014) (the sole volume dedicated to the typological aspects of lability) and others in which the authors focus on the cross-linguistic perspective of lability studies.

Ljutikova (2002) and Letuchiy (2006) propose a semantic classification of labile verbs including reciprocal, reflexive, anticausative (distinguished by Ljutikova) as well as conversive and passive types (which were added to Ljutikova's classification by Letuchiy). In the present article, I only discuss anticausative labile verbs, which are the only ones considered in detail by Nedjalkov (1969), Haspelmath (1993), and Comrie (2006). In this type, the transitive use of labile verbs denotes an externally caused event, such as *I broke the cup*, while the intransitive use denotes an event which is conceptualized as spontaneous, having no external causer, as in *The cup broke*.

The main regions that exhibit labile alternations are Europe (where anticausative lability of the *break* (transitive) / *break* (intransitive) type is observed), and Africa (the only area where passive lability is constantly found in various geographical

domains and language groups, as, for example, in Songhay *taka* 'bury / be buried' (Nilo-Sakharan, see Prost 1956; Rožanskij 1991; Galiamina 2005).

2.2 A-lability vs. P-lability

Another opposition, which is relevant for the classification of labile verbs, is A-lability vs. P-lability.

A-labile verbs are those lexemes which have an Agent argument in both uses, transitive and intransitive. This can be illustrated by Russian *jest'* 'eat (something) / eat (it does not matter what)'. In (3), the verb is intransitive, while in (4), it has an accusatively-marked Patient *mjaso* 'meat':

(3) *Ja je-m .*

I.NOM eat-PRS.1SG

'I am eating.'

(4) *Ja je-m mjas-o.*

I.NOM eat-PRS.1SG meat-SG.ACC

'I am eating meat.'

In the P-labile type, the verb has a Patient in both uses. In the transitive use, as in (5), an Agent is usually present, while in the intransitive use, represented in (6), the verb tends to be monovalent (with only the Patient being overtly expressed). The English *boil* exemplifies this type:

(5) *John is boiling water* (an Agent and a Patient).

(6) *The water is boiling, we can make some tea!* (only a Patient).

In a particular language, either A- or P-lability can be the main (the most frequent and productive) type of variation. For instance, Drossard (1998) claims that A-lability outranks P-lability in accusative languages, while in ergative languages, it is the opposite way round, and P-lability is more productive than A-lability.

This claim calls for a more precise formulation, especially for P-lability. Both ergative and accusative languages differ significantly in what concerns the number of P-labile verbs. Of course, in some ergative languages, P-lability is really frequent (Avar, Adyghe, Warekena), and in some accusative languages it is infrequent (Russian, Ava Pit). However, there are also accusative languages with many P-labile verbs (French, German) and ergative languages where P-lability is marginal (Lezgian, Tsez).

Letuchiy (2010) claims that accusative languages, contrary to ergative ones, typically do not have P-labile verbs with strong semantic transitivity, like English

break or *tear*. Such is the case in Arabic, where this group of situations is not covered by labile verbs.

Creissels (2014) demonstrates that the very notion of P-lability is much harder to define in ergative than in accusative languages. In ergative languages, an intransitive use of a labile verb is virtually indistinguishable from the use of a strictly transitive verb, in which the object is omitted.

2.3 Lability and syntactic transitivity

When dealing with lability, linguists usually consider the relation between lability and syntactic transitivity. The question is of real significance: the fact that a verb has a causative and a non-causative use does not actually reveal much about syntactic transitivity of the former and the latter use.

Typically, a labile verb has a transitive causative use and an intransitive non-causative one. However, Letuchiy (2013) shows that for some verbs, the variation of argument structure and semantics is not accompanied by transitivity variation. For instance, the Turkish verb *başlamak* ‘begin’ has a spontaneous use, as in (7a), and a causative one, illustrated by (7b). Yet, neither of them is syntactically transitive. In the causative use the verb has a dative indirect object (lit. ‘The teacher begins to a lesson’).

- (7) a. *Ders başl-ıyor.*
 lesson begin-PRS
 ‘The lesson is beginning.’
- b. *öğretmen ders-e başl-ıyor.* [Scheka 1999].
 teacher lesson-DAT begin-PRS
 ‘The teacher is beginning the lesson.’

See also Examples (1) and (2) for a similar case in Arabic.

In what follows, I will call transitive causative and intransitive non-causative uses of labile verbs ‘canonical patterns’, since the causative meaning is usually associated to transitive verbs and the absence of causation (the spontaneous meaning) with intransitive ones. The other two patterns, namely, intransitive causative (as in (1) and (7b)) and transitive non-causative uses (as in (2)) will be termed below ‘non-canonical patterns’.

The focus of this paper is the non-canonical cases. I will show that in Arabic form III, many verbs which are semantically similar to conventionally labile ones do not conform to the canonical pattern: either their causative uses are intransitive, or their spontaneous (non-causative) uses are transitive.

In the following section, I will briefly describe some relevant features of Arabic verbal system and transitivity marking. These remarks will be important for the discussion of labile verbs in Section 4.

3. Arabic verb system and transitivity

The Arabic verb system has some properties which seem to be closely related to issues of lability. Here I only mention some of them, namely, (1) existence of numerous patterns of valency change marking; (2) syntactic indefiniteness of most verb patterns, i.e., their ability to contain both transitive and intransitive verbs.

3.1 Verbal patterns

It is widely known that Arabic has a large system of derivational patterns, also called forms or stems. Few of them are specialized for expression of transitivity and valency, most stems can also have aspectual, modal readings or some idiosyncratic meanings. However, almost all of these patterns impact valency and transitivity – at least with some roots. Some of the meanings related to transitivity and valency are listed below (see Blachère 1958: 69–79; Blachère & Gaudefroy-Demombynes 1952: 49–76; Grande 1998: 121–141 for the complete list of meanings):

- II causative;
- III applicative, conative, reciprocal;
- IV causative;
- V anticausative, reflexive (of II);
- VI intransitive variant of III, reciprocal;
- VII passive, anticausative;
- VIII anticausative, reflexive;
- IX anticausative / non-causative variant of form IV (with roots meaning colour, corporal defects and similar things);
- X reflexive.

At the same time, many of the patterns can also have uses which are not related to valency and transitivity. Some examples from [Grande 1998] are given below:

- II intensive action
- IV intensive action
- V multiplicative
- VI multiplicative, intensive

Thus, the crucial property of the Arabic system is that, in spite of the richness of its voice and valency change system, it has few dedicated means of marking valency change.²

3.2 Syntactic indefiniteness

A notable peculiarity of the Arabic verbal system is its property that can be called 'syntactic indefiniteness'. By this term I mean that nearly all morphological patterns include verbs of different syntactic classes (transitive and intransitive). Among the ten frequent patterns, only VII and IX form an exception – these patterns feature intransitive verbs exclusively.

For instance, patterns II and IV, which often form transitive verbs (II *qaddama* 'present', IV *'alqā* 'throw, give (a lecture)', etc.), also contain intransitive verbs with the intensive meaning (e.g. II *fallasa* 'become a bankrupt', IV *'ažma'a* 'gather (oneself, intransitive)') (see Fassi Fehri 2012 for details). Patterns VIII and X not only form intransitive reflexives and anticausatives (VIII *ighṭasala* 'wash', X *istayqaza* 'wake up'), but also transitive verbs with the reflexive benefactive or reflexive causative reading. Or, they may have the same reading as that of form I, as form VIII verb *iktašafa* 'discover' (transitive or with the preposition *'an*) or X *istašāra* 'ask for an advice'.

Typologically, this property of Arabic system is not at all widespread. For instance, in Turkic languages, the core system of four valency change markers (reflexive, reciprocal, anticausative / passive and causative) is observed (cf. Khakas *-n* 'reflexive', *-s* 'reciprocal', *-tyr / -t* and other allomorphs 'causative' and *-l* 'anticausative, passive'). However, only the reflexive and reciprocal markers can form both transitive and intransitive verbs. The two other markers – the causative and the anticausative / passive one – derive only transitive and intransitive verbs, respectively.

On the other hand, many languages behave similarly to Arabic. For instance, in Adyghe (West Caucasian) reflexive, reciprocal, and many applicative prefixes can produce transitive as well as intransitive forms. In any case, the property of syntactic indefiniteness manifests itself very clearly in Arabic – it affects even the causative marker which often is unable to form intransitive verbs cross-linguistically.

In the next section, I will show that the non-standard type of variation in form III is related to the syntactic indefiniteness of this form. The key property which permits the occurrence of variation is that form III includes both transitive and intransitive verbs, though the latter are less frequent than the former.

2. One of the exceptions is formed by the passive formation marked by the vowel change (*kataba* 'write' – *kutiba* 'be written') which is beyond the scope of the present article.

3.3 Form III and non-standard transitivity

In many traditional works, such as Blachère (1958) and Grande (1998), the third form is said to contain mainly or only transitive verbs. In some respects, the claim about the transitivity of form III appears to be true: verbs of form III sometimes denote situations which do not tend to be expressed by transitive verbs cross-linguistically, and follow the transitive pattern in many of these cases. At the same time, we should take into account the semantics of the base verb and the particular use of form III.

For instance, the comitative applicative use of form III, illustrated by (8) (*žālasa* 'sit with' from *žalasa* 'sit') makes the initial verb transitive, which agrees with the definition given by Blachère (1958: 69–79): "A la III^{me} forme, le verbe exprime la direction dans laquelle s'accomplit l'action". The same is true for the reciprocal use, illustrated by (9): the transitive verb *kataba* 'write' remains transitive in form III (*kātaba* 'write to each other'), the object position now being occupied by one of the reciprocal participants.

- (8) *fa qad kān-a j-užālis-u ašdiqā-'a-hu*
 and already be.PST-3SG.M 3SG.M-sit.III-PRS.IND friend.PL-ACC-3SG.M
min as-sijjāsij:-īna. [Al-Hayat 1996]
 from DEF-politician-GEN.PL
 'And he had sat with his friends, politicians.'

- (9) *Lays-a al-žinirāl-u man y-ukātib-u-hu.*
 not.be.PST-3SG.M DEF-general-NOM who 3SG.M-write-PRS.IND-3SG.M
 'It was not the general who changed letters with him.' [Al-Hayat 1996]

See Arkhipov (2009) for possible patterns of marking arguments of the comitative construction and Nedjalkov & Geniušienė (2007) for reciprocals. We can say that cross-linguistically, the comitative participant (= the person or entity that participates in the situation together with another participant) and the second participant of reciprocal situations tend to be marked by a non-accusative case, for instance, instrumental, dative etc., in grammatically-marked reciprocal and comitative constructions.

- (10) a. *Ivan pocelova-l-Ø Daš-u.*
 Ivan.NOM.SG kiss(PF)-PST-SG.M Dasha-ACC.SG
 'Ivan kissed Dasha.'
- b. *Ivan i Daš-a pocelova-l-i-s'.*
 Ivan.NOM.SG and Dasha-NOM.SG kiss(PF)-PST-PL-REFL
 'Ivan and Dasha kissed each other.'

The Arabic situation can be accounted for if the uses of form III in (8) and (9) are regarded as instances of applicative. Peterson (2007) shows that among the uses of applicative markers in the world's languages there is a comitative use too. Reciprocal constructions are not usually regarded as a type of applicatives, yet, this can be done for transitive verbs like *kātaba*.

At the same time, form III has some less predictable uses. For instance, this pattern is used to form denominal verbs. These cases demonstrate significant variance in their transitivity features. For instance, *sāfara* 'travel' is intransitive:

- (11) *Sāfar-tu ilā al-qāhira-t-i fa istaqbal-a-nī ṣadiq-ī.*
 travel.PST-1SG to DEF-Cairo-GEN and meet-3SG.M-1SG friend-1SG
 'I went to Cairo, and my friend met me there.' [Al-Hayat 1996]

It may be the case that many intransitive verbs of form III are derived from nouns, and not from verbs, and denote a property or an event related to this noun (*verbes qualitatifs* or *dénommatifs* in terms of Blachère & Gaudefroy-Demombynes 1952: 56, 59). Perhaps their intransitivity results from the fact that the relations between the verb and the base noun demonstrate cross-linguistically a high degree of variation and are not necessary reducible to well-described notions like 'applicative', 'causative', and so on. The meaning of the verb derived from the noun is to a high degree influenced by the meaning of the noun, and not by syntactic restrictions.

4. Lability in form III

In this section, I consider some labile verbs attested in form III. They mainly belong to the group of 'symmetrical situations',³ or inherent reciprocals in terms of Kemmer (1991). However, a more precise definition is necessary since symmetrical situations like 'kiss' are not designated by labile verbs in Arabic. It seems more plausible that the group of labile verbs in form III denotes symmetrical **states**: it mainly includes verbs like 'be equal', 'be / become close', 'reconcile', where the verb denotes a state or a starting point of the state, and the state of the participant A with respect to B is indistinguishable from the state of B with respect to A. Some verbs like *ṣālaḥa* 'reconcile' are dynamic, but they share with symmetrical states the feature of indistinguishability of the two sub-situations: if A reconciled with B, it is automatically true that B reconciled with A. In contrast, situations like 'kiss' or

3. By this term, I mean those situations which have two or several participants which take part in the situation in the same way. For instance, the situation 'buy' is not symmetrical, because the role of buyer differs from the role of seller. The situation 'be equal' is symmetrical, because the two entities which are equal has the same semantic role in the situation.

'hug' are purely dynamic and do not contain any state component in their meaning. Moreover, A's actions towards B are distinguishable from B's actions towards A (it is possible that B did not kiss A, even if A kissed B).

The peculiarity of the group of form III labile verbs is that many of them have more than two syntactic patterns. Both their causative and non-causative use can be either transitive or intransitive.

This fact comes in sharp contrast with the definition of (anticausative) labile verbs which almost always presuppose a transitive causative and an intransitive non-causative use. In many languages, cases of the Arabic type are rare, though, as I have shown above (see Examples (7a) and (7b)), they are definitely not unique cross-linguistically.

As I will demonstrate below, verbs in the group under analysis differ from each other by the range and frequency of syntactic patterns. For example, *sāwā* 'be equal, make equal' is mainly used in the two non-canonical patterns: the transitive non-causative and the intransitive causative ones. *Fāraqa* 'go away, leave; divide' is primarily found in the non-canonical transitive non-causative use and sometimes in the intransitive causative use. Finally, *qāraba* 'make / get closer' has all the four theoretically possible patterns: the transitive and intransitive causative constructions and the transitive and intransitive non-causative constructions.

4.1 *sāwā*

The verb *sāwā* 'be equal; make equal' is mainly used in two patterns, both of which are non-canonical in the terms used above (see 2.3). The first is a causative intransitive pattern, as in (12) (the object is not in the accusative case, but is introduced by the preposition *bayna* 'between');⁴ the second is a non-causative transitive pattern, as in (13).

- (12) *al-qānūn-u y-usāw-i bayna al-ḡamī'-i.*
 DEF-law-NOM 3SG.M-make.equal-PRS.IND between DEF-all-GEN
 'The law makes everyone equal.' [Al-Hayat 1996]

4. An important question, posed by the anonymous reviewer, concerns the degree of obligatoriness of *bayna* 'between' in examples like (12). I do not possess any information for a wide lexical sample, yet, it seems that for some verbs in some examples, *bayna* is obligatory. For instance, no example parallel to (12) and lacking *bayna* is found in the corpus. Another reviewer's remark has to do with stylistic attribution of *bayna* in the 'symmetrical' use. It seems that the occurrence of *bayna*-construction in newspapers of various regions prevent us from classifying this use as purely colloquial, though no analysis of its occurrence in fiction and other types of texts has been carried out.

- (13) *fī-mā kār-a ad-dīnār-u fī ām-i 1990*
 in-what be.PST-3SG.M DEF-dinar-NOM in year-GEN 1990
y-usāw-i akṭar-a min talāt-at-i dūlār-āt-in.
 3SG.M-be.equal-PRS.IND more-ACC from three-F-GEN dollar-PL-GEN
 ‘Based on the situation in 1990, dinar (was) equal to more than three dollars.’
 [Al-Hayat 1996]

Note that no examples of the intransitive non-causative pattern, for instance, with the preposition *li* ‘to, for’ or *ma’a* ‘with’ are found in any newspaper.⁵

The transitive causative pattern is attested in newspapers, but only once and in a context that seems semantically obscure:

- (14) *tumma iktašaf-nā ’anna lawn-a wujūh-i-nā abyad-u*
 afterwards find.out-1PL that color-ACC face.PL-GEN-1PL white.M-NOM
min ’an y-usāw-i-nā bi as-su’ā d-i as-sā’id-i.
 from to 3SG.M-make.equal-PRS. IND-1PL with p.n.
 ‘Then we found out that the color of our faces is white, too white to make us equal to Suad Said (?).’
 [Al-Ahram 1999]

This means that the parameters of transitivity and causativity interact in a peculiar way in the uses of the verb *sāwā*, as well as other verbs analyzed below.

As early as in (1980), Hopper and Thompson published a famous article where they propose that syntactic (in)transitivity of verbs interacts directly with their semantics. Among the semantic parameters which are taken to be related to transitivity is the agentivity of the subject participant, the patientivity of the object, and the number of participants. All of these parameters predict that the causative variant of the situation ‘make equal’ must be more transitive than the non-causative variant ‘be equal’: the former is (or at least can be) dynamic, its subject is Causer, though not obligatorily agent, while the latter is usually a static event, and its subject is Patient or Theme, as well as the object.

The reason of non-standard behavior of the Arabic verb *sāwā* can be that the transitive verb has two symmetrical objects, cf. ‘X makes Y equal to Z / X makes Y and Z equal’, where Y and Z are symmetrical. The existence of the pattern with *bayna* allows a native speaker to express the symmetry in a direct way: ‘X makes equal between Y and Z’, ‘X makes the relation between Y and Z symmetrical.’

5. Transitive patterns were searched in the following way: in the beginning, the first 100 examples of each verb were analyzed, second, all examples with short object pronouns (e.g. *yusāwi-hi* ‘it is equal to it’) were analyzed separately.

4.2 *mātala*

For the verb *mātala* 'make / consider similar; be similar', the situation is a bit different. The intransitive causative pattern with *bayna* 'between' is much less widespread than with *sāwā*. For instance, it occurs only twice in the whole ArabiCorpus (both examples are from the Al-Hayat newspaper), cf. (15) and (16):

- (15) *al-'unwān-u alladī y-umāṭil-u bayna*
 DEF-name-NOM which.SG.M 3SG.M-equalize-PRS.IND between
ibn-i khalḍūn-i wa al-ḡābirī. [Al-Hayat 1997]
 son-GEN Khaldun-GEN and DEF-Jabiri
 'The name which equalizes Ibn-Khaldun and Al-Jabiri.'
- (16) *y-umāṭil-u bayna ra'y-i al-fawṭi wa*
 3SG.M-make.similar-PRS.IND between view-GEN DEF-Fawti.GEN and
ra'y-i baṣar ibn-i mu'tamar [Al-Hayat 1996]
 view-GEN Bashar son-GEN Mutamar
 'He considers Al-Fawti's and Bashar Ibn Mutamar's views similar.'

In general, the causative use of the verb is rare, both with *bayna* and with a direct object (the latter almost never occurs in texts). Furthermore, my search in the first examples of this verb did not show any example of the transitive causative pattern.

In contrast, *mātala* is often used with the transitive pattern in the non-causative reading. For this verb, the prevalence of the 'non-canonical' pattern (syntactically transitive but semantically non-causative) is evident.

- (17) *al-irḍa'-u aṣ-ṣina'iyy-u lā y-umkin-u*
 DEF-nursing-NOM DEF-artificial-NOM not 3SG.M-be.possible-PRS.IND
'an y-umāṭil-u aṭ-ṭabī'iyy-a [Thawra]
 to 3SG.M-be.similar-PRS.IND DEF-natural-ACC
 'The artificial nursing cannot be similar to the natural one.'

4.3 *ṣālaḥa*

The verb *ṣālaḥa* 'reconcile; become reconciled' usually occurs in the two non-canonical patterns: either in the causative intransitive pattern, with the preposition *bayna* 'between' (18), or in the non-causative transitive pattern (19).

- (18) *al-muḡtamaʿ-u al-madaniyy-u alladī y-uṣālīh-u*
 DEF-society-NOM DEF-citizen-NOM which.M.SG 3SG.M-reconcile-PRS.IND
bayna ad-dīn-i wa al-ʿilm-i wa al-māl-i.
 between DEF-religion-GEN and DEF-science-GEN and DEF-money-GEN
 ‘Civil society that reconciles the religion, the science and the money with each other.’ [Al-Hayat 1997]
- (19) *hadā al-mutaqqaf-u y-ukhaṭim-u as-sulṭat-a*
 this.SG.M DEF-intellectual-NOM 3SG.M-conflict-PRS.IND DEF-power-ACC
fī aṣ-ṣabāh-i wa y-uṣālīh-u-hā fī
 in DEF-morning-GEN and 3SG.M-reconcile-PRS.IND-3SG.F in
al-masāʾ-i. [Al-Hayat 1996]
 DEF-evening-GEN
 ‘This intellectual conflicts with the power in the morning and becomes reconciled with it in the evening (i.e. changes his political views very often).’

The transitive causative pattern also occurs, as in (20), though only in two examples in the entire corpus. The intransitive non-causative pattern (21) is attested only once and only from an older text.

- (20) *ʾanti allatī ṣālah-at-nī maʾa allah-i.* [Remembrance]
 you.SG.F which.SG.F reconcile-3SG.F-1SG with God-GEN
 ‘It was you who reconciled me with God.’
- (21) *laʾalla-nā n-uṣālīh-Ø ʾalā šayʾ-in.* [Aghani]
 PART-1PL 1PL-reconcile-SUBJ on thing-GEN
 ‘Let’s reconcile (= come to one opinion) with respect to some questions.’

4.4 *fāraqa*

The verb *fāraqa* ‘divide; leave’ is mainly found in the corpus in one non-canonical pattern, specifically the transitive non-causative (22). The intransitive causative use (with the preposition *bayna* ‘between’) is found only once, as in (23), while the other two patterns are not found at all.

- (22) *Wa ad-du'ā'-u y-ufāriq-u-hum Wa hādā*
 and DEF-prayer-NOM 3SG.M-leave-PRS.IND-3PL.M and this.SG.M
an-naṣr-u li al-muqa:wamat-i. [Thawra]⁶
 DEF-victory-NOM for DEF-opposition-GEN
 'And the prayer leaves them, and this is the victory for the opposition.'
- (23) *Wa hādā mā y-ufāriq-u bayna al-'imān-i*
 and this.SG.M what 3SG.M-divide-PRS.IND between DEF-belief-GEN
ad-dīniyy-i Wa al-'imān-i al-buṭūliyy-i. [Al-Hayat 1996]
 DEF-religious-GEN and DEF-belief-GEN DEF-heroic-GEN
 'This is what distinguishes religious belief from heroic belief.'

The meaning of the verb in the causative and the non-causative patterns is not identical. The causative meaning is 'distinguish', while the non-causative sense is 'leave'. This semantic variant does not have a causative correlate, such as 'divide (the people), make smb. leave smb.'

4.5 *qāraba*

The verb *qāraba* 'make / get closer' behaves like the majority of the verbs analyzed here in that it has an intransitive causative use, as in (24)–(25), and a transitive non-causative use, as in (26).

- (24) *Wa inna li-ītāliya ayḍan waḡh-an' ūrūbiyy-an šarqiyy-an aw*
 and PART to-Italy also face-ACC european-ACC oriental-ACC or
mā y-uqārib-u bayna-hā. [Al-Hayat 1996]
 what 3SG.M-make.close-PRS.IND between-3SG.F
 'In fact, Italy also has a mixed face (european and oriental) or something which combines the two of them.'
- (25) *Wa y-uqārib-u bayna mu'āmalat-i-ha hunā Wa*
 and 3SG.M-make. close-PRS.IND process-GEN-3SG.F here and
al-mu'āmalat-i allatī kāna-t al-ḥālat-a aṣ-ṣiḥḥiyy-at-a.
 DEF-process-GEN which.SG.F be-3SG.F DEF-case-ACC DEF-true-F-ACC
 'And he compares (lit. makes close) the process (which took place) here and the process which takes place in the correct case.' [Ghad 2001]

6. Example (22) can also be understood as 'The prayer divides them, makes them different'. However, this does not change the general tendency that the transitive use of *fāraqa* is non-causative. Note, however, that more examples for the pattern with *bayna* 'between' can be found on Google.

- (26) ...*fī bank-i ar-riyāD-i alladī y-uqārib-u-hu fī*
 in bank-GEN Riyadh-GEN which.SG.M 3SG.M-be.close-PRS.IND in
ar-ra'asmāl-i [Al-Hayat 1997]
 DEF-capital-GEN
 '... In the Riyadh bank which has a similar capital'

However, this lexeme shows more variation than the verbs previously analyzed: it evidences both an intransitive non-causative use illustrated in (27) and a transitive causative use, cf. (28):

- (27) ...*mā y-uqārib-u min 300 milyūn-i dīnār-in*
 what 3SG.M-be.close-PRS.IND from 300 million-GEN dinar-GEN
kuwaytiyy-in. [Al-Ahram 1999]
 Kuwait.ADJ-GEN
 '... what is close to 300 million Kuwait dinars.'
- (28) *Wa lā y-uqārib-u-hā min munṭalaq-in 'anna-hā*
 and not 3SG.M-make.close-PRS.IND- 3SG.F from start-GEN that-3SG.F
al-furṣat-u al-akhirat-u [Ghad 2001]
 DEF-chance-NOM DEF-last-NOM
 'And the fact that it is the last chance does not make her closer to the starting point.'

Note that the last two patterns are also found with two other verbs of the same root: the latter (transitive causative) is absolutely equivalent to the one exhibited by *qarraba* of form II, while the former (intransitive non-causative) is often found with *taqarraba* in form V or *iqtaraba* in form VIII. Moreover, the existence of these two forms which are unambiguously transitive and intransitive, respectively, can result in contamination of the transitive causative and intransitive non-causative uses in the verb of form III.

4.6 *tābaqa*

The verb *tābaqa* means 'be adequate, be compatible, equalize, compare'. It is found in the non-canonical causative use (with the preposition *bayna*), as in (29) and the non-canonical non-causative use, as in (30). Note that the non-causative use is much more frequent than the causative one.

- (29) ...*alladī y-uṭābiq-u bayna ad-dawlat-i wa*
 which.SG.M 3SG.M-make.equal-PRS.IND between DEF-state-GEN and
al-ummat-i. [Al-Hayat 1997]
 DEF-community-GEN

‘...Which makes the state and the community compatible with each other.’

- (30) *wa la y-abdū ‘anna hadā al-kalām-a*
 and not 3SG.M-seem.PRS.IND that this.M DEF-speech-ACC
y-uṭābiq-u al-wāqi‘-a. [Al-Hayat 1996]
 3SG.M-be.equal-PRS.IND DEF-fact-ACC

‘It does not seem that this claim reflects the reality.’

The canonical non-causative use does not occur. The canonical causative use is rarely found, though there are some uses with the preposition *ma’a* ‘with’.⁷

4.7 *wāzana*

The verb *wāzana* ‘compare, consider equal; be equal, weigh equally’ is almost exclusively found in one syntactic pattern: namely, the causative intransitive use with *bayna*, illustrated by Example (31). The non-causative transitive use is rarely found (32), while the causative transitive and the non-causative intransitive uses are each found in only one example in the corpus.

- (31) *y-uwāzin-u bayna hāž-āt-i-hi wa hāž-āt-i*
 3SG.M-compare-PRS.IND between need-PL-GEN-3SG.M and need-PL-GEN
al-ākhar-īna. [Al-Hayat 1996]
 DEF-other-GEN

‘He compares (makes equal) his needs and other’s needs.’

- (32) *lā y-atašādam-u ma’a-hu bal y-uwāzin-u-hu*
 not 3SG.M-confront-PRS.IND with-3SG.M but 3SG.M-be.equal-PRS.IND-3SG.M
 ‘He does not confront it, but balances it.’

7. The canonical causative use with the preposition *bi* ‘with’ is rather frequent. However, these uses with this preposition are left beyond the scope of the article, since some linguists regard this preposition as an analytical marker of causative, based on examples like *jā’a* ‘come’ vs. *jā’a bi* ‘bring’ (see, for instance, Khrakovkij 2011).

4.8 Intransitive structures with *bayna*: What is the functional motivation?

In the linguistic evidence presented above the pattern with *bayna* 'between' constitutes the most striking part of the data. While a non-causative verb can be transitive or intransitive (both variants are found across languages, and their distribution depends crucially on verbal semantics and the nature of arguments, see Næss (2007) for detailed analysis), causative verbs typologically tend to be transitive.

However, this behavior agrees well with the generalizations drawn by Hopper and Thompson (1980) and Tsunoda (1985). Note that the prototypical transitive situation which is served by transitive verbs in the world's languages is a bivalent situation. The trivalent situation is always subject to complicated processes which result from concurrence between the two objects for the status of the direct object.

Recall, for instance, that among the languages of the world there are both those in which the addressee / recipient of the trivalent verb behaves as a privileged object (= primary object construction) and those where the patient / theme is more likely to be the highest object (= direct object construction), see Malchukov et al. (eds) 2010 for details.

With trivalent causative verbs of symmetrical relations, just as *sāwā*, *mātala* and others discussed throughout this paper, the situation is even more complicated. Not only is there a choice between two object arguments pretending to be a privileged object, but also their semantic properties are completely identical. If the agent / causer A makes B and C symmetrical to each other (e.g., makes them equal or close to each other), there is no way to prove that either B or C is semantically a more canonical direct object.

If we formulate the situation using the mechanism of competing motivations, proposed in the framework of the Optimality Theory, the *bayna*-pattern, which is observed in (12) and (15), and the canonical transitive causative pattern represented, for instance, in (14) and (28), each observe one constraint but violate the other. The constraints are:

1. 'follow the prototypical causative pattern' (i.e., a causative verb must be transitive);
2. 'mark the arguments accordingly to their semantic properties' (i.e., arguments with identical semantic properties must be identically marked).

The canonical transitive pattern follows constraint 1 because transitive behavior is normal for causative verbs. However, it violates constraint 2 because, of the two identical arguments, one becomes a direct object, and another one is designated by a PP. In contrast, the *bayna*-pattern does not follow the causative prototype (constraint 1), but marks the identical arguments by identical means (constraint 2).

Note that in some languages, *bayna*-like patterns are prohibited for verbs. For instance, in Russian, a *bayna*-like preposition *meždu* 'between' can only introduce symmetrical arguments of nouns, but not of transitive verbs:

- (33) *Dal'tonik-i ne različaj-ut sin-ij i*
 daltonics-PL.NOM not distinguish-PRS.3PL blue-M.SG.ACC and
*krasn-yj. / *meždu sin-im i krasn-ym.*
 red-M.SG.ACC between blue-M.SG.INS and red-M.SG.INS
 'Daltonics do not distinguish blue and read.'
- (34) *Meždu et-imi cvet-ami jest' raznič-a.*
 between this-PL.INS color-PL.INS be.PRS.3SG difference-SG.NOM
 'There is a difference between these colors.'

Languages like Russian rank the causative pattern constraint higher than the identical marking constraint. In such languages, in general, one of the two objects of trivalent verbs is usually marked as a direct object, even when neither of them is a prototypical patient.

4.9 Variation in form III: Summary

To sum up, in the previous sections I showed that some Arabic verbs like 'be equal' and 'be close' of form III show syntactic and semantic variation. All these verbs belong to the class of symmetrical states, in which the state of the participant A is indistinguishable from the state or actions of another participant, B. In other words, not only are the situations denoted by the verbs under analysis always or typically symmetrical, but also they belong (at least in some uses) to the state class (cf. 'be equal', a situation which presupposes no dynamic changes).

There are two features which distinguish the Arabic lexemes analyzed in Sections 4.1 through 4.7 from canonical labile verbs. First, the non-causative uses of the verbs under analysis do not denote canonical 'spontaneous events' as defined by Haspelmath (1993). Haspelmath (1993) mainly analyzes verbs denoting dynamic events, while the Arabic lexemes under analysis mainly denote states (in other words, both semantics like 'be equal' (state) or 'become equal' (event) are available, e.g., for the verb *sāwā* 'be / make equal').

Second, while Nedjalkov (1969), Haspelmath (1993), and Comrie (2006) consider the semantic parameter of spontaneity and the syntactic parameter of transitivity to be correlated, this is not the case with the lexemes considered above. It has been demonstrated that the verbs under analysis can have both transitive non-causative and intransitive causative uses. In Table 1, the uses of these verbs are summarized. The labels for the uses are CT (causative transitive), CI (causative

intransitive, with the preposition *bayna* ‘between’), NT (non-causative transitive) and NI (non-causative intransitive). Most data are taken from the corpus, of course some of uses which have not been found in the corpus can easily be found on the Internet. +? is used if the given use is found only once or twice in the corpus.

Table 1. Uses of form III verbs showing syntactic and semantic variation

verb	CT	CI	NT	NI
<i>sāwā</i>	+?	+	+	
<i>māṭala</i>		+	+	
<i>ṣālaha</i>	+?	+	+	+?
<i>ṭābaqa</i>	+–	+	+	
<i>qāraba</i>	+	+	+	+
<i>bā’ada</i>	+	+		+
<i>wāzana</i>	+?/–	+	+	+?

Note that the uses which demonstrate non-standard correlation of syntactic features with the meaning of the verb (transitive non-causative, intransitive causative) are the ones which are found with the greatest number of verbs.

Before going further, a remark should be made here on the semantic relation between verbs of form III and their base verbs of form I. It cannot be claimed that the third form uniformly changes the syntactic properties of the base form I verb. The semantic correspondence between form III of these verbs and their base verbs in form I varies significantly even across the small group under analysis, as Table 2 shows.⁸

Thus, it should be concluded that, independently of the starting point of the derivation (form I verb), when we get to the final point (form III verb), the verb can acquire lability. I propose that this fact results from the semantics of form III. In the meaning of form III, the component of symmetricity (symmetrical situation) is profiled. All other components, including (non)-spontaneity of the situation, are backgrounded. (Recall that the feature of syntactic indefiniteness characterizes the Arabic system: most verb forms contain both transitive and intransitive verbs.) This is why the resulting verb of form III can have either causative or non-causative meaning.

This is reminiscent of the language phenomena which Bybee (1995) calls ‘product-oriented schemas’, the main difference being that Bybee employs this notion for morphological and phonological processes rather than for syntax and

8. At the same time, the semantic correspondence between other groups of form III verbs with their base verbs is much more regular: for instance, there is a semantically homogenous group of comitative applicatives (cf. Example (8)).

Table 2. Semantic correspondence of form III verbs with base form I verbs

verb	meaning	verb of form I	meaning
<i>sāwā</i>	'make / consider / be equal'	<i>sawiya</i>	'cost'; 'be equal'
<i>māṭala</i>	'make / consider/ be similar'	<i>maṭala</i>	'appear, become, be similar to, sculpture, disfigure (with the preposition <i>bi</i>)'
<i>ṣālaḥa</i>	'reconcile / be reconciled'	<i>ṣalaḥa</i> or <i>ṣaluḥa</i>	'be good, religious'; 'be plausible for smth.'
<i>ṭābaqa</i>	'be equal / equalize'	no verb of form I	
<i>qāraba</i>	'make / be close'	<i>qaruba</i>	'be close'
<i>bā'ada</i>	'make / be farther'	<i>ba'uda</i>	'be far away'; 'be incredible'
<i>wāzana</i>	'compare, make / consider equal; be equal, weigh equally'	<i>wazana</i>	'weigh (transitive causative)'
		<i>wazuna</i>	'be serious; weigh a lot'

semantics. Bybee means that some morphological processes yield the same result (for instance the same morpho(phono)logical type of the word or the syllable), independently of the starting point (the base word or the syllable). This is what takes place in Arabic, though with a rather small class of symmetrical situations. These verbs become labile in form III independently of the syntactic features of the base verb.

Another possible solution is the following: it can be claimed that the majority of the base verbs are intransitive, and that the derivation of form III adds a causative component, for instance, 'make equal' to the initial use. However, this analysis is not unproblematic, because the main semantic component which distinguishes form III of the verbs under analysis from form I is the symmetry of the event and not the causative meaning.

Finally, there is an explanation lying in the derivation domain. We could say that the group of verbs under analysis is derived from adjectives or nouns (see Blachère & Gaudefroys-Demombynes (1952: 56, 59, etc.), where a special class of denominal / deadjectival verbs is considered). As stated above, deadjectival verbs often show lability because both patterns are derived from non-verbal stems, and the transitivity feature is neutralized. In principle, all verbs discussed in Section III have some parallel adjectival formations (e.g., *sawā'un* 'equal' for *sāwā* 'be, make equal'; *ṣāliḥun* 'good' for *ṣālaḥa* 'reconcile, become reconciled'). Letuchiy (2013) shows that in many languages, deadjectival verbs tend to be labile. However, the very claim of deadjectival origin of the verbs under analysis is hard to verify. First, Arabic deadjectival verbs contain no specialized markers of derivation, distinguishing them from other types of verbs. Second, the deadjectival origin of verbs like

‘be equal’ or ‘be close’ is not as clear semantically as, for instance, in the case of ‘consider fool’ or ‘make black’.

5. Labile verbs of other forms

Lability is not restricted to the form III in Arabic. However, in other patterns it seems to occur only sporadically and is not a systemic phenomenon. The two common features of the form III group, analyzed above, and other groups of labile verbs, is that (i) there are no labile verbs with a strong semantic transitivity, such as ‘verbs of killing’ or ‘verbs of breaking’ in terms of Levin (1993); and (ii) most of these verbs are derived, though some exceptions exist.

For instance, in form I, the verb *bada’a* ‘begin’ is labile. Note that alongside the monovalent intransitive and the bivalent transitive patterns, it can also form a bivalent intransitive structure where the second argument is introduced by the preposition *bi* (see Saad 1982 on this type of causatives). None of the three patterns are marked as dialectal, and all of them occur in newspapers. However, the precise distribution of the transitive and intransitive bivalent patterns remains unclear. Consider the following examples:

- (35) *y-abda’-u* *ar-ra’īs-u* *al-miṣriyy-u* *ḥusnī*
 3SG.M-begin-PRS.IND DEF-president-NOM DEF-egyptian-NOM P.N.
mubārakun ziyārat-an ilā wāṣintūn. [Al-Hayat 1997]
 P.N. visit-ACC to Washington
 ‘The president of Egypt Husni Mubarak begins his visit to Washington.’
- (36) *y-abda’-u* *al-kitāb-u* *bi* *‘arḍ-in* *‘āmm-in.*
 3SG.M-BEGIN-PRS.IND DEF-book-NOM with presentation-GEN general-GEN
 ‘The book begins with a general presentation.’ [Al-Hayat 1997]
- (37) *li* *n-abda’-Ø* *bi* *mawḍū’-i ṣudūr-i* *al-qarār-āt-i.*
 let’s 1PL-begin-SUBJ with topic-GEN publishing-GEN DEF-decision-PL-GEN
 ‘Let’s begin (to discuss) the topic of taking decisions.’ [Al-Hayat 1997]

In form V, the verb *tabayyana* ‘become clear; make clear, explain’ is labile. In the intransitive use the Content which becomes clear occupies the subject position (38), however, in the transitive use the same participant is an object, the subject position being reserved for an animate Agent (or Experiencer) (39):

- (38) *tabayyan-a* *'anna hunāka qiwā* *musta'idd-at-u li*
 become.clear-3SG.M that there power.PL ready-F-NOM for
al-wuṭūb-i. [Al-Ahram 1999]
 DEF-rise-GEN
 'It became clear that there are powers which are ready for the rise.'
- (39) *fa qad tabayyan-ū-hu* *min ṣudūr-i aṣ-ṣaḥīfat-i.*
 and already find.out-3PL.M-3SG.M from issue.PL-GEN DEF-newspaper-GEN
 'They found it out from issues of the newspaper.' [Al-Ahram 1999]

Some verbs have both transitive and intransitive uses, but differ from canonically labile verbs in that the two uses are semantically distinct from each other – in other words, it is not only the causative meaning that distinguishes the transitive use from the intransitive one. This phenomenon has been discussed by Daniel et al. (2012) for Daghestanian languages. In Arabic, this may be seen, for instance, in *tadāwala* 'discuss, use; be in use'. While the intransitive use can be employed both with names of money units which are in use in the particular territory, and with topics people discuss, the transitive use, on the other hand, is found primarily with the meaning 'discuss'. Of course, these two meanings are historically related: if someone discusses a topic, (s)he in a sense uses it, and this topic is transferred from one person to another in the same sense as money makes its way from one person to another.

- (40) *Wa tadāwal-at* *wasā'il-u* *al-'i'lān-i* *'ism-a*
 and discuss-3SG.F means.PL-NOM DEF-information-GEN name-ACC
'abd-i al-maḥīd-i al-kāriḥ-i. [Tajdid 2002]
 p.n.
 'And the press discusses the name of Abdu-l-Madzhid-al-Karih.'
- (41) *Wa khilāla* *al-ḡalasāt-i* *tadāwal-at* *fī-hā* *'awrāq-un*
 and in.course.of DEF-session-GEN discuss-3SG.F in-3SG.F sheet.PL-NOM
fiḍḍiyy-at-un. [Al-Ahram 1999]
 silver-F-NOM
 'And in the course of the discussions there were discussed / used 'silver securities.'

As I mentioned earlier, the lability of these verbs does not have a systemic character which is at least partially observed in the verbs of symmetrical events in form III. This is why they are not considered here in detail (see Letuchiy 2013: 302–339 for details).

6. Lability of derived verbs: Some parallels in other languages

Throughout this article, I have emphasized that derived verbs of form III are more plausible candidates for being labile in Arabic than base verbs of form I. Although this fact might be incidental, taking into account the small number of labile verbs in Arabic, I consider it to be the result of a feature of the Arabic verbal system which was termed here 'syntactic indefiniteness.' I argued that most verb forms can derive both transitive and intransitive verbs.

For instance, form III can be either transitive or intransitive. What is central for the behavior of the derived form is the semantic component of symmetry. In contrast, the presence or absence of the causative component is peripheral. This results in the fact that form III verbs can be either causative or non-causative.

The same is applicable to some other labile verbs. For instance, form V can either denote anticausative (in this reading it derives intransitive verbs) or middle (reflexive benefactive) which yields transitive verbs. The verb *tabayyana* combines the two readings: it is both an anticausative of *bayyana* 'find out, explain' (this results in its intransitive meaning) and a reflexive benefactive of the same verb (this is why the same lexeme has a transitive meaning 'find out, explain to oneself').

Though the syntactic indefiniteness is not characteristic of European languages, the tendency observed in Arabic is reflected in Europe. In many European languages, there are derivational patterns which often yield labile verbs. Here belongs, for instance, the pattern observed in French, where some verbs of the *ir*-type are derived from adjectives:

- (42) French (work with native speakers):
noir 'black' – *noircir* 'become / make black';
blanc 'white' – *blanchir* 'become / make white'

The German pattern of deriving verbs from adjectives and nouns by means of the prefix *ver-* also yields some labile verbs:

German (work with native speakers):

- (43) *verkohlen* 'become coal, be carbonized; carbonize.'

Kehayov (in press) confirms the same tendency for Estonian where derived verbs manifest lability more often than base verbs.

7. Conclusions

In the present paper, I focused on a special group of Arabic labile verbs, namely, verbs of form III. This group is semantically coherent: the verbs under analysis denote symmetrical states such as 'be close' or 'be equal', although some of them also have dynamic uses. Conceptually, the states or actions of the symmetrical participants are logically indistinguishable. I have demonstrated that not only does Arabic have some labile verbs, but also that there are also some peculiar cases which conflict with the traditional notion of lability. The verbs under analysis have a causative and a non-causative use, but each of them can be either transitive or intransitive. Traditionally, labile verbs are taken to have a transitive causative and an intransitive non-causative use.

I argued that the reason for this peculiarity in form III is found in the semantic component of symmetry (symmetrical action) introduced in course of the derivation of form III from form I is profiled, while other components, including (non-) causativity are not profiled (see Levin 1993; Levin, Rappaport Hovav 1993 where the authors show that not only the nature of semantic components themselves, but also their relative importance, plays a role in the syntactic behavior of the verb). This is why verbs of this pattern can be both non-causative (stative), as, for instance, *sāwā* 'be equal', and causative, as *sāwā* 'make equal, consider equal.'

As mentioned above, a derivational explanation of lability of the form III verbs under analysis is possible, but not the most reliable. It is possible to claim that the group of verbs under analysis is derived from adjectives: as said above, deadjectival verbs often show lability, because both patterns are derived from non-verbal stems, and the transitivity feature is neutralized. However Arabic deadjectival verbs contain no special markers, and we cannot prove that the verbs of our group are really formed from adjectives.

Arabic labile verbs are not only typologically peculiar syntactically, but also show non-standard syntactic properties. The meaning of Arabic labile lexemes does not have much in common with semantics of labile verbs in other languages. I am aware of no other language where symmetrical actions are a nuclear group of labile verbs. Moreover, everyone tends to observe labile verbs which denote dynamic events in both uses (cf. Haspelmath 1993; Letuchiy 2006). Of course, there are exceptions: for instance, in Latin some labile verbs can denote states in their intransitive uses: cf. *variare* 'make different, in a different way; vary, be different.'

Another conclusion I have reached is that the properties of general derivational pattern are not reflected in the properties of the concrete lexemes in any trivial way. Recall that in Arabic we deal with the property of syntactic indefiniteness of morphosyntactic processes: most morphosyntactic derivational processes can either yield transitive or intransitive verbs. This, however, is not reflected trivially

in individual verbs. Otherwise we would expect to observe a large class of labile verbs in Arabic.

Let us now answer the crucial question contained in the name of the article: are Arabic form III verbs under analysis labile? The answer is yes, but in this case, semantic and syntactic lability must be distinguished. Semantically, all verbs under analysis are labile, because they have both a causative and a non-causative (conceptualized as spontaneous) use. Syntactically, they are also labile, but their variation is non-canonical: the causative use is very often intransitive, while the non-causative one is mostly intransitive.

Acknowledgements

I am thankful to Nina Sumbatova and Vladimir Plungian, who were my advisors in different periods of time, for their remarks and notes. I also want to thank the native speakers of Arabic (Ammal Hannan, Muhammad Al-Matni, Georgi Vasiliev) who were the most important participants of this work. Finally, I have a pleasure to thank the organizers and the audience of the Workshop on Verb Valency for the chance to present the work in very friendly and working atmosphere.

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doi:10.1017/S0022226700010318

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