DICTIONARIES AS A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF ERROR FOR ARAB EFL LEARNERS: EVIDENCE FROM VERB ARGUMENT STRUCTURES

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1. Introductory

This paper is particularly concerned with how useful monolingual English dictionaries and bilingual English-Arabic dictionaries are for Jordanian/Arab learners of English as a foreign language in the area of verb argument structures. The argument structure of a verb shows which of its arguments "... must be expressed, which can be optionally expressed and how the expressed arguments are encoded grammatically-that is, as subjects, objects, or oblique objects" (Pinker 1989: 4).

A major property of verbs is that they are "... choosy; not all verbs can appear in all sentences, even when the combinations make perfect sense" (Pinker 1989: 3). For instance, *build* can occur in (1a) and (1b) below, whereas its generally cited synonym *construct* can only occur in (2a).

(1) a. *Ali built a grand palace for Salma.*
    b. *Ali built Salma a grand palace.*
(2) a. *Ali constructed a grand palace for Salma.*
    b. **Ali constructed Salma a grand palace.*

Jackson (1985: 59) argues that "... the inclusion of grammatical information in the Dictionary is a contribution to making the language learner an independent learner, to enabling the learner to produce for himself correct and appropriate sentences in the language he is learning." Furthermore, he suggests that a dictionary must provide information about how a certain lexical item fits into the general syntactic patterns of the language. For instance, a dictionary entry of

a certain verb should inform the user whether this verb can or cannot occur in a certain argument structure.

The basic concern of this paper is to investigate how far monolingual and bilingual dictionaries appear to be useful in providing information about the argument structures of two sets of verbs: four datives, viz., *buy, purchase, give, donate*, and four locatives, viz., *pile, accumulate, scatter, disperse*. Verb argument structures are selected for investigation in this research because "... the verb syntax is essentially the syntax of the clause, and it is where there are probably more differences between languages" (Jackson 1991: 180). The main verb of a sentence usually determines the occurrence of its arguments (e.g., subjects, direct objects, indirect objects, benefactive objects and complements). Furthermore, Jackson (1991: 181) suggests that the inclusion of verbs' syntactic restrictions and possibilities in learners' dictionaries may help them judge and/or form acceptable sentences in English.

Current research and experience have shown that EFL learners (regardless of their proficiency level) seem to encounter problems while trying to pair verbs with their respective arguments. Below are illustrative examples of ungrammatical sentences involving the use of dative verbs which were produced or perceived by foreign/second language (L2) learners as grammatical.

(3)   *Ali translated Salma the letter.* (Hamdan 1994: 168)

(4)   *Sam described Joan the film.* (Mazurkewich 1984: 92)

Suppose the learners who made these errors want to correct their errors with the help of available dictionaries. Are they expected to find relevant information on verb subcategorization that forces them to abandon their inaccurate assumptions, i.e., information that tells such learners that *translate* and *describe* do not occur in double-object constructions? The answer to this question will be sought with reference to two sets of verbs: dative and locative and through consultation of a representative sample of monolingual and bilingual dictionaries which are available for advanced Jordanian/Arab learners of English as a foreign language (EFL).

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 below provides a brief description of the research methodology. In section 3, we specify the type of information which an L2 learner needs to know in order to confirm, modify or reject his/her hypotheses about the argument structures of the verbs under investigation. In section 4, we present and discuss the major findings of the study through comparing and contrasting reference information with the actual information provided by the consulted dictionaries. Conclusions and recommendations are presented in section 5.

2. Methodology

The corpus of this study consists of two sets of commonly used verbs, four datives and four locatives. The dative set includes two pairs of verbs often presented in dictionaries and thesauruses as synonyms, namely, *buy* versus *purchase*; *give* versus *donate* The locative set also includes two pairs of synonymous verbs, namely, *pile* versus *accumulate*; *scatter* versus *disperse*.

The selection of the target verbs was based on the researchers' observation that they are often found problematic by EFL learners. In particular, many Arab EFL learners tend to assume that synonymous verbs share the same syntax, which is not always the case. For instance, one can say: "I piled the books on the table" and "I piled the table with books." One can also say "I accumulated the books on the table" but not "I accumulated the table with books". This false assumption is often aggravated by bilingual English-Arabic dictionaries. For instance, *Al-Mawrid*, a widely used English-Arabic dictionary, suggests that both *buy* and *purchase* translate as 'shara' or 'ishtara'. In reality, *buy* and *purchase* subcategorize differently; moreover, *buy* and 'shara/ishtara' do not share the same syntax, whereas *purchase* and 'shara/ishtara' do.

In view of the foregoing, the immediate objective of this study is to examine whether monolingual and bilingual dictionaries provide Arab EFL learners with useful reference information that helps them confirm or negate their assumptions regarding the argument structures of the target verbs. Below is a list of the steps that will be followed to accomplish the stated objective.

1.   The argument structures of the target verbs as specified in relevant sources (Pinker 1989; Radford 1988; Haegman 1991) will be provided as reference information against which information given in each of the selected dictionaries on the target verbs will be evaluated (see section 3 below).

2.   The target verbs will be looked up in a sample of widely circulated monolingual and bilingual dictionaries. Information provided by each dictionary on the argument structure of each verb will be compared and contrasted with the specified reference information, (see section 4 below).

3. Reference information

Below is a summary of reference information relevant to the argument structures of the target verbs against which the information provided by the selected dictionaries on the same verbs (regardless of the adopted coding system) will be evaluated.

3.1. Dative verbs

3.1.1. *Buy* is an alternating verb which can occur in [NP for-NP] and [NP NP] forms, as in:

(5) a.   *John bought a gift for Mary.*
   b.   *John bought Mary a gift.*

Buy primarily translates as 'ishtara/shara'; however, the latter occurs only in [NP PP] frame.

3.1.2. *Purchase* is a nonalternating verb which can occur in the [NP for-NP] structure, as in:

(6)   *John purchased a new car for his assistant.*

Purchase primarily translates as 'ishtara/shara'; both verbs share the same argument structure.

3.1.3. *Give* is an alternating verb which can occur in [NP to-NP] and [NP NP] forms, as in:

(7) a.   *John gave a gift to Mary.*
   b.   *John gave Mary a gift.*

Give primarily translates as 'a^cta'; both verbs share the same argument structures.

3.1.4. *Donate* is a nonalternating verb which can occur in the [NP to-NP] structure, as in:

(8)   *John donated $ 1000 to the church.*

Donate often translates as 'a^cta' or 'wahaba', both of which alternate in Arabic. Sometimes *donate* translates as 'tabarra^ca', which does not alternate in Arabic.

3.2. Locative verbs

3.1.2. *Pile* is an alternating verb that can occur in [NP on/onto-NP] and [NP with-NP] structures, as in:

(9) a.   *John piled the books on the table.*
   b.   *John piled the table with books.*

Pile primarily translates as 'kawwama'; however, the latter occurs only in a structure equivalent to the [NP on-NP] frame in English.

3.2.2. *Accumulate* is a nonalternating verb that can only occur in the [NP on-NP] frame, as in:

(10)   *John accumulated the books on the table.*

Accumulate is generally cited in English-Arabic dictionaries as 'tajamma^ca' or 'taraakama'; both *accumulate* and its Arabic relevant verbs share the same argument structures.

3.2.3. *Scatter* is an alternating verb that can occur in [NP into/onto-PP] and [NP with-NP] frames, as in:

(11) a.   *John scattered the seeds onto the field.*
    b.   *John scattered the field with seeds.*

Scatter primarily translates as 'naθara' or 'shattata', which do not alternate in Arabic. Sometimes *scatter* translates as 'rashsha', or 'baḍara', which do alternate in Arabic.

3.2.4. *Disperse* is a nonalternating verb that can occur in the [NP into/onto-NP] structure, as in:

(12)   *John dispersed the books in the room.*

Disperse primarily translates as 'shattata' or 'farragha', which do not alternate in Arabic.

4. Findings and discussion

Now let us examine the information provided by each of the selected dictionaries with reference to each of the target verbs. First, we will examine this information in monolingual dictionaries then move on to the bilingual ones.

4.1. Monolingual (English - English) dictionaries

4.1.1. *New Webster's dictionary and thesaurus of the English language* (henceforth, *Webster's*)

1. Dative verbs

a) Buy vs. purchase

Webster's does not state neither explicitly nor implicitly that *buy* can occur in [NP for-NP] and [NP NP] constructions. Furthermore, no illustrative examples are provided. The problem is aggravated by the fact that this dictionary suggests

purchase as a synonym of *buy*. At the same time, it does not state that *purchase* can occur in the [NP for-NP] structure, nor does it provide any illustrative example of this construction.

Lack of sufficient information on the argument structures of *buy* and *purchase* as dative verbs may lead some Arab EFL learners to make, at least, two errors. First, they may replace *for* by *to* since both *to* and *for* may translate as 'li' in Arabic.

(13) **John bought a book to Salma.*

Secondly, some may assume that *purchase* and *buy* share the same syntax, and hence accept or produce a sentence like:

(14) **John purchased Mary a car.*

b) Give vs. donate

Webster's does not provide specific and explicit information about the two argument structures of *give* as an alternating dative verb, i.e., [NP to -NP] and [NP NP]. However, *give* has received a more detailed treatment compared with *buy*. In particular, the dictionary cites examples which may help the 'more intelligent' user to conclude that *give* can occur in [NP to-NP] and [NP NP] constructions. Some of these examples are repeated below:

(15) a. *~ give a doll to a child.*
  b. *The law gives citizens the right to vote.*

Webster's suggests that *donate* is synonymous with *give*. This may lead some users to conclude that the two verbs share the same argument structure, which is not the case. While *give* can occur in [NP to-NP] constructions, *donate* subcategorizes for the [NP to-NP] frame only. Hence, a user may produce or accept a sentence like (16) due to insufficient or confusing subcategorization information.

(16) **Ali donated the mosque $1000.*

By way of exemplification, *Webster's* suggests that one can "donate a site for the park", which may motivate some EFL users to think that *for* is the only preposition that collocates with *donate*. This may result in an error, as in (17):

(17) **Ali donated $1000 for the mosque.*

In view of the foregoing, it may be argued that *Webster's* does not help its users, particularly EFL learners, to learn that both *buy* and *give* can occur in [NP PP] and [NP NP] constructions and that the former pairs with the preposition *for* and the latter with *to*. Nor does it show its users that both *purchase* and *donate* cannot occur in [NP NP] sentences. In other words, this dictionary does not contain sufficient information on verb argument structures which helps its users to abandon their incorrect hypotheses.

2. Locative verbs

a) Pile vs. accumulate

Webster's states that *pile* can occur in the [NP on-NP] structure, e.g., "~ piled potatoes on his plate." However, it does not suggest that this verb can also occur in the [NP with-NP] structure, e.g., "~ piled his plate with potatoes." Hence, it does not help the EFL learner form a complete picture of the syntactic structure of this verb. What adds to the problem is that *Webster's* cites *accumulate* as a synonym of *pile*. Further, it does not state that *accumulate* can pair with the [NP onto-NP] frame, as in:

(18) *He accumulated the books on the table.*

On the basis of *Webster's* insufficient information, an EFL learner may think that *pile* cannot occur in the [NP with-NP] form and hence reject or fail to produce a sentence like (19):

(19) *He piled the table with books.*

Even a proficient EFL user of *Webster's* who knows that *pile* alternates between two argument structures may be tempted to assume that *accumulate* shares the same syntax, and thus accept or produce an erroneous sentence like (20):

(20) **He accumulated the table with books.*

b) Scatter vs. disperse

Webster's does not provide any relevant information on the argument structures of these two verbs, nor does it provide any examples illustrating how they can be used. Moreover, it lists the two verbs as synonyms leaving some EFL learners under the false impression that the two verbs share the same syntax. Due to this obvious insufficient information, an EFL learner may accept and produce a sentence like (21):

(21) **He dispersed the field with seeds.*

Moreover, such a learner may not be reinforced to accept and produce sentences like (22):

(22) a.   *He scattered seeds into the field.*
 b.   *He scattered the field with seeds.*

As is clear, *Webster's* fails to meet the needs of EFL learners who are interested in the argument structures of alternating and nonalternating locative verbs.

4.1.2. *Collins cobuild dictionary* (henceforth, *Collins*)

1. Dative verbs

a) Buy vs. purchase

Collins suggests that *buy* can be followed by two objects and provides illustrative examples. However, one of these examples employs a passive structure which may not be easy to understand by some EFL learners. *Collins* also states that *buy* can pair with the preposition *for* without providing a clear illustrative example in the active structure.

Collins suggests that *buy* and *purchase* are synonyms. However, it does not show that they differ in their argument structures. This may lead some Arab EFL learners, as suggested earlier, to accept or produce some erroneous sentences (see *Webster's* above).

b) Give vs. donate

Collins provides sufficient information which leads its user to conclude that *give* can occur in the [NP to-NP] and the [NP NP] constructions. *Collins* is to be credited for not suggesting *give = donate*. It makes it clear that *donate* cannot occur in the the [NP NP] structure.

This dictionary cites a large number of examples which help EFL learners form a clear picture about the argument structures of both verbs. However, one may still wish to find some explicit information to tell him/her that the [NP NP] form is not always possible (Tanaka 1987). For instance (23a) below is acceptable but (23b) is not.

(23) a.   *She gave the door a push.*
 b.   **She gave a push to the door.*

A final word. Any EFL learner who uses *Collins* and continues to assume that *donate* can occur in the [NP NP] construction cannot claim that *Collins* has motivated him/her to do so.

2. Locative verbs

a) Pile vs. accumulate

Collins states that *pile* is a verb that can occur in the [NP on-NP] structure as in " piled the books on top of the radiator." However, it does not directly show that this verb can also occur in the [NP with-NP] frame. It only illustrates this form through an example in the passive voice, as in (24):

(24)   *His desk was piled with papers.*

As for *accumulate*, *Collins* does not provide any illustrative example to show that this verb can occur in a locative construction, i.e., it does not state that *accumulate* can occur in the [NP on-NP] frame. This insufficient information may lead some EFL learner, who already perceive *pile* and *accumulate* as synonyms, to think that the two verbs have the same syntax, and thus they may accept or produce ungrammatical sentences like (25):

(25)   **His desk was accumulated with papers.*

b) Scatter vs. disperse

Collins states that *scatter* and *disperse* are synonyms, thus leaving its user under the impression that they share the same syntax, when, in fact, they do not. This may become a real problem for EFL learners in the absence of illustrative examples showing that the former can occur in the [NP on-NP] and the [NP with-NP] constructions and that the latter can occur in the [NP on-NP] structure only. Lack of sufficient information may lead some EFL learners to accept and produce ungrammatical like (26):

(26)   **He dispersed the field with seeds.*

As is clear, *Collins* contains some useful information on verb argument structures. However, the suggestion of synonyms (e.g., *buy = purchase*; *scatter = disperse)* may confuse the EFL user leading him/her to assume that synonymity of verbs implies the selection of the same argument structures.

4.1.3 *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary of current English* (henceforth, *Oxford*)

1. Dative verbs

a) Buy vs. purchase

Oxford provides explicit information on the argument structures of *buy* and *purchase*. It clearly states that though both are ditransitive verbs, the former can occur in [NP for-NP] and [NP NP] constructions, whereas the latter can occur in the [NP for-NP] form only.

The illustrative examples of *buy* help Arab EFL learners to learn that *buy*, unlike its Arabic relevant form 'ishtara' pair with two internal NPs and that it collocates with the preposition *for*. Research has shown that many Arab EFL learners confuse *for* and *to* in [NP NP] dative constructions (Hamdan 1994).

Oxford touches on the idea that "purchase something for somebody" is more formal than "buy something for somebody". However, the user may wish to see *purchase* used in clearer illustrative examples. The given example, which we repeat as (27) below is not very helpful; first, it is passive; second, its active form does not show the ditransitive use of this verb.

(27)   *Employees are encouraged to purchase shares in the firm.*

b) Give vs. donate

The lexical entry of *give* includes relevant information about its argument structure. *Oxford* provides the two frames of *give*, viz., [NP to-NP] and [NP NP] along with clear illustrative examples. On the whole, Arab EFL learners do not tend to form false hypotheses about the syntax of *give* since it shares subcategorization with its Arabic relevant form 'aᶜta'.

Oxford shows that *donate* is a ditransitive verb which, unlike *give*, occurs in the [NP to-NP] frame only. An illustrative example, i.e., "donate large sums to relief organizations" is given.

2. Locative verbs

a) Pile vs. accumulate

Oxford explicitly states that *pile* can occur in [NP on-NP] and [NP with-NP] constructions. It provides the following examples;

(28) a.   ~ *piled papers on the table.*
     b.   ~ *piled the table with papers.*

However, *Oxford* does not provide sufficient information on accumulate as a locative verb that occurs in the [NP on-NP] form only. In fact, it cites *accumulate* as a synonym of *pile* which may lead the user to assume that *accumulate* can occur in two different constructions as is the case with *pile*. This may result in such a learner accepting and producing an erroneous sentence like (29):

(29)   **He accumulated the table with papers.*

b) Scatter vs. disperse

The lexical entry of *scatter* provides adequate information about its two argument structures, viz, [NP on-NP] and [NP with-NP], as in "scatter seeds on the field", and "scatter the field with seeds".

As is the case with *accumulate* above, *Oxford* fails to provide sufficient information on the use of *disperse* as a locative verb that can occur in the [NP on-NP] form. This may furnish grounds for a false hypothesis that a sentence like (30) is acceptable:

(30)   **John dispersed the loan with grass seeds.*

Clearly, *Oxford* contains sufficient and informative syntactic details on the argument structures of some verbs. EFL learners seeking syntactic information about dative and locative verbs in *Oxford* may find it helpful and learner-friendly. We concur with Yorkey (1982: 7) that *Oxford* is generally "...excellent for students of English as a second language."

4.1.4. *Longman dictionary of contemporary English* (henceforth, *Longman*)

1. Dative verbs

a) Buy vs. purchase

Longman classifies *buy* as a ditransitive verb, which can occur in [NP for-NP] and [NP NP] sentences like those in (31a) and (31b).

(31) a.   *He bought a book for her.*
     b.   *He bought her a book.*

For the purpose of our investigation, this information is sufficient. However, when one refers to the grammar section in this dictionary (p.xxix), he finds that verbs like *make* are also classified as [D1] verbs (i.e., followed by two nouns which are not coreferential). This may confuse the user. It is true that *make* resembles *buy* in that it can occur in the [NP for-NP] and the [NP NP] constructions, as in: "Ali made a cake for Salma" and "Ali made Salma a cake." But the example cited by *Longman* is different; the first noun is a direct object and the second is a subject attribute. *Longman's* example is repeated as (32):

(32)   *He made her a good husband.* [D1(for)]

Purchase is viewed as a [D1 (for)] verb, which does not help the user to distinguish it from *buy*. In fact, *Longman* gives no indication which guides the reader to reject a sentence like:

(33)   **Ali purchased Salma a new house.*

b) Give vs. donate

Give is treated as a [D1 (to)] verb. Illustrative examples show that this verb can subcategorize for both the [NP to-NP] and the [NP NP] constructions. However, one may wish to know whether this applies to *give* in all contexts. For instance, *Longman* suggests that we can say: "~ gave the door a push" but the dictionary does not tell us that its [NP NP] counterpart is not possible; we cannot say: "~ gave a push to the door."

Unlike *purchase, donate* is described as a [T1 (to)] verb. T1 verbs are transitives that are followed by a noun/noun like expression as direct object (p.xxxi). The dictionary does not provide any example illustrating the use of *donate*, leaving some users under the impression that it may occur in the [NP NP] constructions since it is often cited as a synonym of *give*.

2. Locative verbs

a) Pile vs. accumulate

Longman suggests that *pile* can occur in the [NP on-NP] form, as in, "He piled the books one on top of the other." However, it indirectly, i.e., in the passive, shows that this verbs can occur in the [NP with-NP] structure, as in: "The cart was piled high with fruit and vegetables." As for *accumulate, Longman* does not cite any illustrative example to show that this verb can occur in a locative construction; i.e., it does not state that *accumulate* can occur in the [NP on-NP] form. This insufficient information may motivate some EFL learners who already perceive that *accumulate* is a synonym of *pile* to accept and produce an ungrammatical sentence like (34):

(34)   *The car was accumulated high with fruit and vegetables.*

b) Scatter vs. disperse

Longman explicitly states that *scatter* can occur in [NP on-NP] and [NP with-NP] forms, as in: "~ scatter seed on the field", and "~ scatter the field with seed."

As is the case with *accumulate, Longman* does not provide any single example to illustrate that *disperse* can occur in a locative construction, i.e., it does not show that this verb can occur in the [NP on-NP] form. Thus, this dictionary does not provide sufficient information pertaining to the argument structure of *disperse* that differentiates it from its cited synonym *scatter*. Consequently, some EFL learners may produce an unacceptable sentence like (35):

(35)   *John dispersed the field with seed.*

To conclude this section, we would like to make the following remarks about the investigated monolingual dictionaries on verb argument structures:

1. Synonymity of two verbs, e.g., buy and purchase; pile and accumulate need not be taken to imply that they have the same argument structures. Dictionary compilers should make every effort to make tpoint clear by specifying the argument structures of the so-called synonyms along with illustrative examples. Failing to do so, these dictionaries may turn into a source of potential error for some EFL learners.
2. EFL learners interested in verb argument structures, particularly those of dative and locative verbs, sometimes consult monolingual dictionaries which are not specifically designed to meet the language needs of EFL/ESL learners. Such dictionaries (e.g., *Webster's*) do not seem to succeed in meeting some important needs of such learners. This is not a call for EFL learners to stop using general monolingual dictionaries; nor is it a suggestion that EFL/ESL -oriented monolingual dictionaries are flawless or equally excellent.

4.2.1. *Al-Mawrid: A modern English-Arabic dictionary* (henceforth, *Al-Mawrid*)

1. Dative verbs

a) Buy vs. purchase

Al-Mawrid does not state that *buy* can occur in [NP for-NP] and [NP NP] constructions. It also does not provide any illustrative examples of these constructions.

Al-Mawrid suggests that the first meaning of *buy* is 'ishtara' which may constitute a potential source of error for some Arab EFL learners since 'ishtara' does not share the same syntax with *buy*. The verb 'ishtara' cannot occur in the [NP NP] form.

Purchase is presented as a transitive verb which means 'ishtara' with no illustrative examples. This may lead some Arab EFL learners to believe that *buy* and *purchase* are true synonyms sharing the same syntax, which is not the case as indicated earlier.

b) Give vs. donate

Al-Mawrid does not provide any information that *give* can subcategorize for [NP to-NP] and [NP NP] constructions. However, this verb may not cause a problem to Arab EFL learners, thanks to L1 transfer. Both *give* and its Arabic equivalent 'a^ta' share the same syntax.

Al-Mawrid does not provide any information that *donate* can occur in the [NP to-NP] form. The possibility of error by some Arab EFL learners is ag-

gravated by the dictionary's suggestion of 'aᶜta' as one of the meanings of *donate*. This may tempt some learners to accept and produce an erroneous sentence like (36):

(36)   *Ali donated the mosque JD1000.*

2. Locative verbs

a) Pile vs. accumulate

Al-Mawrid provides insufficient information pertaining to the argument structures of *pile* as it only states, through one example, that this verb can occur in the [NP with-NP] form. It does not suggest that *pile* can also occur in the [NP on-NP] structure. Moreover, it does not offer any illustrative example to show that *accumulate* can occur in a locative construction. It actually cites 'yarkum' amongst the equivalents of both *accumulate* and *pile*. Thus some Arab EFL learners who consult this dictionary may find it unhelpful since it may lead them to think that synonymity entails similarity in syntax, which is not always the case. Consequently, some EFL learners may misuse these two verbs and produce an unacceptable sentence like (37):

(37)   *John accumulated the table with books.*

b) Scatter vs. disperse

Al-Mawrid does not cite any single example to show that *scatter* and *disperse* can occur in locative constructions. It only provides 'yanθur', 'yubaddid' and 'yufarriq' as Arabic equivalents to both *scatter* and *disperse*.

As is the case with *pile* and *accumulate* above, some Arab EFL learners may be led to assume that the English verbs, e.g., *scatter* and *accumulate*, which are given the same Arabic equivalents, share the same syntax, which is not the case. Such learners may also erroneously assume that the English verbs and their Arabic equivalents also have the same syntax. Therefore, these learners may misuse the English synonymous verbs and perceive or produce ungrammatical sentences due to wrong assumptions.

In view of the foregoing, *Al-Mawrid* may motivate the production of some errors by Arab EFL learners due to the insufficient information it provides on verb argument structures.

4.2.2. Al-Mughni Al-Akbar (henceforth, Al- Mughni)

1. Dative verbs

a) Buy vs. purchase

Al-Mughni describes *buy* as a verb which means 'shara/ishtara'. The only example it provides is of *buy* as a nontransitive verb. In effect, *Al-Mughni's* treat-

ment of *buy* is a replica of *Al-Mawrid's*. Hence, our comments on *buy* in *Al-Mawrid* can be repeated here with no alteration.

Like *Al-Mawrid*, *Al-Mughni* suggests that *purchase* means 'ishtara'. It gives an illustrative example which lacks the *for*-NP goal argument. Thus, *Al-Mughni* does not help its users to pair *purchase* with *for* (e.g., purchase something for somebody). Again, the comments we made on *purchase* in *Al-Mawrid* still hold.

b) Give vs. donate

Like *Al-Mawrid*, *Al-Mughni* suggests that the first meaning of *give* is 'aᶜta'. However, it provides illustrative examples which may lead EFL users to conclude that *give* can be used in both [NP to-NP] and [NP NP] constructions. As suggested earlier (see our treatment of the same verb in *Al-Mawrid*), Arab EFL learners are not expected to make errors while trying to use *give* since it shares the same syntax with its Arabic equivalent 'aᶜta'.

Like *Al-Mawrid*, *Al-Mughni* leaves its Arab EFL users under the impression that donate is synonymous with *give* since both mean 'aᶜta'. This may lead such users to draw a false conclusion that the two verbs share the same syntax with the result of accepting or producing ungrammatical sentences as we have already indicated.

2. Locative verbs

a) Pile vs. accumulate

Al-Mughni lists the Arabic equivalents of *pile* and provides an example to show that it can occur in the [NP on-NP] form, as in:

(38)   *He piled the boxes one on top of the other.*

However, *Al-Mughni* only provides an example in the passive to illustrate the use of *pile* in [NP with-NP] structure as in (39):

(39)   *The cart was piled high with fruit.*

Al-Mughni provides no information to show that *accumulate* can be used in the [NP on-NP] structure. The problem aggravates by the fact that *AL-Mughni* cites 'tarakama' amongst the various meanings of both *pile* and *accumulate*. Thus, the user of this dictionary is left under the impression that both verbs have the same argument structure. Consequently, some EFL learners may imitate sentence (39) above and produce an erroneous sentence like (40):

(40)   *The cart was accumulated high with fruit.*

b) Scatter vs. disperse

Al-Mughni does not provide any example to illustrate that *scatter* can occur in

[NP on-NP] and [NP with-NP] structures. It does not also show that *disperse* can occur in the [NP on-NP] form.

As is the case with *pile* and *accumulate*, *Al-Mughni* cites 'shattata' amongst the meanings of both *scatter* and *disperse,* leaving some EFL learners under the impression that these two verbs share the same syntax.

In light of this false impression, and in the absence of illustrative examples, some Arab EFL learners may not be able to use these two verbs in locative constructions; they may produce ungrammatical sentences like (41):

(41)   **John dispersed the field with seeds.*

Thus, *Al-Mughni* is inconsistent in presenting and illustrating the verbs that have the same argument structures, e.g., *buy* vs. *give* and *pile* vs. *scatter*. Moreover, it cites the same Arabic equivalents for *buy* and *purchase* on the one hand and *disperse* and *scatter* on the other. This insufficient treatment of these verbs may form a potential source of error for EFL learners.

Now that we have examined the two most popular English-Arabic dictionaries, we wish to make the following remarks:

1. Both *Al-Mawrid* and *Al-Mughni* provide an insufficient treatment of the verbs under investigation. For instance, both do not suggest (neither explicitly nor implicitly) that *buy* can occur in [NP for-NP] and [NP NP] constructions and that *scatter* can occur in [NP on-NP] and [NP with-NP] constructions. Moreover, they do not provide any useful information to help the EFL user recognize the syntactic difference between *give* and *donate* on the one hand and *buy* and *purchase* on the other.

2. The two dictionaries may tempt some Arab EFL learners to form a false assumption that English verbs and their Arabic relevant forms share the same syntax, which may constitute a potential source of errors. While *give* and 'aᶜta' share the same syntax,*buy* and 'ishtara' do not; similarly, *scatter* and naara share the same argument structures while *pile* and 'kawwama' do not. Yorkey (1982: 8) warns that the great danger of native-language-to-English dictionaries "... is the assumption that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the words of the two languages." This observation, we believe, also applies to English-to-native language dictionaries like *Al-Mawrid* and *Al-Mughni*. Research has shown that the false assumption of equivalence leads L2 learners into errors (Hamdan 1997).

5. Conclusions and recommendations

As has been demonstrated in section (4) above, monolingual dictionaries vary in the amount and quality of information they provide on verb argument structures. *Webster's,* which is not primarily directed to EFL learners, contains the least explicit information in this regard. One may argue that monolingual dictionaries directed to native speakers and the so-called "general user" do not necessarily need to provide detailed grammatical information on verbs on the assumption that their users either know such information or do not need it. In reality, this is not always the case. Many native speakers often need to consult such dictionaries to seek further information to confirm their intuitive judgments. Mazurkewich (1984) reported that some English-speakers whose mean age was 15;6 years were unable to make accurate grammaticality judgments on [NP NP] dative sentences. As for the "general user", it is true that he/she may not need this type of specialized information on verbs. However, no one knows when this learner will turn into an interested user who badly needs such information.

It is worth noting that the use of monolingual dictionaries such as *Webster's* is not restricted to native speakers. In effect, *Webster's* is internationally circulated and used by advanced EFL learners. Lack of sufficient information on verb argument structures may prove to be a disservice to that category of EFL learners who need such information.

Dictionaries intended to serve EFL learners have been found useful and effective in many ways. However, two points are due. First, the consulted dictionaries are not always consistent in their treatment of verbs belonging to the same category. For instance, *Collins* provides more explicit and detailed information on *give* than on *buy*, though the two are alternating dative verbs. Secondly, these dictionaries vary in the amount of detailed information they provide. For instance, *Oxford* provides more detailed and explicit information on both locative and dative verbs compared with *Collins* or *Longman* (see tables (1) and (2) below).

The bilingual (English-Arabic) dictionaries under investigation do not, on the whole, provide satisfactory information on the syntax of the target verbs. Moreover, they sometimes constitute a potential source of problems for Arab EFL learners who think that equivalence in meaning always implies equivalence in syntax. While *buy* and 'ishtara', for instance, subcategorize differently, *give* and 'aᶜta' share the same syntax. Again, we observed some lack of balance in presenting information within the same dictionary. *Al-Mughni,* for instance, provides sufficient information and illustrative examples for the verb *give* but not for *buy*, though both belong to the same category.

We tried to compare and contrast the given information by each dictionary on each of the target verbs. A similar comparison and contrast was carried out across the consulted dictionaries. A dictionary which included explicit information on the argument structures of an alternating verb, e.g., *give* and *pile* was given two points (one for each structure). If it provided clear illustrative examples of the two arguments, it was given another two points (one for each).

In the case of nonalternating verbs (e.g., *donate* and *disperse*,) the dictionary was allocated one point for stating the argument structure and another one for giving an illustrative example. On the whole, a dictionary which provided complete information on each set of verbs (i.e., two alternators and two nonalternators) was given 12 points.

Tables (1) and (2) below provide a comparison and contrast of the consulted dictionaries in light of this proposed rating system.

Table 1. Comparison and contrast of consulted dictionaries in relation to dative verbs

Verb Argument / Dictionary	BUY				PURCHASE		GIVE				DONATE		TOTAL
	Arg.1	Ex.	Arg.2	Ex.	Arg.	Ex.	Arg.1	Ex.	Arg.2	Ex.	Arg.	Ex.	= 12
Webster's	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Collins	1	0.5	0	0.5	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	5
Oxford	1	1	1	1	1	0.5	1	1	1	1	1	1	11.5
Longman	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	9
Al-Mawrid	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Al-Mughni	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2

Arg.1   = argument structure 1 [NP to, for-NP]
Arg.2   = argument structure 2 [NP NP]
Arg.   = only one argument structure is possible
Ex.   = example provided

Table 2. Comparison and contrast of consulted dictionaries in relation to locative verbs

Verb Argument / Dictionary	BUY				PURCHASE		GIVE				DONATE		TOTAL
	Arg.1	Ex.	Arg.2	Ex.	Arg.	Ex.	Arg.1	Ex.	Arg.2	Ex.	Arg.	Ex.	= 12
Webster's	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Collins	1	0	0.5	0	0	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	0	2
Oxford	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	4
Longman	1	0	0.5	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	3.5
Al-Mawrid	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Al-Mughni	1	0	0.5	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2.5

Arg.1   = argument structure 1 [NP into/onto-NP]
Arg.2   = argument structure 2 [NP with- NP]
Arg.   = only one argument structure is possible
Ex.   = example provided

Tables (1) and (2) above clearly indicate that monolingual dictionaries which are geared towards meeting the needs of foreign/second language learners provide useful information on verb argument structures, though with varying degrees. The information provided by *Oxford* on the target verbs was found more explicit and more detailed than that presented by both *Longman* and *Collins*. Moreover, it is far more detailed than the information provided by *Webster's* which is not primarily directed to meet the immediate needs of EFL/ESL learners. Researchers are invited to evaluate the information provided by these dictionaries on other types of alternations such as accusatives and passives.

Bilingual English-Arabic dictionaries are too far from addressing the needs of Arab EFL learners with regard to verb argument structures. Moreover, they may constitute a potential source of error for those learners who think that equivalence in meaning (e.g. 'buy' = 'ishtara') entails equivalence in syntax, which is not always the case.

In light of the findings of this study, it is recommended that dictionary compilers consider the provision of some more detailed information on the syntax of verbs. This may be particularly useful in those areas where more than one argument structure is possible. The provision of such information in a dictionary will make it a more effective source and a more useful reference for EFL/ESL learners.

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