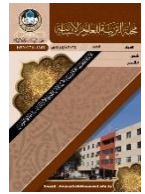




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A Comparative Study of Ingressive Verbs in Arabic and English: Syntactic and Pragmatic Perspectives

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Abstract

The study presents a comparative analysis of Arabic and English ingressive verbs with particular reference to their syntactic structures and pragmatic functions. Franceschi's (2015) framework provides the basis for the analysis. Its syntactic classification is grounded in the major descriptive grammars of contemporary English, notably Quirk et al. (1985), Biber et al. (1999), and Huddleston and Pullum (2002), before the pragmatic interpretation is considered. For Arabic, Hassan's (1985) grammatical theory is used to describe the syntactic properties of af'al al-shurū'. Attention is confined to the syntactic and implicative components of the framework. A qualitative comparison of authentic language examples indicates a typological difference between the two languages. Arabic permits only an imperfect verb predicate with af'al al-shurū'. Within this pattern, the verb functions as a strict positive implicative verb. English, in contrast, allows a variety of syntactic complements. This structural diversity allows prospective readings whose realization depends on lexical aspect (Aktionsart), with truth-conditions determined through pragmatic evaluation using Karttunen's (1971) negation test. The study demonstrates that the truth-conditional interpretation of ingressive verbs is constrained by language-specific syntactic rules, while the contribution of pragmatic evaluation differs fundamentally

across the two languages. Future studies may broaden the discussion by examining cognitive and pragmatic aspects of ingressive verbs, paying particular attention to listener inference, pragmatic implicature, and cognitive processing in different discourse contexts

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مجلة التربية للعلوم الإنسانية

مجلة علمية فصلية محكمة، تصدر عن كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية / جامعة الموصل



دراسة مقارنة لأفعال الشروع في اللغتين العربية والإنجليزية من منظور نحوي وتداولي

مرودة رياض هاشم ¹ ID

جامعة الموصل / كلية الآداب / قسم الترجمة / نينوى - العراق ¹

ملخص	معلومات الارشفة
تقدم هذه الدراسة، من منظور تقابلي، تحليلًا لأفعال الشروع في اللغتين العربية والإنجليزية وتخص بالذكر بنيتها التركيبية ووظائفها التداولية. ويشكل إطار فرانثيسكي (2015) الأساس النظري لهذا التحليل، حيث يستند تصنيفه للبنية التركيبية إلى أهم المعاجم النحوية الوصفية للغة الإنجليزية المعاصرة، ولاسيما كويرك وآخرون (1985)، وبايبر وآخرون (1999)، وهودلستون وبولوم (2002)، قبل الانتقال إلى التفسير التداولي. أما بالنسبة للغة العربية، فيتبع التحليل نظرية حسن (1985) النحوية من أجل وصف الخصائص التركيبية لأفعال الشروع. وتتنحصر هذه الدراسة في عنصرى البنية التركيبية والاستلزام من هذا الأطار. وتشير المقارنة النوعية لأمثلة لغوية أصيلة تباين نمطي واضح بين اللغتين، إذ لا تسمح اللغة العربية إلا مجيء الفعل المضارع خبرًا لأفعال الشروع، وضمن هذا النمط يعمل الفعل بمثابة فعل استلزامي إيجابي صارم. أما اللغة الإنجليزية، على النقيض من ذلك، تسمح بتنوع تركيبى أوسع، وهو تنوع يتيح قراءات مستقبلية يتوقف تحققها بحسب الجانب المعجمي للحدث (الأكثيونسارت)، حيث تتحدد شروط الصدق عبر التقييم التداولي بإستخدام اختبار النفي الذي وضعه كارتونن (1971). وتبين الدراسة أن تفسير شروط الصدق لأفعال الشروع مُقيد بقواعد تركيبية خاصة بكل لغة، في حين يختلف دور التقييم التداولي اختلافاً جذرياً بين اللغتين. وقد تمتد الأبحاث المقبلة إلى استقصاء الأبعاد المعرفية والتداولية لأفعال الشروع، مع التركيز على استدلال المستمع، والإيحاء التداولي، والمعالجة المعرفية في سياقات خطابية مختلفة	تاريخ الاستلام : 19/3/2026 تاريخ المراجعة : 2/8/2026 تاريخ القبول : 9/8/2026 تاريخ النشر : 2026/9/1 الكلمات المفتاحية : أفعال الشروع، نحوي، تداولي، نقطة الشروع، منهج مقارنة معلومات الاتصال مرودة رياض marwahriyadh@uomosul.edu.iq

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1. Introduction

Cross-linguistic variation between Arabic and English forms the subject of this paper, using ingressive verbs as the principal area of investigation. Similarities between the two languages are accompanied by important differences, most notably at the syntactic and pragmatic levels. Since the verb is a nucleus part of the sentence in both languages, a comparative investigation of ingressive verbs in Arabic and English is well justified. Previous studies have examined ingressive verbs, but direct comparison between Arabic and English is uncommon. Most accounts describe the constructions without considering the effect of syntactic realization on pragmatic interpretation. The paper examines how differences in the syntactic realization of event onset differ in Arabic and English and how these differences affect pragmatic interpretation.

1.1. Problem of the Study

Early monolingual studies of aspectual verbs were largely semantic and historical. More recent research has turned to the relation between syntactic realization and pragmatic interpretation. Franceschi (2015) gives particular attention to the relationship between syntactic structures and pragmatic patterns. The ingressive subclass, however, has received little attention in comparative studies of Arabic and English. This paper addresses this gap through a unified comparison of Arabic and English, examining how structural realizations determine implicative properties of events.

1.2. Research Questions

- 1- How are ingressive verbs realized syntactically in Arabic and English?
- 2- How do these syntactic realizations contribute to shaping specific pragmatic dimensions conveyed in each language?
- 3- How do the fixed structural patterns of Arabic contrast with the flexible structural patterns of English in conveying comparable pragmatic functions?

1.3. The Study Objective(s):

The objective of this paper is to examine the syntactic structures of ingressive verbs in Arabic and English together with a specific pragmatic dimension associated with those structures, particularly implicativity. It then compares the fixed syntactic patterns of Arabic with the flexible structural patterns of English in order to identify points of convergence and divergence in the pragmatic functions they perform.

1.4. The Study Hypothesis:

The study hypothesizes that:

- 1- Arabic confines them to a single obligatory construction. English, by contrast allows several syntactic patterns for ingressive verbs.
- 2- These structural differences determine the truth-conditions of ingressive verbs. In Arabic, the obligatory construction entails the event realization and functions as a strict positive implicative verb, while English varies in implicative interpretation according to the Aktionsart of the complement.
- 3- While both languages indicate the onset of an event, they achieve this by means of different syntactic structures. Arabic relies on internal semantic specification, producing a strict implicative interpretation, whereas English permits prospective, non-implicative interpretations under certain structural conditions

2. Theoretical Framework

In both languages, ingressive verbs serve a crucial discourse function: marking transitions in narrative, introducing active engagement, new topics, or signaling the shift from potentiality to action. (Dickey, 1999, p. 26; Bogaards, 2022, p.4; Jabir, 2026, p. 437)

Within Arabic linguistics, the notion of aspect (*al-jiha*) is based on the semantic specification and restriction of the verb. Recent studies, following Hassan's (1986, p. 245) grammatical account, define aspect as the mechanism that restricts verbal meaning beyond its general nature, either with respect to the event itself or its internal temporal boundaries (Hamdaoui, 2020, p. 158). Whereas tense concerns external time, aspect identifies the internal progression and realization of the action. The processes of semantic specification "*takhṣīṣ*" and syntactic restriction "*taqyīd*" confine the imperfect verb to the point of event onset, making the occurrence of the event necessarily entailed. English linguistic theory, however, distinguishes aspect from tense by defining aspect as the internal temporal organization of an event rather than its location in time. (Comrie, 1976, p. 41). Conventional classifications distinguish perfective, imperfective, and phasal aspectuality, the latter encompassing ingressive, durative, and egressive subtypes. (Dik, 1997, p. 221; Brinton, 1988, p. 62; Freed, 1979, p. 30). The defining feature of the ingressive aspect is the beginning of an event,

whereas the continuative and terminative aspects refer to the duration and completion of an event, respectively. (Cuvalay-Haak, M., 1997).

The figures below illustrate the concept of ingressivity.

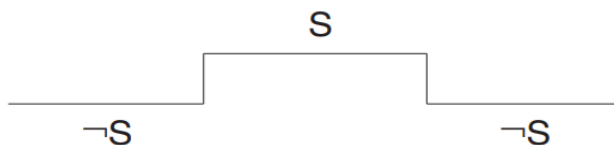


Fig. 1. Potential Boundaries of an Event
(Edie, 2020, p. 598)



Fig. 2. Ingressive, Dynamic, Eventive, Inchoative
(Edie, 2020, p. 598)

In Arabic, pragmatic interpretation follows from the semantic specification “takhṣīṣ” and syntactic restriction “taqyīd” of af’āl al-shurū. Karttunen’s (1971) negation test is applied only to confirm this interpretation. English, on the other hand, establishes truth-conditions through the same negation test.

2.1. Syntactic-Pragmatic Framework

Comparison of Arabic and English ingressive verbs is carried out within an integrated theoretical framework. The selected samples are discussed with respect to syntactic subcategorization and pragmatic implicativity, allowing both convergence and divergence to be identified.

2.1.1 Syntactic Dimension

Arabic, to express ingressivity, relies on defective verbs of beginning “af’āl al-shurū”, including “bada’a بدأ”, “akhatha أخذ”, “shara’a شرع”, “ansha’a أنشأ”, “tafiqa طفق”, “habba هبّ”, “qama قام” which constitute a subclass of the broader category of verbs of approximation or imminence “af’āl al-muqāraba.” According to Hassan (1985, p. 620), a view also reflected in Alish (2008, p. 244) and Alhawary (2016, p. 49), these verbs are described as defective verbs that operate in many ways the same as “kana set.” More specifically, these verbs function syntactically by raising the

subject and placing the predicate in the accusative case. Unlike full lexical verbs, they are subject to a strict complementation constraint whereby an imperfect verb “الفعل المضارع” must occur as the predicate in order to denote the onset of an event (Al-Samerai, 2000, p. 283; Salah Al-Deen, 2022, p. 19). Furthermore, the imperfect predicate obligatorily occurs with the omission of the particle “أن”. Once the verb takes a nominal object instead of the required imperfect predicate, the ingressive reading no longer arises, and the verb functions as a full lexical verb.

In English, however, aspectual ingressivity functions within a secondary aspectual system. Instead of morphological marking, it employs full lexical verbs such as start, begin, commence, and initiate (Brinton, 1988, p. 95). This selection is based on the core semantic meaning of the verbs so that only those denoting the beginning of the action or state, rather than its continuation or completion, are included. Moreover, data selection was limited to four principal complementation patterns in English—to infinitive, gerund, nominal object, and zero complement. These constructions constitute the standard complementation patterns of aspectual verbs throughout major descriptive grammars of contemporary English (Quirk et al., 1985; Biber et al., 1999; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Restricting analysis to these constructions, while excluding marginal and idiomatic extensions, ensures a systematic comparison with the structurally restricted Arabic data.

2.1.2 Pragmatic Dimension

The framework next considers the relation between syntactic structures and pragmatic truth-conditions. Vendler (1967, p. 21) and Comrie (1998, p. 41-51) classify the lexical aspect (Aktionsart) of embedded events on the basis of their inherent temporal character into:

- 1- **Semelfactives:** this category refers to single, instantaneous events with no measurable duration and lacks a natural endpoint. Examples include blink, knock, flash, and cough.
- 2- **Achievements:** these verbs describe instantaneous events with an inherent endpoint. Their distinctive feature, in contrast with semelfactives, is that they denote either a sudden change of state or the attainment of a goal. Examples include to arrive, to die, to reach the summit, and to recognize.
- 3- **Accomplishments:** These refer to events that extend over time and terminate in an inherent endpoint. Examples include write a book and build a house.

4- Activities: This category comprises dynamic events without an inherent endpoint. Examples are run, swim, speak, and walk.

5- States: This category includes states rather than actions. They continue for an indefinite period and lack internal development and movement. Examples are know, love, like, and hate.

The table below shows the feature matrix of aktionsart categories with clarifications.

Table 1. Feature Matrix of Aktionsart Categories (Adopted from Brinton, 1988, p. 57)

Category	Dynamicity	Durativity	Telicity
Semelfactives	+	-	-
Achievements	+	-	(+)
Accomplishment	+	+	+
Activities	+	+	-
States	-	+	-

Notes:

1. + [dynamic] involves action or change.
2. - [dynamic] involves no action or change; static condition.
3. + [durative] extends over a period of time.
4. - [durative] occurs instantaneously or nearly so.
5. + [telic] has a natural endpoint or goal.
6. - [telic] has no inherent endpoint; can continue indefinitely
7. () shows marginality or weakness of a feature.

The pragmatic functions of ingressive verbs are examined with reference to implicative properties. An implicative verb inherently presupposes that the event denoted in its complement clause has actually occurred (Karttunen, 1971, p. 341). Building on the semantic account proposed by Vandler (1967) and subsequently

extended by Karttunen (1971), Franceschi (2015) adopts the negation test to determine the implicative force of English ingressive verbs.

Crucially, the unified framework applies the implicativity test to determine whether an ingressive verb in both languages entails the realization of its complement event. Franceschi (2015) demonstrates that the implicative properties of English ingressive verbs may, with certain Aktionsarten, be lost, permitting prospective interpretations. Hamdaoui (2020, p. 158), following the grammatical framework of Hassan (1986), defines Arabic (al-Jiha) as a form of semantic “takhsīṣ”. Therefore, within this framework, *afʿāl al-shurūʿ* are treated as inherently strict positive implicative verbs in every context, fixing the imperfect verb at the precise moment of its realization. This pragmatic property is better understood through comparison with *afʿāl al-muqāraba*, which merely signal the approach of an event without guaranteeing its occurrence. Therefore, to empirically verify this claim, the study employs Karttunen’s (1971) pragmatic negation test.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive-comparative approach based on authentic examples to compare Arabic *afʿāl al-shurūʿ* and English ingressive verbs at both the syntactic and pragmatic levels. Formal written discourse provides the Arabic corpus for this study. Since “*afʿāl al-shurūʿ*” occur mainly in Modern Standard Arabic and Classic Arabic, the examples are accordingly drawn from written media and academic publications, ensuring that the data reflect the formal environment in which these verbs occur. The English corpus, by contrast, is based entirely on contemporary spoken discourse transcribed from YouTube in order to reflect natural usage. The analysis first considers the structural patterns of both languages before turning to their pragmatic interpretation.

The Arabic analysis follows Hassan’s (1985) account of the syntactic pattern governing *afʿāl al-shurūʿ* together with Karttunen’s (1971) pragmatic negation test. For English, the analysis follows Franceschi (2015), whose model relates structural classification and pragmatic interpretation through the interaction of syntactic complement and Aktionsart in yielding implicative readings.

A similar position is found in broader cross-linguistic research, especially Halliday’s (1994) principle of multifunctionality, whereby aspectual interpretation depends on contextual rather than on lexical classification alone (Cheon-hak, 2026, p. 165).

Collectively, these frameworks relate differences in syntactic organization to corresponding differences in pragmatic interpretation.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Arabic Ingressive Verbs

Arabic grammarians like Al-Samerai (2000, p. 283) recognize a limited group of verbs belonging to this class, namely “bada’a بدأ”, “akhatha أخذ”, “shara’a شرع”, “ansha’a أنشأ”, “ṭafīqa طفق”, “habba هبّ”, “qama قام”.

Stage 1: Syntactic Profiling

Arabic verbs of beginning, “af’āl al-shurū’”, are governed by a strictly fixed syntactic structure. Their obligatory syntactic configuration is restricted to the following formula (Hassan, 1986, p. 620):

Verb of beginning (af’āl al-shurū’) + imperfective verb (الفعل المضارع) [أن without].

Thus, Arabic verbs are typically restricted to dynamic actions, while state change is expressed by other verbs such as “šbaha أصبح” and “šara صار” that belong to a different category.

The following examples are taken from Badawi et al. (2016, pp. 482-485):

- (1) “بدأ كل منهما يروى قصته للآخر.”
“Each of the two began to tell the other the story of his life.”
- (2) “أخذت تدعو صديقاتها إلى زفافها.”
“She began inviting her friends to the wedding.”
- (3) “شرع يشرح الدرس.”
“He started explaining the lesson.”
- (4) “أنشأ المهندس يخطط المشروع.”
“The engineer began planning the project.”
- (5) “طفق يعيد تنظيم الحجرة.”
“He immediately began to rearrange the room.”
- (6) “هبت الطيور تغرد.”
“The birds started singing”
- (7) “قام الخطيب يخطب.”

Thus, ingressive interpretation occurs only when the verb assumes an aspectual role, governing a verbal complement and signaling the beginning of actions,

(8) بدأ الرجل يعمل.

The man began to work.

(9) أخذ المعلم يشرح الدرس.

The teacher started explaining the lesson.

On the other hand, ingressivity is not established when the verb takes a subject and a nominal object because it functions as a full lexical verb.

(10) أخذ المعلم ورقّ الامتحان. (*)

The teacher took the exam papers (*)

Stage 2: Testing Implicativity

Pragmatically, the structural rigidity of Arabic af'āl al-shurū' limits their Aktionsart compatibility. Whereas English ingressive verbs permit both dynamic and stative predicates, Arabic ingressive verbs are generally restricted to dynamic predicates. Expressions denoting a change of state fall outside their scope and are instead realized by another verbal category, namely "اصبح sbaha" and "صار sara".

Since Arabic ingressive verbs govern only dynamic imperfect predicates, they exhibit strict implicative behaviour in every context. The negation test consistently leads to a logical contradiction. Because every Arabic ingressive verb encodes the same strict implicative force, their pragmatic distinctions arise not from the truth conditions but from the manner in which the beginning of an event is presented. Each verb contributes to its own stylistic and pragmatic character at the onset. 'أخذ Akhatha' usually denotes a gradual beginning, implying that the activity develops progressively. 'هَبَّ Habba', on the other hand, indicates an abrupt and forceful onset. Differences of a similar kind appear in 'قام qama' which conveys purposeful agency, whereas 'طفق tafaqa' expresses the durative continuation of the activity.

4.2. English Ingressive Verbs

English ingressive verbs are realized through a secondary aspectual system based on full lexical verbs. The analysis is confined to start, begin, commence, and initiate, which Franceschi (2015) regards as the principal ingressive verbs in English. Their selection is further justified by their frequent occurrence in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The figures show a clear lead for start, with 275,949 occurrences, followed by begin with 112,444 occurrences. Although less frequent than start and begin, the formal verbs of Latinate origin remain sufficiently represented, with initiate yielding 5,831 occurrences and commence 1,749. The selection of those four statistically dominant verbs therefore offers a representative

account of the principal structural variation and pragmatic functions of English ingressivity.

4.2.1. Start

Stage 1: Syntactic Profiling

Among English ingressive verbs, start is the most common and versatile marker of ingressivity in present-day English. It exhibits highly flexible subcategorization patterns. In the corpus of authentic media and conversational register, it regularly occurs with four principal complementation structures:

- 1- To infinitive clause,
- 2- V-ing clause,
- 3- The nominal direct object,
- 4- And the zero-complement intransitive pattern.

(11) “From the moment that **we started to create** architecture, to put objects in the world, to make art, to carve tools, we’ve been augmenting reality.” (The Augmented Reality Revolution, 2016)

(12) “I **started playing** in jazz bands and played in concert and jazz band throughout high school.” (Louis The Child Lollapalooza Homecoming | Joey Papoutsis & Jaime Black | Talks at Google, 2019)

(13) “That was not how he **started the meeting.**” (Pelosi's Power: Nancy Pelosi (interview) | FRONTLINE, 2022)

(14) “So, **the civil rights struggle started** right then.” (Oklahoma Horizon TV Show 1707, 2017)

The first two examples present “start” as an aspectual complement-taking verb followed by non-finite clauses. By contrast, the third example takes a direct nominal object as a transitive verb, whereas the fourth shows an intransitive use.

The same four principal complementation structures are observed in both begin and commence. As a result, the structural analysis remains valid for both verbs, as will be shown in the following two subsections.

Such structural classification, however, does not fully determine the truth-conditions of the events, making pragmatic evaluation essential.

Stage 2: Testing Implicativity

Franceschi’s (2015) framework is used to determine implicativity, evaluating each construction in relation to the Aktionsart (lexical aspect) of the complement. In

the corpus, every non-finite complement governed by start denotes an activity and accomplishment and functions as a strict implicative verb. When “start” occurs with a durative activity, illustrated by the v-ing complement (2) “start playing in jazz,” the activity is interpreted as having occurred. The negation test supports this conclusion, since “I started playing in jazz bands ... but I did not play in them” is self-contradictory. This contradiction confirms the occurrence of the activity. The to-infinitive complement in (1) behaves in the same way. The sentence “we started to create architecture ... but we did not create it” produces the same contradiction, demonstrating that the event must have taken place. Consequently, corpus evidence does not support a prospective reading of start.

The analysis is limited to the non-finite clausal complements illustrated in patterns (1) and (2), where the target event is expressed explicitly. In patterns (3) and (4), the intended activity is linguistically underspecified. For instance, in “start the meeting, whether the meeting is chaired, attended, or addressed must be established through pragmatic domain expansion before the truth conditions of the construction can be evaluated. The same analysis extends to begin and commence.

4.2.2. Begin

Stage 1: Syntactic Profiling

As the second most frequent ingressive verb in present-day English, “begin” demonstrates a broad range of subcategorization patterns. Throughout the corpus of authentic media and conversational data, it regularly appears with four principal complementation structures as the verb “start”

- (15) “But when you **begin to realize** that your life is that dash” (Tom's Take on How To Realize Your Life's Purpose (TFPE Excerpt), 2019)
- (16) “So every morning, I would sit and read a chapter of that book and then I'd **begin writing** a novel as if I were Will Durant.” (Adopting Art Parents to Develop Your Style - Draftsmen S1E05, 2019)
- (17) “and the president of the United States—and I say, how is he going to **begin the meeting.**” (Pelosi's Power: Nancy Pelosi (interview) | FRONTLINE, 2022)
- (18) “The **process begins** when materials are being reviewed for selection.” (The University of Chicago Library: Preservation Labs, 2022)

Stage 2: Testing Implicativity

The pragmatic implicative status of these constructions is examined through Karttunen's (1971) negation test. Whereas "start" emphasizes the point immediately preceding an event, "begin" centers on the event itself and commonly expresses gradual progression. Its pragmatic behaviour is characterized by strict positive implicativity when governing dynamic Aktionsart categories. The implicative character of "begin" is confirmed by applying the negation test to the authentic examples. In sample 2, the accomplishment "writing a novel" makes the statement "I'd begin writing a novel ... but I did not write it" contradict itself. The same applies to the achievement "realize" in "since you begin to realize ... but you do not realize," which produces self-contradiction. These contradictions exclude any prospective or about-to interpretation. Within the present corpus, its non-finite clausal complements in pattern (1) and (2) pragmatically guarantee the realization of the event.

4.2.1. Commence

Stage 1: Syntactic Profiling

As a highly formal marker of ingressivity, commence represents the most formal alternative while exhibiting the same broad range of subcategorization patterns as "start" and "begin". The authentic corpus indicates that it regularly occurs with the same four principal complementation structures:

- (19) "in a future that we all must **commence to actualize** a future that may just be imperiled by treading the simpler path." (2015 Midyear Completion Celebration, 2015)
- (20) "and you may **commence firing** from all sides." (2013 Olin Lecture: The Meaning of the Vietnam War, 2013)
- (21) "and then I will **commence the formal business of the meeting.**" (CQC board meeting - June 2022, 2022)
- (22) "then, **the extradition process commences.**" (1/11/16: White House Press Briefing, 2016)

Stage 2: Testing Implicativity

The present analysis establishes the pragmatic implicative status of these constructions by employing Karttunen's (1971) negation test. The corpus shows that commence is used primarily in formal and institutional discourse. Like begin, it presupposes that the event has occurred and serves as a presupposition trigger

throughout dynamic Aktionsart categories. Its strictly implicative interpretation is confirmed by the negation test. Neither the durative activity in example (2) nor the accomplishment in example (1) permit a continuation such as “... but you did not fire” or “... but we did not actualize it.” Both yield contradictions, confirming that commence presupposes event occurrence. An event cannot both commence and fail to occur. Accordingly, prospective or about-to interpretations are ruled out. In this corpus, the non-finite clausal complements (pattern 1 and 2) therefore receive implicative interpretations.

4.2.2. Initiate

Stage 1: Syntactic Profiling

The verb “initiate” allows fewer complementation patterns because the verb is treated as a strongly transitive verb denoting a process. Accordingly, infinitives, gerunds, and zero-complement constructions are generally excluded because they denote action in progress rather than abstract event realization (Franceschi, 2015, p. 99).

- (23) “and we **initiate an improvement process** from that point, we’re on what I call the dark side of self-improvement because we’re literally in the dark.”(The Dark Side of Self Improvement | Suzanne Eder | TEDxWilmington, 2015)

Stage 2: Testing Implicativity

The verb “initiate” is characteristic of formal discourse and is generally followed by abstract nominal phrases. It is defined in the Longman Dictionary for Contemporary English (2009) as “formal to arrange for something important to start, such as an official process or a new plan.” Rochette (1999, p. 145) maintains that nominal phrases in this position should be interpreted as “presupposing a verbal projection.” On this view, the abstract nouns following “initiate” imply an embedded event with its own Aktionsart.

Karttunen’s (1971) test can therefore be applied directly to these abstract nouns for evaluation of their truth conditions. Unlike start, begin, and commence, initiate inherently expresses event causation. The occurrence of the caused event is therefore presupposed, without requiring the interpretation of an implicit action.

Application of the negation test shows that initiate functions as a strict presupposition trigger for the embedded event. In “we initiate an improvement process ...”, the continuation “but the process did not occur” is logically contradictory. Such a contradiction demonstrates that the truth condition contributed by initiate remains uncancellable.

Among the English ingressive verbs, *initiate* exhibits a more restricted pattern of complementation, being largely confined to nominal complements. In contrast, *start*, *begin*, and *commence* permit noun phrase complements, to-infinitives, gerunds, and intransitive constructions.

4.3 Discussion: Cross-linguistic Convergence and Divergence

A comparison of Arabic and English ingressive verbs shows that the syntactic structures and pragmatic interpretation are closely connected. Although Arabic and English convey broadly similar communicative functions, each language expresses it through different syntactic structures.

4.3.1. Convergence

- 1- Both languages express the ingressive aspect is realized through complement-taking instead of marking the lexical verb morphologically.
- 2- In both languages, the relevant grammatical structures denote the temporal boundary corresponding to the onset of a dynamic event.
- 3- With dynamic activities, Arabic and English display identical implicative interpretation. In each case, they function as strict presupposition triggers, presupposing that the complement event has occurred.

4.3.2. Divergence

- 1- Arabic *afʿāl al-shurūʿ* belong to the defective class, requiring an imperfect predicate and the obligatory omission of “أن”. By contrast, English ingressive verbs “start, begin, and commence,” freely occur with several complementation patterns, including to-infinitive, gerund, nominal object, and intransitive realization.
- 2- The two languages diverge markedly in predicate selection with respect to lexical aspect. Arabic *afʿāl al-shurūʿ* are confined to dynamic predicates, while changes of state are expressed through a separate class of verbs. English ingressive verbs, however, freely combine with both dynamic and stative predicates.
- 3- Pragmatically, Arabic and English differ in the discourse functions of their ingressive verbs. Arabic *afʿāl al-shurūʿ* show minimal register variation, with their variation lying primarily in the manner and continuity of the event’s initiation, which gives rise to interpretations of suddenness, graduality, or intentionality.

English ingressive verbs, by contrast, display clear register distinctions, with commence and initiate largely confined to formal or institutional context, whereas start and begin occur more generally.

- 4- While the two languages converge with dynamic activities, they differ considerably with other Aktionsarten. Arabic afʿāl al-shurūʿ, being obligatorily realized with the imperfect predicate, function as strict positive implicative verbs in all contexts. English ingressive verbs may lose their implicative properties. When introducing accomplishments or particular semelfactives, such as “start to sneeze”, they receive a prospective interpretation in which the onset of the event does not entail its realization.

5. Conclusion

This cross-linguistic comparison reveals that Arabic and English differ in the realization of ingressive verbs. Arabic employs a fixed grammatical pattern, whereas English displays greater flexibility in syntactic complementation. These structural differences determine their pragmatic interpretation. Arabic afʿāl al-shurūʿ invariably indicate that the event has begun, while English permits prospective readings with certain Aktionsart through alternative complementation patterns.

The comparison confirms that each language expresses ingressivity through its own syntactic structures rather than following a common structural pattern. For this reason, syntactic structures and their effects on truth conditions cannot be fully explained if syntax is separated from pragmatics.

The discussion has been restricted to qualitative analysis of selected examples instead of quantitative corpus analysis. Future studies may consider larger corpora in order to obtain broader evidence concerning the frequency and contextual distribution of cross-linguistic differences in the expression of ingressivity.

Future research may consider the cognitive and figurative dimensions of ingressive verbs. Attention may be directed to listener inference, conversational implicatures, and cognitive processing as factors influencing the interpretation of initiation across different discourse contexts.

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