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# On Cognate Objects in Sason Arabic

Faruk Akkuş  
*University of Pennsylvania*

Balkız Öztürk  
*Boğaziçi University*

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## **Abstract**

This paper investigates the patterns of cognate objects (COs) associated with unergatives and unaccusatives in Sason Arabic.

We propose that COs of both unergatives and unaccusatives are not true arguments, as evinced by their highly productive and unrestricted use, but constitute rhematic complements in the sense of Ramchand (2008), therefore cannot be used as diagnostics for unergative-unaccusative distinction in the language.

# On Cognate Objects in Sason Arabic

Faruk Akkuş and Balkız Öztürk\*

## 1 Introduction

This paper investigates the patterns of cognate objects (COs) associated with unergatives and unaccusatives in Sason Arabic, an endangered Arabic dialect spoken in eastern Turkey (Jastrow 2006, Akkuş 2016).

We propose that COs of both unergatives and unaccusatives are not true arguments, but constitute rhematic complements in the sense of Ramchand (2008), therefore cannot be used as a diagnostics for unergative-unaccusative distinction in the language.

## 2 Previous Literature on Cognate Objects

(1) and (2) illustrate examples of COs from the familiar languages such as English and French.

- (1) a. John danced a (slow) dance.  
b. Mary sang a (beautiful) song.
- (2) a. Il a danse une grande danse.  
he has danced a grand dance.  
'He danced a grand dance.'  
(Pereltsvaig 2002, (2))  
b. Elle a chante une (belle) chanson.  
she has sung a beautiful song  
'She sang a beautiful song.'

As can be seen from the above examples, COs are noun phrases containing a noun which is morphologically related to the verb. In English, this noun can sometimes be the exact copy of the verb (as in the case of *smile a smile*, *laugh a laugh*, and *dance a dance*). Two central questions that have been the focus of the previous research on COs are (i) what can they tell us about the predicate-types? and (ii) are they arguments or adjuncts?

The widely-held generalization about the occurrence of cognate objects is stated in Kuno and Takami (2004:107) as *the Unergative Restriction on the Cognate Object Construction*:

- (3) *Unergative Restriction on the Cognate Object Construction*  
Only unergative verbs can appear in the cognate object construction. No unaccusative verbs can.

This generalization has been used as a diagnostics to differentiate between unergative and unaccusative verbs. It has been argued that intransitives which can take a cognate object are typically unergative verbs, i.e., verbs whose subjects are (non-)volitional initiators, but not unaccusatives with undergoer subjects. (See furthermore Keyser and Roeper 1984, Larson 1988, Massam 1992, Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995, and Hale and Keyser 1993, among others.)

- (4) a. Malinda smiled her most enigmatic smile.  
(Levin and Rappaport Hovav, 1995:40)  
b. The baby slept a sound sleep.  
(Nakajima 2006:677)

However, Kuno and Takami (2004:116, also in Nakajima 2006) observe that some unaccusative

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verbs can occur with cognate objects.

- (5) a. The tree grew a century's growth within only ten years.  
 b. The stock market dropped its largest drop in three years today.  
 c. Stanley watched as the ball bounced a funny little bounce right into the shortstop's glove.

The empirical facts raise certain questions regarding Perlmutter's (1978) *Unaccusative Hypothesis* (UH), shown in (6). For instance, what are the implications of the possibility of unaccusative verbs allowing cognate objects for the UH?

- (6) *The Unaccusative Hypothesis*  
 Unergative and unaccusative verbs are syntactically differentiated; while unergative verbs have nonderived subjects (i.e., surface subjects are generated as subjects at D-structure), surface subjects of unaccusative verbs originate as direct objects.

In fact, this point is closely related to the property of cognates, that is whether they are argumental or adverbial (Pereltsvaig 1999, 2002). Crucially, if the COs occupy the object position, rather than the adjunct position, this would contradict the UH, since the object position of unaccusatives would be underlyingly occupied by the surface subject.

The literature on COs is not unanimous, and the previous studies on the nature of COs can be divided into two camps:

- i. Some claim that COs are thematic and/or underlying arguments of their predicates (cf. Hale & Keyser (1993) for English, Macfarland (1995) for English and French, Massam (1990) for English, Matsumoto (1996) for English and Japanese)  
 ii. Others maintain that COs are adjuncts (cf. Jones (1988) for English, Moltmann (1989) for English and German, Zubizarreta (1987) for English).

There are also studies like Pereltsvaig (1999, 2002), Nakajima (2006) which argue for both types. For instance, Nakajima makes a distinction between argumental and adverbial COs and points out that argumental COs are only possible with unergatives, whereas the COs certain unaccusatives take are adverbial, still arguing for the role of COs in the unaccusative-unergative split.

### 3 Cognate Objects in Sason Arabic

The first striking fact about COs in Sason Arabic is that they can occur with a wide range of predicates. In Sason, COs can occur not only with unergative verbs, as in (7), but also with transitive verbs that have an overt direct object (italicized in (8)).<sup>1</sup>

- (7) a. **zake**-ma            kotti    **zak**.  
 laugh-a                bad    laughed.3m  
 He laughed a bad laugh.  
 b. sabi    **bayu**    **ibki**  
 boy    crying    cry.3m  
 The boy is crying a cry.
- (8) a. ali        ams                    *kitab*    **qaru**    **qara**.  
 ali        yesterday            book    reading    read.3m  
 'Ali read book(s) yesterday.'  
 b. *axpeys* **akil**    **ayale**.  
 bread    eating    ate.3f  
 'She ate bread.'

<sup>1</sup>Cognate objects and predicates they are associated with are boldfaced throughout.

Moreover, in Sason Arabic unaccusative verbs can also productively take COs, as illustrated in (9).

- (9) a. badıncanad    **pat**-ma            gıze kotti            **patto**.  
 tomatoes        rotting-a            such bad            rottened.3pl  
 ‘The tomatoes rotted such a bad rotting.’
- b. çiçak    **ubs**-ma boş        kotti    **ubes**.  
 flower fading-a very    bad    faded.3m  
 ‘The flower faded a bad fading.’
- c. nahar    **talı**-ma            koys            **tala**            ala sari  
 sun    appearing-a        beautiful        appeared.3m        this morning  
 ‘The sun appeared a beautiful appearance this morning.’

Likewise, COs can appear with predicates from all aspectual classes: activities (10a), accomplishments (10b) and achievements (10c):

- (10) a. **faqəz**    le        sari    **faqaze**.  
 running of        morning ran.3f  
 ‘She ran a morning run.’
- b. ene    **addil**-ma            imbala diqqat    **adlu**-a.  
 room building-a        without care        made.3pl-it  
 ‘They built the room carelessly.’
- c. **mot**-ma            xəfəf    **mat**.  
 death-a            quick    died.3m  
 ‘He died a quick death.’

The fact that COs can occur with almost any type of predicate is problematic for the hypothesis that all COs are arguments of a verb. Thus, it seems like at least some COs in Sason are not selected, and there is no restriction on the occurrence of COs in terms of the argument structures of the predicates.

With respect to the aspectual properties of predicates, Kuno and Takami (2004) argue that COs are acceptable if they denote a resultant object/product of an activity/process that the predicate denotes. If the predicate denotes only the result without involving a process, as in the case of *break*, *occur*, *appear*, or only the manner of the process, then COs are not possible. However, in Sason there is no such restriction, as not only the predicates denoting processes, but also the ones denoting only results (11) or manner (12) are compatible with COs:

- (11) a. şuşa    **qarf**    **ınqaraf**.  
 glass breaking broke.3m  
 ‘The glass broke a breaking.’
- b. nahar    **talı**-ma            koys            **tala**            ala sari.  
 sun    appearing-a        beautiful appeared.3m        this morning  
 ‘The sun appeared a beautiful appearance this morning.’
- c. dave    **say**            **sare**,            hama boş        nes        ma-ca.  
 wedding occurring        occurred.3f        but    many    person    neg.3m  
 ‘The wedding occurred an occurring, but not many people came.’
- (12) a. babe    **fadu**-ma            hedi **ınfada**.  
 door opening-a        slow opened.3m  
 ‘The door opened a slow opening.’
- b. John **maju**-ma xıfəf **ca**.  
 John coming-a quick came.3m  
 ‘John came a quick coming.’
- c. şelç    **zabu**-ma            hedi **zab**.  
 snow melting-a        slow melt  
 ‘The snow melted a slow melting.’

This section has shown that COs in Sason can freely occur with a range of predicates, including unaccusatives, thus pose a problem for the hypothesis that all COs are arguments of a verb. The next section investigates the nature of COs in terms of their argumenthood vs. adjuncthood status and concludes that they are adverbial.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4 Are Sason Cognate Objects Arguments or Adverbials?

In order to address the question of whether COs are arguments or adverbials in SA, we need to define the criteria that distinguish between the two kinds of phrases (see Pereltsvaig (2002)). Here, following Pereltsvaig (2002) we will take the following properties to be characteristic of argument NPs: (i) compatibility with strong determiners, (ii) pronominalization, and (iii) coordination.

Moreover, we suggest (i) wh-formation, (ii) word order and (iii) ability to take possessive as further tests to determine the (non-)argument status of COs. Let us take a look at each of these tests in order.

##### 4.1 Compatibility with Determiners

In her discussion of COs in Biblical Hebrew and Modern Hebrew, Pereltsvaig (2002:112) argues that there are two types of COs, i.e., argumental and adverbial COs and contends that unlike arg-COs in (13), adv-COs cannot occur with strong determiners, as shown in (14).

- (13) a. Weak Determiner + Arg-CO  
**akadnu rikudim** rabim / šney **rikudim**.  
 (we) danced dances many / two dances  
 ‘We danced many dances / two dances.’
- b. Strong Determiner + Arg-CO  
**rakadnu** ’et kol ha-**rikudim** /’et ha-**rikud** ha-ze.  
 (we) danced ACC all the-dances / ACC the-dance the-this  
 ‘We danced all the dances / most of the dances / this dance.’
- (14) a. Weak Determiner + Adv-CO  
 Tali **bikra** ’et Dani **bikurim** rabim / šney **bikurim**.  
 Tali visited ACC Danny visits many / two visits  
 ‘Tali visited Danny many times / twice.’
- b. Strong Determiner + Adv-CO  
 \*Tali **bikra** ’et Dani ’et kol ha-**bikurim** /’et ha-**bikur** ha-ze.  
 Tali visited ACC Danny ACC all the-visits / ACC the-visit the-this  
*Intended:* ‘Tali visited Danny all the visits/most of the visits/this visit.’

Sason Arabic differs from Hebrew in not allowing any type of determiner, weak or strong on cognate objects, as seen in (15a-b), which can typically occur on regular objects as illustrated in (15c).<sup>3</sup> This is an indication of the adverbial nature of the COs in Sason.

- (15) a. \*sabiyad **zak**-ten **zayo**.  
 boys laugh-two laughed.3pl  
 ‘The boys laughed two laughs.’
- b. \*sabiyad **zakad** kəllen **zayu**-en.  
 boys laughs all laughed.3pl-them

<sup>2</sup>Norbert Hornstein (p.c.) has pointed out the possibility of whether COs in Sason have the same function as in the sentence *Do you like her, or like like her?* in English, referred to as Contrastive Focus Reduplication (Ghomeshi et al 2004). As the data make it clear, COs in Sason are used in a much wider range of discourse-contexts and crucially, they do not require to be used in a contrastive focus construction (cf. Section 5.1).

<sup>3</sup>Since Sason cognates cannot occur with determiners or quantifiers, it is not possible to test them in terms of scope ambiguity, unlike Hebrew.

- ‘The boys laughed all the laughs.’<sup>4</sup>  
 c. *sabiyad axpeys-ten ayalo.*  
 boys bread-two ate.3pl  
 ‘The boys ate two loaves of bread.’

#### 4.2 Pronominalization

Now consider pronominalization. As shown in (16), COs in Sason cannot be pronominalized, in line with Pereltsvaig’s (1999) hypothesis.

- (16) a. \**ay zake qaddam, zay-a bəlqasti*  
 that laughing early laughed.3m-it on purpose  
 ‘That early laugh, he laughed it on purpose.’  
 b. *mase, cab-a ali ams.*  
 table brought.3m-it ali yesterday  
 ‘The table, Ali brought it yesterday.’

This contrasts with the regular direct objects in the language as in (16b), which can occur in the left peripheral domain of a clause and relate to a pronominal element inside the clause. This is the characterization of Clitic Left Dislocation (CLLD).

#### 4.3 The ability to take Possessive

COs in Sason are not compatible with possessive suffixes, as illustrated in (17).

- (17) a. \**faqzu fə xams daqqa faqaz.*  
 running-his in five minutes ran.3m  
 ‘He ran his run in five minutes.’  
 b. *faqəz-ma fə xams daqqa faqaz.*  
 running-a in five minutes ran.3m  
 ‘He ran a run in five minutes.’

This property also contrasts with the direct objects, which readily take possessives.

- (18) *faqazna tərəx-na fə xams daqqa.*  
 ran.1pl road-our in five minutes  
 ‘We ran our road in five minutes.’

#### 4.4 Coordination

Another test for the syntactic status of cognate objects is coordination, which is usually used as a test for “likeness”. In order for a coordinate structure to be grammatical the two conjuncts have to be of the same syntactic category and/or have the same semantic function.

- (19) a. *əbna [boş wa hab-ma gbir] təhabb-u.*  
 her son a lot and love-a big loves.3f-him  
 ‘She loves her son a lot and with big love.’  
 b. \**[faqəz wa tərəx] faqaze*  
 running and road ran.3f  
 ‘She ran a run and the road.’

Example (19) shows that the phrase containing the cognate object can be coordinated with an adverb, while in (19) the coordination of a regular object and a cognate object is ruled out.

<sup>4</sup>The only possible weak determiner is the enclitic *-ma*, which however needs to be followed by an adjective, such as *zake-ma gbir* ‘a big laugh’ or be used in the sense of ‘such a ...’. These two contexts also support the adverbial interpretation.

#### 4.5 Distribution

In languages such as English or French cognate objects appear in postverbal position, as do non-cognate direct objects.

- (20) a. He drank a drink.  
b. He drank a bottle of water.

However, cognate objects and non-cognate direct objects exhibit a distributional asymmetry in Sason. True non-specific objects can occur postverbally in neutral word order (21) (Akkuş and Benmamoun 2016), while COs of both unergatives and unaccusatives cannot occur in the postverbal position (22), thus, they behave differently than true object arguments.

- (21) zıxar ayalo dondurma  
kids ate.3pl ice cream  
'The kids ate ice cream.'
- (22) a. \*faqaztu faqız  
ran.1sg running  
'I ran a running.'  
b. \*şuşa inqaraf qarf  
glass broke.3m breaking  
'The glass broke a breaking.'

#### 4.6 Question Formation

The type of wh-words, i.e., *how* vs. *why*, can be used to question COs in SA provide another testing ground for the argument-adjunct distinction. COs in SA can only be questioned with the wh-word *ıştaba* 'how', but not with *şine* 'what', which can be used to question true objects. This implies that they are adverbials:

- (23) a. kemal **faqız**-ma ıştaba **faqaz**.  
kemal running-a how ran.3m  
'How a running did Kemal run?'  
b. badılcanad **pat**-ma ıştaba **patto**.  
tomatoes rotting-a how rottened.3pl  
'How a rotting did the tomatoes rotten?'

### 5 COs as rhematic material

The various tests applied in the previous section indicate that COs in Sason are adverbial in nature, hence are not part of the argument structure. However, they do not make immediate implications regarding the role of COs among predicate types. Nakajima (2006), who makes a distinction between argumental and adverbial COs, argues that only the COs of unergatives (24a), but not those of unaccusatives (24b) can be passivized, as only COs of unergatives are argumental.

- (24) a. A sound sleep was slept by the baby.  
b. \*A century's expansion was grown in only ten years by the tree trunk.

In Sason, however, both COs of unergatives and unaccusatives behave as non-argumentals. First, unlike English, no COs in SA can be the target for passivization.

- (25) a. \***nom** in-**nam**.  
sleep pass-slept  
'Sleep was slept.'



- b. \*pat            in-pat.  
 rotting        pass-rotted  
 ‘A rotting was rotted.’

Second, the coordination test in (19), repeated here as (26) also speaks against an argumental approach to COs in Sason since coordination of a direct object and a cognate object is disallowed, which would otherwise be expected if the COs had an argumental status.

- (26) \*faqəz    wa        tərex    faqaze.  
 running    and       road     ran.3f  
 ‘She ran a run and the road.’

The discussion so far leads to the conclusion that Sason allows non-argumental COs productively both in unergatives and unaccusatives, and COs cannot be a diagnostics for the predicate-type in Sason.

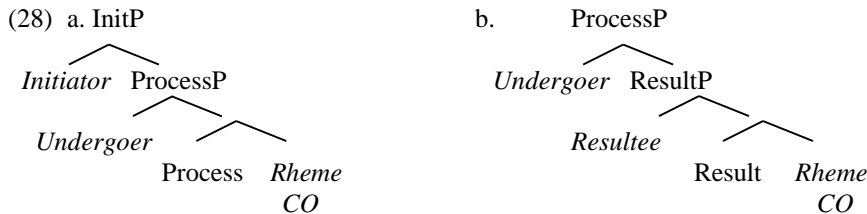
As COs in SA are not argumental, but behave more like adjuncts, as a working hypothesis, we argue that they constitute rhematic materials in the sense of Ramchand (2008). Ramchand decomposes events into three subevents and introduces the arguments in the specifiers of the projections associates with these subevents:

- initP introduces the causation event and licenses the external argument (‘subject’ of cause = INITIATOR)
- procP specifies the nature of the change or process and licenses the entity undergoing change or process (‘subject’ of process = UNDERGOER)
- resP gives the ‘telos’ or ‘result state’ of the event and licenses the entity that comes to hold the result state (‘subject’ of result = RESULTEE).

While ProcessP is obligatory for eventive verbs, the other two projects depending on the event type, and take arguments associated with these subevents as their subjects merged into their specifiers.

- (27) *kill*: [InitP [ProcessP [ResultP ] ] ]  
*dry*<sub>intrans.</sub>: [ProcessP [ResultP ] ]  
*walk*: [InitP [ProcessP ] ]

Ramchand classifies adjunct material which cannot act as the subjects of these subevents, but modify them, as Rhemes and introduces them in the complement position of these subevents. As COs are non-argumental in SA, they can only be introduced in the complement position of the relevant subevents as rhemes, i.e., as the material modifying the subevent, but never in the specifier position. We argue that COs that unergatives take are the rhemes of ProcessP (28a), while the ones in unaccusatives are the complements of ResultP (28b), modifying these subevents:



One question concerns the morphological shape of the COs. Gallego (2012) argues that cognate objects involve a doubling strategy, analogous to the one seen with clitics and floating quantifiers. Under this doubling account, both the real object and the double, are in the structure as a complex unit from the start.

The problem with this approach is that it fails to capture the overwhelming crosslinguistic pattern that the cognate objects are morphologically related to the verb.<sup>5</sup>

### 5.1 Discourse-properties of COs

Cognate objects are usually not felicitous in presentational focus contexts, as seen in (29), but tend to be used more in contrastive/corrective focus contexts as shown in (30) (See Akkuş, to appear, for focus in Sason):

- (29) Q: kemal şone sa?  
 kemal what did.3m  
 ‘What did Kemal do?’  
 A: axpeys (\*akəl) ayal.  
 bread eating ate.3m  
 ‘He ate bread (\*eating).’

- (30) axpeys akəl intiyel, var m-inver.  
 bread eating pass-eat throwing not-throw  
 ‘The bread is eaten, not thrown away.’

Moreover, COs can also be used for topicalization, which is again another crosslinguistic pragmatic context they are used in (31).<sup>6</sup>

- (31) qaru, ali ams kitab qaro-u.  
 reading ali yesterday book read.3m-it  
 ‘As for reading, Ali read the book yesterday.’

The following properties signal that COs can undergo A'-movement:

First, the dependency is unbounded, in that a CO can cross finite clause boundaries.

- (32) talu-ma koys, ma-qultni le nahar tala.  
 appearing-a beautiful neg-said.1sg that sun appeared.3m  
 ‘As for an beautiful appearance, you didn’t tell me that the sun appeared.’

Moreover, the dependency is island-sensitive.

- (33) Wh-island  
 ??qaru istaxbır-tu içax naze qare.  
 reading asked-1sg when naze read.3f  
 ‘As for reading, I asked when Naze read.’

- (34) Complex NP-island  
 ??qaru naze mi-tıqbel idda le qare.  
 reading naze neg-3f.accept claim that read.3f  
 ‘As for reading, Naze doesn’t accept the claim that she read.’

<sup>5</sup>As one reviewer suggested, based on this property, one might be tempted to give a verb-doubling or vP-copying account in the sense of Landau (2006), Cable (2004). The construction refers to instances where the verb is doubled, occurring both in the base position and in the fronted one. Crucially, the fronted one surfaces as an infinitive. In addition to the discussion in Section 4 where we showed a number of nominal properties related to COs, the fact that infinitival form is not at issue in the case of cognate objects speaks against such an approach.

<sup>6</sup>Note that it is not possible to front a complete DP, where the CO is the head, which is another aspect that differentiates COs from regular objects.

- (i) \*[qaru (le) kitab], ali ams qaro-u.  
 reading of book ali yesterday read.3m-it  
 ‘As for reading the book / reading of the book, Ali read yesterday.’

- (35) Adjunct -island  
 ??qaru mi-nımme milqawa le kul nes qara.  
 reading neg-1pl.go after that everybody read.3m  
 ‘As for reading, we will not go after everyone read.’

Therefore, COs in Sason show A’-dependencies.

## 6 Conclusion

The paper shows that COs in Sason Arabic are highly productive and are used in quite an unrestricted way: They are compatible with a wide range of predicates of various aspectual types, particularly unaccusatives.

We conclude that the highly productive and unrestricted use of COs in SA is due to their non-argument status and as such COs cannot be a testing ground for unergative-unaccusative distinction in the language.

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Department of Linguistics  
University of Pennsylvania  
Philadelphia, PA 19104–6305  
[akkusf@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:akkusf@sas.upenn.edu)

Department of Linguistics  
Boğaziçi University  
Istanbul, Turkey 34342  
[balkiz.ozturk@boun.edu.tr](mailto:balkiz.ozturk@boun.edu.tr)