The Middle Voice in Najdi Arabic: A Morphological Description

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Abstract

Voice category is an essential grammatical aspect of verb constructions in Linguistics. It is widely known that voice involves two main types: active and passive. However, there is a possibility of having a third grammatical voice known as the middle voice. Based on the relevant literature, the middle voice is a controversial topic that has aroused debate over its linguistic properties. This paper, therefore, aims to investigate some of the middle voice linguistic properties within a morphological context. More specifically, it attempts to identify the middle voice verb patterns and examine their existence using a linguistic test in one of the Arabic varieties, Najdi Arabic (NA). The middle voice morphological patterns that have been obtained in NA are *ʔinfiʕal, faʕal, fiʕal, ʔiftaʕal, tifaʕʕal, tifaːʕal,* and *tifaʕlal*. Moreover, this paper argues that the prefix *ʔin-* and *ti-* attached to certain middle voice verbs serve a detransitivising function.

Keywords: middle voice, Najdi Arabic, Arabic, morphological patterns.

الملخص

تعد صيغة الفعل واحدة من أهم العوامل المؤثرة على بناء الجملة في علم اللسانيات. عادة ما تشمل صيغة الفعل نوعين رئيسيين: المبني للمعلوم والمبني للمجهول. بيد أن هناك احتمالية وجود نوع ثالث يشير الى الصيغة التي تتوسط بين المبني للمعلوم والمبني للمجهول أو ما يعرف في كتب النحو والصرف بالمطاوعة. بناء على الدراسات السابقة، تعد ظاهرة المطاوعة أحد الموضوعات المثيرة للجدل التي أثارت خلافات متعددة حول خصائصها اللغوية. لذلك تهدف هذه الورقة إلى دراسة بعض خصائص المطاوعة اللغوية في إطار صرفي. وبشكل أدق، تسعى إلى تحديد أوزان أفعال المطاوعة والتحقق من استخدامها في اللهجة النجدية عن طريق تعيين اختبار لغوي. وقد توصلت الورقة إلى أن المطاوعة تشمل الأوزان الصرفية التالية: انفعل، فعل، فِعل، افتعل، تِفعّل، تفاعل، تِفعلل. وتوصلت، كذلك، إلى أن الملحقات البادئة إن- تِ- المتصلة ببعض أفعال المطاوعة تؤدي وظيفة اللزوم حيث تحول الفعل المتعدي الى لازم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المطاوعة، اللهجة النجدية، اللغة العربية، الأوزان الصرفية.

1. Introduction

The middle voice is a marked voice category found in many different languages (e.g., Greek, French and Arabic). Some characterising properties are typically attributed to the middle voice, such as preventing the agent argument in its construction. According to current linguistic research, this property has received a relatively broad consensus (e.g., Kemmer, 1993; Lekakou, 2005; Li, 2020; Manney, 2000). Manney (2000) points out that the absence of the agent argument in modern Greek is the main function of the middle voice. This leads the discussion to the concept of transitivity, which plays an important role in characterizing the middle voice constructions. It has been widely noted that the middle voice tends to have intransitive constructions in which the subject is a nonagent argument (Manney, 2000). Kemmer (1993) also argues that the middle voice is sometimes seen as a type of detransitiviser (i.e., syntactic intransitivity device). However, the relation between intransitivity and middle voice has exceptions as is the case with other linguistic aspects and phenomena. Middle voice verbs can sometimes be used in transitive constructions (Al-Wohaibi, 1994).

As stated above, the middle voice is, to a considerable extent, a cross-linguistic phenomenon that exists in many languages, including Standard Arabic (SA) and other Arabic varieties. This voice is interestingly complex and somewhat understudied in Arabic, particularly in modern linguistic literature. This is why the middle voice in Najdi Arabic (NA) has been chosen as the topic of this paper.

To form the middle voice in Arabic, the verb must undergo a morphological inflection process. Due to its rich verbal morphology, Arabic includes several fixed patterns for the middle voice. As argued by Halliday (2003), the middle voice should exist together with transitive verb sentences, and it has certain requirements, like specific verbs, specific aspects of a verb and specific NPs. To elaborate more on this, let us discuss the NA examples in (1) which show a comparison of the three voices: active, passive, and middle.

(1) a. *fitaħ*   *aħmad*   *l-ba:b*   (active voice)
   open.past-3.SG.M Ahmad   DEF-door
   'Ahmad opened the door.'
 b. *ftiħ*   *l-ba:b*   (passive voice)
   open.past-3.SG.M   DEF-door
   'The door opened.'
 c. *ʔinfitaħ*   *l-ba:b*   (middle voice)
   open.past-3.SG.M DEF-door.
   'The door opened.'

As can be seen in example (1.a), the transitive verb *fitaħ* 'open' in NA is used intransitively in (1.c) and morphologically changed to *ʔinfitaħ* 'opened' following the most common pattern of the middle voice verbs which is *ʔinfiʕal* in NA. The middle voice example in (1.c) includes only one argument *l-ba:b* 'the door' which is the subject here. However, this subject is not the doer of the action. Instead, it undergoes the expressed action. In other words, the NP *l- ba:b* 'the door' here is a nonagent subject.

The middle voice has been the subject of discussion in literature for decades; however, there is still debate on its significant aspects, such as its definition, underlying properties, and analysis (Alexiadou, 2014; Croft et al.,1987; Kemmer, 1993; Steinbach, 2002). This issue can be traced back to the obscurity of the middle voice's system besides its different markers, patterns, and applications. Also, the lack of sufficient research in the middle domain can be considered part of the problem. To fill this gap, this paper aims to identify the middle voice patterns in NA and distinguish them from other related voice categories. To achieve this objective, this paper seeks to answer the following research question.

 1. What are the morphological verb patterns of the middle voice used in NA?

Answering this research question involves presenting a morphological description of the middle voice verb patterns in NA supported by empirical evidence. These patterns are also examined using a proposed linguistic test to consider their existence in the middle voice.

The following sections are structured as follows. Section [2] discusses the relevant literature on the middle voice in Arabic. Section [3] provides an overview of the morphological patterns of the middle voice in NA. The basic patterns of the middle voice are presented in [3.3], and the other possible patterns are examined in [3.4] along with a discussion of the proposed linguistic test. Finally, section [4] draws the paper's conclusion.

2. Previous studies on the middle voice in Arabic

The origin of the middle voice phenomenon in Arabic is traditionally traced back to the concept of *l-mutˁawaˁah* (i.e., accepting other effects). This concept was introduced first in the eighth century by Sibawayh who used the verb *tˁawˁa* in his famously untitled grammatical text known as Al-Kitāb 'The Book'. Historically, grammarians defined *l-mutˁawaˁah* as a case in which the verb is *mutawiˁ* 'obedient' to (i.e., accepts the effect of) another verb. For instance, in (2.a), the verb *ʔinkasar* is obedient to the first verb *kasar*. Similarly, in (2.b), the verb *ʔinqatˁaˁ* is obedient to the verb *qatˁaˁ*.

(2) a. *kasar-tu*   *l-ba:b-a*   *fa*   *ʔinkasar-a*
      break.past-1.SG.M   DEF-door-ACC   and   break.past-3.SG.M
      Literally: 'I broke the door and it broke'.
    b. *qatˁaˁ-tu*   *l-ħabl-a*   *fa*   *ʔinqatˁaˁ-a*
      cut.past-1.SG.M   DEF-thread-ACC   and   cut.past-3.SG.M
      Literally: 'I cut the thread and it cut'.

Sibawayh also assigned five verb patterns of the middle voice in Arabic: *ʔinfaˁala, faˁala, tafaˁˁala, tafa:ˁala,* and *tafaˁˁlal*. In traditional Arab literature, the discussion of the middle voice is typically restricted to this view.

The recent research examining the middle voice in Arabic is still limited. Al-Wohaibi (1994) presented a brief description of the patterns and meanings of the middle voice in SA. He also revisited several properties of the middle voice that had already been discussed in traditional Arab literature.

Ajer (2015) analyzed the middle voice verbs in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) from a semantic view. Her analysis is based on the notion of affectedness (i.e., subject affectedness) as presented by Roberts (1987), among others. Affectedness is illustrated by the middle voice construction in example (3). The subject *this baseball* is an affected argument since it undergoes the event of movement.

(3) This baseball throws well.   (Roberts, 1987, p.206)

Another work is conducted by Shakir (2016), who presents a comparative study of the middle voice in English and Arabic. The similarities and differences between these languages were highlighted. He found that both English and Arabic use the ergative verb to form the middle voice verbs. However, these languages behave differently in the process of forming these verbs. In English, the middle verbs have the same forms as the active voice, whereas most Arabic middle verbs must undergo a morphological inflection, as in (4) and (5).

(4) *inkasar-a*   *l-qalam-u*
 break.past-3.SG.M   DEF-pen-NOM
 'The pen broke'.

(5) *irtafaʕ-at*   *l-asʕa:r-u*
    increase.past-3.SG.F   DEF-prices-NOM
    'Prices increased'.

As can be seen from this review, previous studies on the middle voice in Arabic focus mainly on SA from a traditional perspective. The current paper, however, will investigate another Arabic variety (i.e., NA) and aim to establish the morphological frame of this voice in NA in detail.

3. The morphological patterns of the middle voice in NA

3.1 An overview

This section addresses the morphological patterns of the middle voice in NA. It presents both the basic and possible patterns of the middle voice along with some of their characteristics, conditions, structures, and meanings which are supported by NA data.

3.2 Preliminary to Arabic morphology

Before proceeding to discuss linguistic properties of the middle voice in NA, some specification of the structure of SA verbs is needed here. It is commonly known that SA verbs are established by the nonconcatenative root and pattern-based morphology (Dahab et al., 2015; Islam et al., 2010). This means, as stated by Ajer (2015), that verbs are morphologically formed by the process of combining the root consonants together with different derived patterns which in turn include both vowels and consonants. The verb forms in SA typically employ three root consonants, ordered as follows: *f*, *ʕ* and *l*.

In SA, verbs are morphologically divided into two categories in the process of forming verb patterns: The base verb (*mujard*) keeps its original form, while the verb (*mazeed*) includes one or more letters or affixes added to its original form (Hamlawi, 1894). The middle voice patterns, in most cases, use an augmented verb form (*mazeed*). In other words, verbs are always inflected to form the middle voice in SA. These patterns are subdivided into three types of augmented triliteral verbs and two types of augmented quadriliteral verbs, summarised in Table 1. The augmented triliteral verb that includes one additional letter involves two patterns: *ʔfʕala* and *faʕʕal*. The augmented triliteral verb that includes two additional letters involves four patterns: *ʔinfaʕala, ʔiftaʕala, tafaʕʕala and tafa:ʕala.* The augmented triliteral verb that includes three additional letters indicates the pattern *ʔistafʕala*. The augmented quadrilateral verb that includes one additional letter stands for the pattern *tafaʕlala*, while the augmented quadrilateral verb that involves two additional letters is exemplified by the patterns: *ʔifʕanlal and ʔifʕanla:*. The existence and application of these patterns are examined in [3.4] to gain an insight into their existence and application in NA. Importantly, these patterns involve some modifications in NA, especially concerning the case marking and vowels.

Table 1. A summary of the middle voice verb patterns in SA

The patterns of the middle voice in SA				
Augmented triliteral verbs			Augmented quadriliteral verbs	
One additional letter	two additional letters	three additional letters	one additional letter	two additional letters
ʔfʕala *faʕʕal*	*ʔinfaʕala,* *ʔiftaʕala,* *tafaʕʕala* *tafaːʕala*	*ʔistafʕala*	*tafaʕlala*	*ʔifʕanlal* *ʔifʕanlaː*

3.3 The basic pattern of the middle voice in NA

Several fixed patterns are closely related to the middle voice in SA. These are the basic patterns exemplified by *ʔinfaʕala, ʔifʕanlal and ʔifʕanlaː*. However, *ʔifʕanlal and ʔifʕanlaː* are rarely found in NA, possibly because such patterns are difficult to pronounce. It is commonly argued that the pattern *ʔinfaʕala* has the greatest prevalence in the middle voice in SA (Ajer, 2015; Samarrai, 2017). In general, *ʔinfaʕala* is a widely spread pattern across the Semiotic languages, including Aramaic, Ethiopic and Hebrew (Al-Wohaibi, 1994). According to SA references on syntax and morphology, this pattern is commonly distinguished by expressing the meaning of *l-mutˤawaʕah*. Note that *al-hamzah* which is presented in *ʔinfaʕala, ʔifʕanlal* and *ʔifʕanlaː* has no relation to the meaning of *l-mutˤawaʕah,* nor any other meanings (Sibawayh, 1982). It is used only to satisfy a pronunciation requirement. Thus, distinguishing the patterns attached to *l-hamzah* as a form of *l-mutˤawaʕah* is beside the point.

Some Arab traditional grammarians (e.g., Sibawayh 1982; Hamlawi, 1894, among others) have concluded that the verb of the pattern *ʔinfaʕala* in SA must obey three requirements in order to be used in the middle voice. These requirements are based on the following. First, the verb of the pattern *ʔinfaʕala* must be derived from an augmented triliteral transitive verb that is used intransitively in the middle voice constructions. Second, the first consonant of the verb, like *f* in *faʕal*, must not include any of these sounds: *r, l, m, n* or *w*. Third, the verb must denote a physical movement (e.g., *ʔinkasara* 'broke' and *ʔinqatˤaʕa* 'broke'). Thus, abstract verbs like *ʔinfahama* 'understand' are unacceptable. In short, a verb is allowed to follow the pattern *ʔinfaʕala* if and only if it conforms to the previous requirements. Nevertheless, satisfying these requirements alone does not mean that a verb can follow the pattern *ʔinfaʕala*, as the choice to use this pattern is also determined by the appropriateness of the language use.

The middle voice constructions in (6) present an example of the pattern *ʔinfiʕal* in NA.

(6) a. *ʔindilag*   *l-baːb*
    open.past-3.SG.M   DEF-door
    'The door   slid open.'
  b. *ʔingitˤaʕ*   *l-ħabil*
    break.past-3.SG.M   DEF-thread
    'The thread broke.'

Verbs that follow the pattern *ʔinfiʕal* have the inflectional form of *l-mutˤawaʕah ʔin-* that precedes the stem. The prefix *ʔin-* requires the verb to appear in intransitive constructions, as shown in (6). It appears that the NA verbs *ʔindilag* and *ʔingitˤaʕ* both satisfy all the three requirements of the pattern *ʔinfaʕala* in SA, as

these verbs are originally in their basic form (*dilag* and *gitˤaˤ*) are augmented triliteral and involve transitive constructions. Furthermore, the first consonant of these verbs does not include the sounds *r, l, m, n* or *w.* Finally, both *ʔindilag* and *ʔingitˤaˤ* denote a physical movement.

In contrast, the NA verbs *ʔinmilaˤ* 'hurt' and *ʔinmisaħ* 'deleted'*,* in (7), violate the second condition of the pattern *ʔinfaˤala* in SA because these verbs include /m/ in the first position of the verb, which is prohibited.

(7) a. *ʔinmilaˤ*　　　　　　*l-walad*
　　　hurt.past-3.SG.M　　　DEF-boy
　　　'The boy hurt.'
　　b. *ʔinmisaħ*　　　　　　*l-ragm*
　　　delete.past-3.SG.M　　DEF-number
　　'The number was deleted.'

As shown in (7), the second condition of the middle voice in SA does not apply in the same way to the forms of the middle voice in NA.

3.4 Testing other possible patterns of the middle voice in NA

3.4.1 Introduction to the studied patterns and the proposed test

Beyond those discussed above, additional patterns can be observed in both the middle voice and other voice constructions, including *faˤal, ʔfˤal, fiˤal, tifaˤlal, ʔiftaˤal, tifa:ˤal, tifaˤˤal* and *ʔistafˤal*. The patterns that are discussed herein are not exclusively designated for the middle voice in that they can denote other meanings and uses in different voices. This subsection examines the existence of these patterns in the middle voice in NA by using a proposed diagnostic test. These patterns were selected because existing literature has often shown that this set of verbs is in the middle voice in SA (e.g., Al-Wohaibi, 1994; Samarrai, 2017; Hamlawi, 1894). As these patterns have been studied before, they will be employed here as linguistic models to distinguish middle voice constructions from active and passive ones, and determine whether these middle voice patterns are used in NA. It has been noted that the middle voice is commonly connected to the following situations: (a) its subject is acting upon itself; (b) having an implied controller in its construction is optional, not obligatory; (c) a spontaneous verb (that does not assign an agent role) or spontaneous event is used in its construction.

The spontaneous events involving a natural process are well-known in the literature as anticausatives (Ajer, 2015; Alexiadou & Doron, 2012; Allan, 2002; Kaufmann, 2007). However, the term *spontaneous events* is more appropriate for the middle voice since events are typically caused by something in real life (Ajer, 2015; Kemmer, 1993). Steinbach (2002) distinguished between middle voice constructions and anticausatives, noting that both the middle voice and anticausatives suppress the first arguments (do not assign an agent role). However, they behave differently regarding the first arguments in semantic representations: While anticausatives remove the first argument from such representations, the middle voice does not. Instead, the first arguments in the middle voice are restricted to generic operators. This contrast may presumably indicate that there is an underlying structural difference between anticausative and middle voice verbs.

In the middle voice, the prevention of overtly expressing the agent is commonly presented as a generalization. Therefore, it will be hypothesized here that it is possible for the constructions of the middle voice in NA to engage an implied agent. Following the nonagentivity of the middle voice subject, it has

been noted that some expressions such as *all by itself* and *on its own* cannot be added to the construction of the middle voice in English, as in (8) (Keyser & Roeper, 1984; Van Oosten, 1986, as cited in Davidse & Heyvaert, 2007). This argument is raised by the assumption that the middle voice necessarily involves an implied controller.

(8) a. The book read easily.

    b. The book read easily all by itself. *

To evaluate this argument, the expression *all by itself* is applied in both SA and NA, presented in (9) and (10), respectively. The expression *all by itself* corresponds to *min tilqaʔ nafsih* in SA and *min nafsah* in NA.

(9) *ʔinfataħa*   *l-ba:b-u*   *min tilqaaʔ-i nafsih*   (SA)
    open.past-3.SG.M   DEF-door-NOM   by itself
    'The door opened by itself.'

(10) *ʔinfitaħ*   *l-ba:b*   *min nafsah*   (NA)
    open.past-3.SG.M   DEF-door   by itself
    'The door opened by itself.'

The data presented in (9) and (10) reveal that expressions like *all by itself* can be used in the middle voice constructions of both SA and NA because the middle voice in both relates to situations with or without an implied controller. In other words, the expression *all by itself* in (9) and (10) is acceptable because the expressed situation (i.e., opening the door) can simply occur by itself, without an agent. Based on this finding, the test in (8) cannot be used to examine the data on the middle voice in NA. Instead, we apply a proposed variation of the agent modification test, which has been discussed by Mashaqba et al. (2020), that involves adding the NA adverb *imtaʕammid* 'intentionally', which requires an expressed agent. We propose that the adverb *imtaʕammid* 'intentionally' is unacceptable in the middle voice in NA. To clarify, this test excludes the construction that involves an expressed agent. For example, the pattern *faʕal* and its derived froms are used for the active, passive, and middle voices. To distinguish between these voices in NA, the adverb *imtaʕammid* is applied in (11).

(11) a. *fitaħ*   *saleh*   *l-ba:b*   *imtaʕammid*   (active voice)
    open.past-3.SG.M   Saleh   DEF-door   intentionally
    'Saleh opened the door intentionally.'

    b. *ftiħ*   *l-ba:b*   *imtaʕammid* *   (passive voice)
    open.past-3.SG.M   DEF-door   intentionally
    'The door opened intentionally.'

    c. *ʔinfitaħ*   *l-ba:b*   *imtaʕammid* *   (middle voice)
    open.past-3.SG.M   DEF-door   intentionally
    'The door opened intentionally.'

As shown in (11), the active voice allows the addition of adverb *imtaʕammid* to its construction, while the passive and middle voices do not. This is because the active voice involves an expressed controller, whereas the passive and the middle voices usually involve an implied controller. Despite this similarity, however, the passive and the middle voices also differ in certain respects. Alexiadou and Doron (2012) stated that the passive voice requires an implied controller, while this is not always the case with the middle voice. In other words, the middle voice allows for an implied controller in some cases, but it can also occur naturally as a spontaneous event for which there is no implied controller. In (11.c), *ʔinfitaħ l-ba:b* may occur by itself, whereas the passive verb *ftiħ* must have an implied controller that opened the door. Moreover, different verb forms are assigned to each of these non-active voices in NA. The passive voice takes the verb form *ftiħ* while the middle voice takes *ʔinfitaħ*. In general, the active voice tends to focus on the one who performs the action to place this entity (i.e., the agent) in the subject position. The passive voice focuses on presenting

an affected entity as a subject; thus, it is theme-oriented, or sometimes a patient. In contrast, the middle voice attends to describe the event at hand more than the related entity. Hence, although it shares certain similarities with the other voices, the middle voice holds a distinct position.

3.4.2 The pattern *faʕal*

The pattern *faʕal* has been addressed in the literature as a possible pattern of the middle voice in SA. *naːm* 'slept' and *tˤaːħ* 'fell' appear to be intransitive verbs that have affected subjects (*l-walad* and *l-galam*), presented in (12 a–b).

(12) a. *naːm*　　　　　　　*l-walad*
　　　　sleep.past-3.SG.M　　　DEF-boy
　　　　'The boy slept.'
　　b. *tˤaːħ*　　　　　　　*l-galam*
　　　　fall.past-3.SG.M　　　DEF-pen
　　　　'The pen fell.'
　　c. *raːħ*　　　　　　　*l-walad*
　　　　left.past-3.SG.M　　　DEF-boy
　　　　'The boy left.'

As discussed above, a variation of the agent modification test is applied by adding the adverb *imtaʕammid* in NA to assess the existence of the expressed agent. As shown in (13.a), the verb *naːm* 'slept', derived from the pattern *faʕal,* does not accept the insertion of the adverb *imtaʕammid* because sleeping is a subconscious action that does not involve an agent. Therefore, we suggest that *naːm* 'slept' is an intransitive verb that may belong to the middle voice and this applies more clearly to *tˤaːħ* as exemplified in (13.b). In contrast, the verb *raːħ* 'went' is a basic intransitive verb that cannot be used in the middle voice since it is an agent-oriented verb, as shown by the proposed test, in (13. c), where *raːħ* 'went' takes the adverb *imtaʕammid.*

(13) a. *naːm*　　　　　　*l-walad*　　*imtaʕammid* *
　　　　sleep.past-3.SG.M　　DEF-boy　　intentionally
　　　　'The boy slept intentionally.'
　　b. *tˤaːħ*　　　　　　*l-galam*　*imtaʕammid* *
　　　　fall.past-3.SG.M　　DEF-pen　intentionally
　　　　'The pen fell intentionally.'
　　c. *raːħ*　　　　　　*l-walad*　　*imtaʕammid*
　　　　left.past-3.SG.M　　DEF-boy　　intentionally
　　　　'The boy left intentionally.'

3.4.3 The pattern *ʔafʕal*

Another possible pattern is *ʔfʕal*. Compared to the previous pattern (*faʕal)*, *ʔfʕal* involves a morphological inflectional process in which the prefix *ʔ-* is attached to the stem *fʕal.* Based on the traditional SA literature, nine assigned meanings are attributed to the pattern *ʔfʕal,* one of which is *l-mutˤawaʕah*. However, there is a disagreement regarding applying the meaning of *l-mutˤawaʕah* for *ʔfʕal.* In other words, whether *l-mutˤawaʕah* can be a denotation of *ʔfʕal* remains controversial. Such debate is likely because *ʔfʕal* is subject to a causative meaning, which is a disfavoured denotation for the middle voice. To illustrate, consider the NA example in (14).

(14) a. *ʔftar*　　　　　　　*aħmad*　　*biːdˤ*
　　　　ate.past-3.SG.M　　　Ahmad　　eggs
　　　　'Ahmad ate eggs for breakfast.'

b. *Ɂftar*   *aḥmad*
   ate.past-3.SG.M   Ahmad
   'Ahmad ate breakfast.'

The pattern *Ɂfʕal* exemplified by *Ɂftar* 'eat breakfast', accepts both transitive and intransitive structures, as in (14. a–b). Let us now use the proposed test as shown in (15) to determine whether *Ɂfʕal* belongs to the middle voice in NA or not.

(15)   *Ɂftar*   *aḥmad*   *bi: dˤ*   *imtaʕammid*
     ate.past-3.SG.M   Ahmad   eggs   intentionally
     'Ahmad ate eggs for breakfast intentionally.'

The verb *Ɂftar*, derived from *Ɂfʕal*, can be used with the adverb *imtaʕammid* as shown in (15). This is so because the subject of *Ɂftar* is the initiator of the action (of eating breakfast). Thus, *Ɂftar* is not considered a middle voice verb. Other examples of the pattern *Ɂfʕal* include *Ɂgʕad* 'to sit someone down' and *Ɂkram* 'to honour someone', both of which can use the adverb *imtaʕammid*. Therefore, the pattern *Ɂfʕal* is excluded from being a middle voice verb in NA.

3.4.4 The pattern fiʕal

This pattern is less likely than some others to be associated with the middle voice in NA. Most of the Arab linguists who have discussed the topic of *l-mutʕawaʕah* did not account for the pattern *fiʕal* in SA. An example of *fiʕal* in NA is given in (16).

(16) a. *kibar*   *moḥamad*
     grow up.past-3.SG.M   Mohamad
     'Mohamad grew up.'

   b. *sˤibar*   *moḥamad*
     wait.past-3.SG.M   Mohamad
     'Mohamad waited.'

The examples in (17) can be attributed to a middle voice construction in which there is an intransitive structure that involves a nonagent subject. Therefore, the linguistic test is applied to determine whether this pattern is a middle voice verb in NA. The proposed linguistic test is shown in (17), where the verb *kibar* 'grow up', derived from *fiʕal*, rejects the addition of the adverb *imtaʕammid*. This is because the action of the verb *kibar* (i.e., growing up) is a natural process that happens to all human beings without involving an agent. Thus, *kibar* is an intransitive verb that does not require an implied or expressed agent. Furthermore, the NP *Mohamad* appears to act upon itself, which is a feature ascribed to the subject of the middle voice. In sum, based on the proposed linguistic test presented in (17), *kibar* is considered a middle voice verb in NA.

(17)   *kibar*   *moḥamad*   *imtaʕammid* *
     grow up.past-3.SG.M   Mohamad   intentionally
     'Mohamad grew up intentionally.'

   In contrast, *figad* 'missed' and *simaʕ* 'heard' are transitive verbs that share the same pattern *fiʕal*, as exemplified in (18). These verbs can take two arguments: a subject and a direct object.

(18) a. *figad*   *aḥmad*   *a:bu:h*
     miss.past-3.SG.M   Ahmad   his father
     'Ahmad missed his father.'

   b. *simaʕ*   *moḥamad*   *l-salfah*
     hear.past-3.SG.M   Mohamad   DEF-story
     'Mohamad heard the story.'

Going back to the proposed test, if *imtaʕammid* is added to the verb *figad* 'miss', as in (19.a), is unacceptable because the NP Ahmad here has an experiencer role that appears to have no control over the described action. Therefore, *figad* 'miss' is an emotional verb that can fall within the middle voice. The same also relatively applies to the verb *simaʕ* as in the example (19.b) suggesting that it can be a middle verb too.

(19) a. *figad*   *aḥmad*   *a:bu:h*   *imtaʕammid* *
      miss.past-3.SG.M   Ahmad   his father   intentionally
      'Ahmad missed his father intentionally.'
    b. *simaʕ*   *mohamad*   *l-salfah*   *imtaʕammid* *
      hear.past-3.SG.M   Mohamad   DEF-story   intentionally
      'Mohamad heard the story intentionally.'

3.4.5 The pattern ʔiftaʕal

The fourth possible pattern is *ʔiftaʕal*. This triliteral stem is built by adding the prefix *ʔi-* and the infix *-t-*. To illustrate, NA examples of *ʔiftaʕal* are given in (20).

(20) a.   *ʔirtafaʕ-at*   *ḥarartah*
      increase.past-3.SG.F   his temperature
      'His temperature increased.'
    b. *ʔiʃtaɣal*   *l-telefezu:n*
      turn on.past-3.SG.M   DEF-television
      'The television turned on.'
    c. *ʔiʃtaɣal*   *l-ʕamil*
      work.past-3.SG.M   DEF-worker
      'The worker worked.'

ʔiftaʕal is considered both a transitive, like *ʔiʃtara:* 'buy' and *ʔixta:ra* 'choose', and an intransitive verb in the literature on SA. However, it must be intransitive when used in *l-mutʕawaʕah*. This point is shown in (20), in which *ʔirtafaʕ* and *ʔiʃtaɣal* can take only one argument.

The SA pattern *ʔiftaʕala* is frequently used in the middle voice constructions and can be seen as an alternative form of the pattern *ʔinfaʕala* (Al-Wohaibi, 1994). If any of the sounds *r*, *l*, *m*, *n* or *w* is involved in the first consonant of the verb, *ʔiftaʕal* is applied instead of *ʔinfiʕal*. This rule could explain why the verb *irtafaʕ* matches the pattern *ʔiftaʕal* rather than *ʔinfiʕal*. The pattern *ʔiftaʕal,* unlike *ʔinfiʕal,* does not require a physical movement denotation and adopts both concrete and abstract verbs. For instance, *ʔijtamaʕ* 'met' and *ʔintafaʕ* 'benefited' involve different denotations. The former denotes a physical action, while the latter denotes a nonphysical action, yet both are accepted.

To examine the existence of the pattern *ʔiftaʕal* in the middle voice in NA, the proposed linguistic test is applied to the examples in (21). In (21.a), the addition of the adverb *imtaʕammid* cannot acceptably be added to the verb *ʔirtafaʕ*, derived from the pattern *ʔiftaʕal*. The verb *ʔiʃtaɣal* is shown in two different constructions, given in (21.b–c). In (21.b), the adverb *imtaʕammid* is not acceptable, while in (21.c) it is quite permitted. The NP *l-telefezu:n* 'the television', unlike *l-ʕamil* 'the worker', is an inanimate subject that cannot act on purpose. In other words, the NP in (21.b) does not fulfil the agent role. Therefore, the data in (21.b) is classified as a middle voice construction. This test suggests that some verbs that follow the pattern *ʔiftaʕal* can be used in the middle voice in NA with a nonagent subject.

(21) a. *Ɂirtafaʕ-at*   *ħarartah*   *imtaʕammid* *
     increase.past-3.SG.F   his temperature   intentionally
     'His temperature increased intentionally.'

    b. *Ɂiʃtaɣal*   *l-telefezuːn*   *imtaʕammid* *
     turn on.past-3.SG.M   DEF-television   intentionally
     'The television turned on intentionally.'

    c. *Ɂiʃtaɣal*   *l-ʕamil*   *imtaʕammid*
     work.past-3.SG.M   DEF-worker   intentionally
     'The worker worked intentionally.'

3.4.6 The pattern tifaʕʕal

Tifaʕʕal is derived from the pattern *faʕʕal* by adding the prefix *ti-*. These additional affixes raise the question of whether the prefix *ti-* and the infix *-ʕ-*, when attached to the root of the verb, fulfil a semantic or syntactic function. The infix *-ʕ-* is formed by duplicating second radicals and seems to have no syntactic function. It can be used to exaggerate or emphasise. According to Danks (2011), the prefix *ta-* attached to the root consonants of a verb has a detransitivising function in SA. To assess this assumption, examples of the pattern *tifaʕʕal* in NA are presented in (22).

(22) a. *tiɣaiyyar*   *l-ʒaw*
     change.past-3.SG.M   DEF-weather
     'The weather changed'.

    b. *tikawwam*   *l-ɣbar*
     gather.past-3.SG.M   DEF-dust
     'The dust gathered.'

    c. *tiʒaddad*   *l-ʕagd*
     renew.past-3.SG.M   DEF-contract
     'The contract renewed'

    d. *tigatˤtˤaʕ*   *l-ħabil*
     broke.past-3 SG.M   DEF-thread
     'The thread broke.'

The verbs presented in (22) are derived from transitive verbs, which are *ɣaiyyar* 'changed', *kawwam* 'gathered', *ʒaddad* 'renewed' and *gatˤtˤaʕ* 'broke'. However, the attachment of the prefix *ti-* acts as a detransitivising device, allowing these verbs to then be used intransitively. Consequently, the assumption by Danks (2011) that the prefix *ta-* involves a detransitivising function is confirmed in NA. Moreover, the examples in (22) show the meaning of *l-mutˤawaʕah*, as the verbs' subjects accept being affected by the action.

    In testing the pattern *tifaʕʕal,* the verbs *tiɣaiyyar* 'changed' and *tiħatˤtˤam* 'disappointed', presented in (23), fail to accept the addition of adverb *imtaʕammid* because *l-ʒaw* and *l-walad* are not the doers of the action. This suggests that the verbs *tiɣaiyyar* and *tiħatˤtˤam* are middle voice verbs. The same applies to the verbs *tikawwam*, *tiʒaddad* and *tigatˤtˤaʕ*.

(23) a. *tiɣaiyyar*   *l-ʒaw*   *imtaʕammid* *
     change.past-3.SG.M   DEF-weather   intentionally
     'The weather changed intentionally.'

    b. *tiħatˤtˤam*   *l-walad*   *imtaʕammid**
     disappoint.past-3.SG.M   DEF-boy   intentionally
     'The boy disappointed intentionally.'

3.4.7 The pattern tifa:ʕal

The pattern *tifa:ʕal* is built by inserting the prefix *ti-* as well as the long vowel *-a:-* as an infix to the root of the verb. According to the traditional SA literature, the pattern *tifa:ʕal* selects one of four meanings, two of which are reciprocity and *l-mutʕawaʕah*. Examples of the pattern *tifa:ʕal* in NA are given in (24).

(24) a. *tiʕa:fa:*   *l-mari:dˤ*
         recover.past-3.SG.M   DEF-patient
         'The patient recovered [from being ill].'
    b. *tidˤa:rab*   *l-waladi:n*
        fight.past-3.SG.M   DEF-boys.P
        'Two boys have fought.'
    c. *tiʒa:hal*   *l-walad*   *l-mukalmah*
        ignore.past-3.SG.M the-boy   DEF-call
        'The boy ignored the call.'

Presented in (24.b–c), *tidˤa:rab* and *tiʒa:hal*, which follow the pattern *tifa:ʕal*, appear to have both a reciprocal and *l-mutʕawaʕah* meaning because these verbs involve two entities. In addition to the reciprocal meaning, the examples in (24) include the meaning of *l-mutʕawaʕah*, in which the subject of the verbs accepts the effect of the action, without which the action of the verb would not exist. In other words, without accepting the effect of recovering, fighting, and ignoring, none of the verbs listed in (24) will occur.

The proposed linguistic test is applied to the pattern *tifa:ʕal*, presented in (25 a–b). In (25.a), *tiʕa:fa:* 'get well' does not align with the adverb *imtaʕammid* because the subject *l-mari:dˤ* has no control over the process of recovery. However, in (25. b), the adverb *imtaʕammid* fits well with the verb *tidˤa:rab*. Hence, we argue that *tiʕa:fa:* is a middle voice verb, while *tidˤa:rab* is not. Note that the adverb *imtaʕammdi:n* is adjusted to agree in number and gender with the NP *l-waladi:n*.

(25) a. *tiʕa:fa:*   *l-mari:dˤ*   *imtaʕammid* *
         recovered.past-3.SG.M   DEF-patient   intentionally
         'The patient recovered [from being ill] intentionally.'
    b. *tidˤa:rab*   *l-waladi:n*   *imtaʕammdi:n*
        fight.past-3.SG.M   DEF-boys.P   intentionally
        'The two boys have fought intentionally.'

3.4.8 The pattern ʔistafʕal

ʔistafʕal is derived by adding the prefix *ʔis-* and the infix *-ta-*. Typically, the consonant /s/ signifies the meaning of seeking something in SA. This is also the case in NA; for example, the consonant /s/ in the verb *ʔistagbal* (26.a), means that the subject of the verb seeks to face the direction of *l-giblah*.

(26) a. *ʔistagbal*   *moḥamad*   *l-giblah*
         face.past-3.SG.M   Mohamad   DEF-giblah
         'Mohamad faced al-giblah.'
    b. *ʔistaɣrab*   *aḥmad*   *ʃakil sˤidi:gah*
        marvel.past-3.SG.M   Ahmad   his friend appearance
        Ahmad marveled at his friend's appearance.'
    c. *ʔistaɣrab*   *aḥmad*
        marvel.past-3.SG.M   Ahmad
        'Ahmad marveled.'

The prefix *ti-* is included in *tifaʕʕal* and *tifa:ʕal* while the infix *-ta-* is included in *ʔistafʕal* in NA. Does the morpheme /t/ used in these affixes fulfil the same function? As stated before, the prefix *ti-* has a detransitivising function. However, the examples in (26) show that the infix *-ta-* can occur in both transitive and intransitive structures, which suggests that the detransitivising function does not apply to the infix *-ta-*.

Hence, the function involved in the prefix *ti-* is not equivalent to that of the infix *-ta-*, although, these affixes do share the denotation of *l-mutˤawaˤah*.

To examine the data presented so far, consider the linguistic proposed test in (27).

(27) a. ʔistagbal   mohamad   l-giblah   imtaˤammid
   face.past-3.SG.M   Mohamad   DEF-giblah   intentionally
   'Mohamad faced al-giblah intentionally.'

  b. ʔistaɣrab   aḥmad   ʃakil sˤidiːgah   imtaˤammid
   marvel.past-3.SG.M   Ahmad   his friend appearance   intentionally
   'Ahmad marvelled at his friend's appearance intentionally.'

In (27.a–b), the verbs *ʔistagbal* and *istaɣrab* follow the pattern *ʔistafˤal*. The two accepts the adverb *imtaˤammid* as it involves a controller who performed the action intentionally. Hence, we can conclude that neither is a middle voice verb.

3.4.9 The pattern tifaˤlal

The pattern *tifaˤlal* could potentially be used in the middle voice of NA. It is formed by adding the prefix *ti-* to the quadrilateral stem *faˤlal*. However, the pattern *tifaˤlal* is uncommon in SA, and specifically in NA. Examples of *tifaˤlal* in NA include *tiħaruːl* 'being disabled' and *tizalzal* 'quaked', given in (28).

(28) a. tiħaruːl   l-raʒil
   cripple.past-3.SG.M   DEF-man
   'The man became crippled [being disabled].'

  b. tizalzal   l-ħaiː
   quake.past-3.SG.M   DEF-neighborhood
   'The neighborhood quaked.'

As shown in (28), the verbs *tiħaruːl and tizalzal* do not take a complement which could be attributed to the addition of the prefix *ti-*. As stated before, the prefix *ti-* added to the verb form fulfils a detransitivising function. This function is considered in the examples in (28).

The next step is to examine the pattern *tifaˤlal*, exemplified by the verb *tiħruːl*, by inserting the adverb *imtaˤammid*. The adverb *imtaˤammid* cannot be attached to the verb *tiħruːl*, as shown in (29). Typically, the state of being disabled exists from birth or because of an accident, both of which lack control and do not involve an agent subject. Therefore, this verb is considered a middle voice verb.

(29) tiħaruːl   l-raʒil   imtaˤammid *
   cripple.past-3.SG.M   DEF-man   intentionally
   'The man became crippled intentionally.'

3.4.10 Summary

Based on what has been discussed so far in sections [3.3] and [3.4], we can conclude that the morphological patterns that can be used in the middle voice in NA are *ʔinfiˤal, faˤal, fiˤal, ʔiftaˤal, tifaˤˤal, tifaːˤal,* and *tifaˤlal*. These patterns are shown in Table 2 together with their examples.

Table 2. A summary showing the default pattern *ʔinfiˤal* together with the other possible patterns of the MV in NA

Pattern	*ʔinfiˤal*	*faˤal*	*fiˤal*	*ʔiftaˤal*	*tifaˤˤal*	*tifaːˤal*	*tifaˤlal*
Example	*ʔindilag* (opened)	*naːm* (slept)	*kibar* (grew)	*ʔirtafaˤ* (increased)	*tiɣaiyyar* (changed)	*tiˤaːfaː* (recovered)	*tizalzal* (quaked)

It is worth noting at this juncture that middle voice verbs are sometimes divided into oppositional and non-oppositional middle verbs. In the former class, the middle verbs have their non-middle counterparts from which they are morphologically derived. On the other hand, the non-oppositional middle verbs do not have non-middle counterparts and they are inherently middle. This classification is discussed in languages such Spanish and Greek (Moreno, 2023; Inglese, 2022). One might ask here if we can link this dichotomy to the middle voice verbs in NA which are summarized here in table (2). Based on the examples discussed in the previous sections, the situation seems a bit vague. This could be due to the rich morphological system of Arabic. However, we may say that the plausible and short answer to this is that all middle voice verbs in NA have their non-middle counterparts. There is not a clear instance of a verb that is inherently middle and not morphologically derived or connected to a non-middle one. For example, the verb *infitaħ* which is an example of the most commonly used pattern *ʔinfiʕal* is derived from *fitaħ*. For the other less frequently used patterns, we have seen that sometimes even the same middle voice verbs may be used in a non-middle construction and here comes the reason behind the test that is proposed in this paper to distinguish between middle and non-middle verbs in such constructions.

4. Conclusion

This paper addressed some of the plausible characterizing properties of the patterns of the middle voice in NA. The single most striking observation to emerge from the data is that the middle voice constructions in NA generally have one argument. It has also been shown that the prefix *ta-* attached to the root consonants of some middle voice verbs has a detransitivising function in NA. To make a distinction between middle and non-middle verbs in NA, the paper has proposed a linguistic diagnostic test where we apply a modified version of the agent modification test. This test assumes that the adverb *imtaʕammid* cannot be added to middle voice constructions because *imtaʕammid* requires an expressed agent that carries out the action intentionally, which is not allowed in the middle voice.

In addition to the pattern *ʔinfiʕal* which can be described as the basic and the most frequently used pattern in the middle voice in NA, we find that most of the patterns described in this paper can pass the test and, therefore, can be used in the middle voice, except the patterns *ʔfʕal* and *ʔistafʕal*. Hence, we can conclude that the morphological patterns of the middle voice in NA are *ʔinfiʕal, faʕal, fiʕal, ʔiftaʕal, tifaʕʕal, tifaːʕal,* and *tifaʕlal*. It has been observed that the middle voice verbs have a form of connection to the verbs of emotion, recovery, disability, and spontaneity. It has also been shown that the middle voice in NA is related to the entities that lack control and act upon themselves.

Identifying the patterns of the middle voice verbs in NA and describing them morphologically can pave the way for future research in this interesting topic especially from the perspective of syntax and semantics. For example, one may wonder at which derivational stage middle voice verbs emerge. Will middle verbs and their argument(s) be derived similarly to those of the active or the passive constructions? Another important question is how to account for the structural similarities and differences between middle voice and anticausative verbs. Answering these questions and other relevant ones will enrich the ongoing research on this topic as the current paper has attempted to.

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