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Verb Doubling in Najdi Arabic

Sami Alharbi

Independent Researcher

Email: L-se@hotmail.com

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Abstract

It has been observed that verb doubling occurs in different languages, although there are some differences in the form of the construction that make it difficult to explain within a theory that views verb doubling as a manifestation of multiple-copy spell-out. In this paper, I present novel evidence concerning Najdi Arabic and discuss the distribution, morphosyntactic properties, and meaning of doubled participles. The construction seems to occur only with participles and to have a future-oriented meaning close to that of contrastive focus. There are regular restrictions on the placement of the copy relative to the object, the use of object clitics, and the definiteness of the object: in the case of post-object copies, the use of a clitic is required when the object is definite, whereas a pre-object copy excludes the use of clitics. Copy adjacency with nominal complements is possible but not obligatory, whereas it is obligatory with clausal complements. Negation shows that the additional copy contributes semantically to the construction independently of the lexical verb, since negation affects only the former. All these properties cast doubt on attempts to explain all aspects of the construction using solely the Copy Theory of Movement. Based on Müller's analysis of the phonological-copying mechanism, I propose treating the copying morpheme *p* as a lexical item that inherits morphosyntactic and phonological properties from the verb without losing its own semantics. Thus, my account takes into consideration the similarities between the grammatical behavior of the lexical verb and its copy, although the copy's lexical category and syntactic locality restrictions still need to be investigated. Generally speaking, the case of Najdi Arabic shows that cross-linguistic verb doubling is not merely the spell-out of the same verb twice.

Keywords: Najdi Arabic; verb doubling; predicate doubling; reduplication; Copy Theory of Movement.

1 INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of verbal doubling has received considerable attention in the literature (Ghmeshi et al. 2004; Saab 2017; Müller 2021, among many others). It is also attested cross-linguistically (see (1)). However, for a better understanding of the phenomenon, it is useful to have diverse data from more languages that exhibit verb doubling. This paper does precisely that.

(1) a.

Vino	Juan,	vino
Came	Juan,	Came

'Juan Came!' (Río de la Plata Spanish, Saab 2017)

b.

Liknot	hi	kantav	et	ha-praxim
to.buy	she	bought	ACC	the-flowers.

'As for buying, she bought the flowers.' (Hebrew, Landau 2006)

c.

È	andato	a	Parigi,	è	andato.
is	gone	to	Paris	is	gone.

'He really did go to Paris.' (Italian, Gulli 2003)

In this paper, I present and analyze novel data pertaining to verb doubling from Najdi Arabic. Najdi Arabic is the spoken variety of Arabic in the Najd Region in Saudi Arabia, and it is spoken by 10 million people today. The canonical verb order in NA is SVO, unlike what's usually presumed by non-speakers (VSO is canonical almost exclusively to Modern Standard Arabic). Word order can be so flexible in NA (allowing VSO, VSO, OVS, for example), that this is not directly relevant to the discussion at hand, so it will be set aside. Similarly, although NA exhibits inflection agreement on verbs, it is irrelevant because the doubling is applicable to participle verbs only. For this reason, glossing is not going to be so faithful to the morphology, and words will be glossed to their closest English counterpart if possible (e.g., the non-animate object clitic can be masculine, so I will gloss it as "he"), to simplify exposition and keeping only what's directly relevant.

In section 2, the data is presented and discussed. Afterward, in section 3, I discuss the relevant literature and the proposed analyses for verb doubling cross-linguistically. Section 4, relying on candidate analyses, is an attempt to develop an account of the Najdi Arabic data. Lastly, in section 5, I conclude the paper.

2 The Data

This section sets the empirical ground and explores verb doubling in Najdi Arabic. The data is presented here and relevant aspects of the phenomenon are highlighted before moving on to developing an account of the NA facts.

2.1 Basics

In NA, verb doubling is productive but it has a set of grammatical constraints that are explored in the next subsections. Basically, verb doubling can be shown in its very basic form in sentences like (2) below.

(2)

ana
Idʒa:j
comingdʒa:j
coming

'I'm coming anyway'

It might be relevant to reiterate and show that this form is tenseless (participle), as we see from the grammaticality in (3).

(3)

ana dʒa:j ams/alhi:n/bukrah

I coming yesterday/now/tomorrow

'I came yesterday/I'm coming now/I will come tomorrow.'

However, it must be kept in mind that: 1) this is the only form that can be doubled (tensed verbs will result in ungrammaticality); and 2) when this form is doubled, it's always interpreted in the future tense only (even though, as (3) demonstrated, it can be interpreted in any tense if not doubled). These notes may be key to further morphological insight into this particular phenomenon.

2.2 Transitive Verbs and Structure

More exploration is due to the transitive verb doubling in particular because it shows relevant patterns. (4), for example, shows that a transitive verb can be doubled and the additional copy can appear before or after the complement. This means the copies' adjacency is optional, at least here.

(4)

{ʃa:ri}
Buyingʃa:ri
buyingakəl
food{ʃa:ri}
buying

'I will buy food anyway.'

Furthermore, things get complicated when the object is definite. In (5) below, there appears an obligatory object clitic on the copy when the object is definite. Also, note that the clitic cannot manifest on the copy if the object is indefinite, as seen in (6).

(5)

ʃa:ri
Buyingal-akəl
the-foodʃa:ri-h
buying-him

'I will buy the food anyway.'

(6)

*ʃa:ri
Buyingakəl
foodʃa:ri-h
buying-him

'I will buy food anyway.'

Interestingly, though, adjacency is optional for copies when the object is definite, but the clitic manifestation restrictions diverge accordingly.

(7)

ana
I{ʃa:ri:(*-h)}
buying-himʃa:ri
buyingal-be:t
the-house{ʃa:ri:*(-h)}
buying-him

'I will definitely buy the house.'

(7) shows robustly that the clitic is prohibited if the copy proceeds the object but obligatory if it follows the definite object. This is not exclusive to verb doubling phenomena in Najdi Arabic. If the object proceeds the verb (via topicalization for example), it must have a pronominal object clitic that refers to the object, as demonstrated in (8).

- (8) a.
- | | | |
|-----------|-----|-------------|
| al-be:t | ana | ʃa:ri:*(-h) |
| The-house | I | bought-him. |
- 'As for the house, I bought it.'
- b.
- | | | |
|-----|-------------|------------|
| ana | ʃa:ri:*(-h) | al-be:t |
| I | bought-him | the-house. |
- 'I bought the house.'

This parallelism suggests that the copy is not merely a phonological unit with no grammatical content. This will be relevant below.

Lastly, the optionality of adjacency seems to be sensitive CPs, which makes it obligatory. (9) shows that copies of the verb must be adjacent when a CP follows. This could be argued that it is because of the size of the CP, but, as shown in (10), complex DPs do not enforce adjacency even if they were larger than CP (compare the size of the CP in (9) and the DP in (10)).

- (9)
- | | | | | | |
|--------|----------|--------|----------|--------|-----------|
| χa:lid | {ga:jəl} | ga:jəl | [CP in-k | æbt] | {*ga:jəl} |
| Khalid | saying | saying | that-you | absent | saying |
- 'Khalid is surely going to say you were absent.'

- (10)
- ana {ʃa:ri} ʃa:ri [DP al-səjja:rah al-ħamra elli gədda:m-i] {ʃa:ri:-ha}
- I buying buying the-car the-red that front-me buying-her
- 'I will definitely buy the red car that's in front of me.'

Furthermore, and even more crucially, the same parallelism found in clitic-obligatoriness above between verbs in non-doubled structures and copies in doubled-structures in behavior is attested here, too. See the contrast between (10) and (11a) and between (9) and (11b)

- (11) a.
- ana {ʃa:ri} [DP al-səjja:rah al-ħamra elli gədda:m-i] {ʃa:ri:-ha} ams
- I buying the-car the-red that front-me buying-her yesterday
- 'I bought the red car that's in front of me yesterday.'
- b.
- | | | | | | |
|--------|----------|----------|--------|-----------|---------|
| χa:lid | {ga:jəl} | [CP in-k | æbt] | {*ga:jəl} | al-jo:m |
| Khalid | saying | that-you | absent | saying | today |
- 'Today, Khalid said you were absent.'

In (11a), where the DP proceeds with the verb, the sentence is still grammatical, similar to (10) where the copy is allowed to appear after the DP, regardless of its size. Similar parallelism is found in (11b) where the verb cannot follow the CP and (9) where the verb copy cannot appear

These observations support the idea that the copy is not merely phonological and can have robust grammatical properties similar to lexical verbs. The decision if it is actually lexical, morphological, or phonological is pending for now to be discussed in due course below.

2.3 Meaning

In connection with the previous suspicion that the copy is more than just mere phonological repetition, we turn to the semantics of the copy to have better insight. That is if we established that the additional copy has independent semantic content on its own, it might give support to the possibility that it is a lexical item rather than otherwise.

For example, the pair in (12) shows how doubling gives meaning that was not there in the non-doubled example. Though, it must be noted when the participle is not doubled and there are no temporal adverbs, it is typically interpreted in the present tense. For that reason, (12a) has a temporal adverbial to minimize differences between the pairs in (12).

- (12) a.
- | | | | | |
|-----|-------|------|-------|----------|
| hu: | baʕd | ʃwaj | ma:ʃi | ad-dwa:m |
| He | after | bit | going | the-work |
- 'He is going to work in a bit.'
- b.
- | | | | |
|-----|-------|-------|----------|
| hu: | ma:ʃi | ma:ʃi | ad-dwa:m |
| He | going | going | the-work |
- 'He's going to work anyway.'

In most cases, verb doubled structures function like contrastive focus in response to something in context/discourse. By contrasting doubled and non-doubled verbs, the added meaning is clearer. In the examples of English in (13), the underlined adverbs are the closest equivalents of the copy of the verb in context (if we were to translate similar conversation to NA, doubling would be used to convey the meaning of the underlined adverbs).

- (13) a.
- Speaker B is giving speaker A a ride to a place to which she intended to go.
- A: Sorry for the trouble!
- B: It's okay, I am going there anyway
- b.
- A: I think you should reconsider going home next week?
- B: I'm definitely going.

Further support for the copy's semantic independence comes from negation. First, we should consider the scope of negation in (14).

- (14) a.
- John does not speak.
- b.
- John does not speak loudly.

Intuitively, we know that in (14b) John still speaks but not loudly. This means it was the adverb that was negated and the verb remained intact. Similarly, consider (15).

(15) a.

χa:lid	ma:-hu	mda:wəm	bukrah
Khalid	NEG-he	working	tomorrow

'Khalid is not going to work tomorrow'

b.

χa:lid	ma:-hu	mda:wəm	mda:wəm
Khalid	NEG-he	working	working

'Khalid is not definitely working.'

In (15b), what is inferred is that Khalid is still working as normally as every other day, there is no reason to think it is definite or 100% sure. It is, thus, safe to conclude that negation negated the copy rather than the verb, similar to the English examples in (14). The scope of negation here seems to give even further support to the idea that the copy has its own semantic content, which in turn gives more support to the assumption that it's a lexical item with independent semantics and syntactic distribution.

Given the data above, the next section attempts to account for verb doubling and explore competing frameworks that are relevant to predicate doubling in general.

3 DISCUSSION

3.1 Against the Copy Theory of Movement

Predicate doubling has been attested in a number of languages and is by no means a rare phenomenon. Because of the diverse data cross-linguistically, there are more than one framework that is proposed to account for the phenomenon. Different analyses have either adopted the Copy Theory of Movement (Chomsky 1981, 1993, 2008) or the Prosodic Morphological approach to reduplication (McCarthy & Prince 1994). While Prosodic Morphology is discussed in the following subsections, here I limit the discussion to the other framework, namely the Copy Theory of Movement (CTM) approach to predicate doubling.

Verb doubling phenomena have been accounted for within the framework of CTM (Kandybowicz 2007, 2008; Biberauer 2009; Saab 2017, among many others). In essence, loosely and informally defined, CTM claims that syntactic movements are a result of copying and deleting copies of the constituent until only one copy is spelled out while the rest is deleted in PF (Chomsky 1981, 1993, 1995). Accounts that adapt CTM focus on explaining the syntactic mechanisms that made it possible for more than one copy of the verb to be spelled out. In other words, such accounts are based on mostly syntactic assumptions and treat verb doubling as a result of PF deletion for several copies and spelling out two copies. There are several (empirical and theoretical) reasons for us to disfavor CTM and look for an alternative.

First, as Müller (2021) argues, there must be an algorithm that explains how and why certain copies are deleted while others are spelled out. Such an algorithm should also explain why it is systemic and consistent, in addition to why it is usually only two copies that surface (and not three or four). Also, in line with Müller (2021), adjacency in Najdi Arabic is obligatory, unlike what CTM would predict. See (16), for example.

(16) a.

{bukrah}	ana	{bukrah}	msa:fər	{*bukrah}	msa:fər	{bukrah}
Tomorrow	I	tomorrow	traveling	tomorrow	traveling	tomorrow

'I am definitely going to travel tomorrow.'

b.

{χa:lid}	fa:ri	{*χa:lid}	be:t	{*χa:lid}	fa:ri	{χa:lid}
Khalid	buying	Khalid	house	Khalid	buying	Khalid

'Khalid is definitely buying a house.'

As you can see in (16a), while the adverb can appear anywhere, it cannot be between the copies. In (16b), the subject can be in more than one position, but not in between the copies. Note that in (16b) the order can be VVO but even then the subject can appear only {S}VVO{S}. (see Müller (1998, 2014, 2021) for more theoretical points against the Copy Theory of Movement).

From an empirical point of view, CTM does not seem to explain the problem of clitic manifestation of transitive verbs (mentioned in 2.2). See the pair in (17), for concreteness.

(17) a.

fa:ri	al-akəl	fa:ri*(-h)
Buying	the-food	buying-him

'I will buy the food anyway.' (=5)

b.

ana	{fa:ri:(*-h)}	fa:ri	al-be:t	{fa:ri:(*-h)}
I	buying-him	buying	the-house	buying-him

'I will definitely buy the house.' (=7)

c.

fa:ri	akəl	fa:ri*(-h)
Buying	food	buying-him

'I will buy food anyway.' (=6)

It could, in principle, be argued that the transitive property on the verb is copied as well and has to be lexicalized through the clitic as a last resort. But that does not very well explain what is going on in (17b, c) because the first copy in (17b) and the latter copy in (17c) are still transitive but still have no clitics. It is not very clear that CTM-based accounts have a way to account for this.

Lastly, the negation problem (see 2.3) in sentences like (18) cannot be explained using the CTM.

(18) a.

χa:lid	ma:-hu	mda:wəm	bukrah
Khalid	NEG-he	working	tomorrow

'Khalid is not going to work tomorrow'

b.

χa:lid	ma:-hu	mda:wəm	mda:wəm
Khalid	NEG-he	working	working

'Khalid is not definitely working.' (=15)

As explained in section 2.2, the main verb in doubled structures such as (18b) is not negated. It is also noted that this happens when the verb is modified by an adverbial constituent, where negation targets the modifying constituent instead of the verb. Different accounts based on CTM cannot explain why the additional copy can behave as an adverb in negated sentences.

Given the reasons above, it is safe to abandon CTM when attempting to explain the Najdi Arabic data.

3.2 Alternative Approach

Alternatively, verb doubling can be treated as a result of reduplication. In morphology, reduplication is assumed to result from a copy operation that's triggered by specific morphemes (Marantz 1982; McCarthy & Prince 1994, 1995; McCarthy et al. 2012). Müller (2021) proposes an account that treats predicate doubling as a morphophonological phenomenon. In his account, he proposes that doubling is a result of phonological copying that is triggered by a special morpheme ρ . The following analysis is based on fundamentals from Müller's (2021) treatment of doubling but with necessary adjustments. This analysis is preferred over CTM-based analyses because it does not have the problems presented in the previous subsection and, with some adjustments, can explain more of the facts.

The most essential assumption is that the morpheme ρ triggers copying of the verb given that it is strictly local, as defined below. This requirement of locality aligns well with the evidence we have from Najdi Arabic. Also, this condition (at least partially) explain why the copies must always be adjacent, if not separated by an object.

(19)

Locality of Copying

A prosodic affix ρ on a head X can trigger copying of Y to X only if (a) or (b) holds.

a. X c-commands Y.

b. Y c-commands X. Müller (2021: 13)

Also, Müller argues that the material that is copied onto ρ is inaccessible to further syntactic operations, which does not conflict with the current dataset.

However, as seen in (19), Müller treats this morpheme as an affix, which does not seem to be applicable to the phenomenon in (Najdi) Arabic for a multitude of reasons. First, the realization of the copy can be in (V)VO or in VO(V), which means, if it's an affix, it's simultaneously a suffix and prefix. There are no such affixes in Arabic, and it is highly unlikely that a "special morpheme" would have its own class of affixes. Second, The copy can have a clitic attached to it (as seen above in 2.2 and below), i.e., the clitic can be realized as VO(Vc). Virtually, more than one argument can be proposed to keep its status as an affix, but they won't be able to explain why the copy can have a clitic post-object (VO(Vc)) but cannot before it ((V(*c)VO). Third, Müller (2021) treats it as an affix to explain the adjacency requirement (among other reasons). However, it does not have to be an affix to explain the adjacency. For example, at least in Najdi Arabic, the object of the verb is in complementary distribution with pronominal clitics. While we can say that clitics are affixed to the verb to explain its non-optional adjacency to the verb, the object can be any full and free DP and would still have to be adjacent, but it's not clear that we should assume it's affixed to the verb, too.

The additional copy does have some morphosyntactic properties that give us more reasons to reject an affix treatment of the copy. See (20) below.

(20) a.

ana	{fa:ri:*(-h)}	fa:ri	al-be:t	{fa:ri:*(-h)}
I	buying-him	buying	the-house	buying-him

'I will definitely buy the house.' (=7)

b.

al-be:t	fa:ri:*(-h)	fa:ri*(-h)
The-house	buying-him	buying-him

'I will definitely buy the house.'

c.

ʃa:ri	akəl	ʃa:ri(*-h)
Buying	food	buying-him

'I will buy food anyway.' (=6)

(20a) to reiterate how the copy must have a pronominal clitic object if it follows the verb but must not if it proceeds it. Moreover, notice how the copy and the verb behave in the exact same way when the definite object is topicalized and proceeds both of them. Therefore, we can assume the copy does have the same morphosyntactic properties as the lexical verb. Additionally, (20c) shows, once again, how the clitic cannot manifest on the copy if the object is indefinite. Hence, it might be more accurate to treat the copy as a free morpheme (perhaps even a word) rather than an affix. Due to limitations in time, space, and data, this problem is not investigated further here.

Another crucial component of Müller's (2021) account is that the copy is *syntactically and semantically inert*. His assumption follows the argumentation of Bayer (2008) that verbs are not interpreted in V2 positions in verb doubling in German. However, this, too, seems to conflict with the current data.

(21) a.

χa:lɪd	ma:-hu	mda:wəm	bukrah
Khalid	NEG-he	working	tomorrow

'Khalid is not going to work tomorrow'

b.

χa:lɪd	ma:-hu	mda:wəm	mda:wəm
Khalid	NEG-he	working	working

'Khalid is not definitely working.' (=15)

While verb doubling gives a contrastive-focus-like interpretation, when negated, the negation actually negates only the added meaning by the additional copy, but never the lexical verb. In (21b), for example, it can never be interpreted that Khalid is not going to work. As argued before, the same pattern is seen with the verb modified by adverbs, and adverbs are neither semantically nor syntactically inert.

Although Müller's analysis treats the copy as a mere phonological string, Müller also briefly suggested a hypothesis that can make the analysis more applicable to the present data. He states "if PF realization of some item precedes copying, (only) phonological features will be copied; if PF realization follows copying, the copy operation can only target morphosyntactic features" (Müller 2021: 9). We can, thus, assume that copying proceeds PF realization to explain some aspects such as clitic manifestation, as shown above.

Building on this, the morpheme ρ should be treated, instead, as a lexical item with its own semantic properties, and it copies its morphosyntactic and phonological properties from the lexical verb. Copying the morphosyntactic properties accounts for the similarities in behavior between the copy and the verb. Additionally, having its own independent semantics accounts for the negated interpretation (as shown in (21) and addressed in 2.3).

4 CONCLUSION

This paper analyzed verb doubling in Najdi Arabic. While the general phenomenon of verb doubling has been of interest, the idiosyncratic attributes of verb doubling in Najdi Arabic has been of more interest in particular. How verb doubling manifests differently crosslinguistically in conjunction with analyzing it as a result of a copying morpheme might have interesting implications. One of these

implications is the possibility that morphemes that copy is a class of morphemes, rather than a single morpheme (hence explaining minor differences in manifestation. Also, if this was to be understood topologically, it might have (unforeseeable) significant implications to syntactic and morphological theory.

The analysis proposed above is not without its limitations. One non-trivial one is the necessity to abandon the affix attribution to the morpheme without providing a better alternative for explaining the relative adjacency. Also, it was not clear how the copy is classified in the lexicon, if not an affix. It behaves like verbs morphosyntactically but like adverbs semantically.

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