The Role of Case Markers in the Interpretation of Standard Arabic Sentences

Within the literature of Government and Binding (GB), and Principles and Parameters Theory (PPT), Chomsky (1981) assumed that Case features are assigned to nouns under government by specific Case assigners. In his Minimalist Program (henceforth MP) 1992, Chomsky abandoned the notion of governmental together and assumed that all determiner phrases DPs are fully inflected in the lexicon. Features carried by DPs are, then, checked against relevant inflectional heads. The sole purpose of the checking process is to filter features in and out such that interpretable morphosyntactic features survive at logical form (LF) representation while uninterpretable features are eliminated from LF representation. Such requirement is imposed by the Principle of Full Interpretation (PFI). Under PPT framework Case features are considered as uninterpretable features. Such claim has been demonstrated by providing illustrations from Modern Standard English (henceforth MSE). As a consequence, all Case features are eliminated from structural representations before the derivation of a sentence reaches LF representation.

The issue of the (un)interpretability of Case features constitutes one of the controversies raised by classical and modern Arab linguists. Some of them argue that Case features are required to satisfy phonological rules. Others, on the other hand, insist that Case features definitely contribute to meaning. If Case features were purely phonological, then, they should be eliminated from LF representation, but survive at phonetic form (henceforth PF) representation. The thesis aims to investigate the semantic contribution of Case features in the interpretation of Modern Standard Arabic (henceforth MSA) sentences. The thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter one introduces morphosyntactic features, lists their inventory, and discusses interpretable and uninterpretable features. The chapter is also concerned with providing an overview to the MP, the framework adopted in the thesis. Chapter two is devoted to introducing MSE Case system. It introduces the notion of Abstract Case and provides an idea about the
assignment of Case in the early version of PPT. The chapter then ends by focusing on the relation between Case and Theta Theory. Chapter three highlights and discusses in detail MSA Case system. It shows how the assumptions of Checking Theory can be applied to MSA sentences. It furthermore, discusses the relationship between Case and other morphosyntactic features in specifying meaning. Finally, the chapter focuses on the semantic contribution of Case Markers in the interpretation of MSA sentences concentrating on illustrations taken from the Holy Qur’an. In conclusion, chapter four summarizes the findings of the research and concludes the thesis before providing the bibliography.