ARABIC SILENT IMPERSONALS, (IN)DEFINITE PERSON, 
AND TEMPORAL/VOICE INFLECTION

0. Issues and aims

A. Arabic is a consistent NSL which licenses referential/definite Pro in three persons

(1, 2, 3)

(1) ʔ-aktub-u r-risaalat-a

1-write-ind the-letter'acc

I am writing the letter.

(2) t-aktub-u

2-write-ind

You are writing.

(3) y-aktub-u hunaa

3-write-ind here

He is writing here.

Typically, the 3rd sg inflection cannot be interpreted as ‘indefinite’ like French ‘on’
or English ‘one’

(5) a. On écrit ici.

b. One eats here.

Or as in the partial Finnish NSL (6):
(6) Tässä istuu mukavasti
    here sits comfortably
    One sits comfortably here.

B. Passive for indefinite impersonal Pro

In order to express (5) or (6), Arabic uses passive Voi(ce):

(7) y-u-jlas-u hunaa waqt-a l-istiraḥat-i
    3-pass-sit-ind here time-acc the-brake-gen
    One sits here at brake time.

(8) y-u-sbaḥu hunaa bi-duuni muqaabil-in
    3-pass-swim here without counterpart
    One swims here without paying.

(9) Holmberg’s (2007) descriptive correlations

a. If a language has a null 3rd sg person referential subject, it does not have a null generic one.

b. If a language has a null 3rd sg generic subject, it does not have a null 3rd referential one.

Clearly, (9) has to be adjusted relative to inflection (tentative):

(10) Pro/Inflection divide

a. In consistent NSL, def (R) Pro Agrees only with T.

b. In consistent NSL, indef (non-R) Pro Agrees only with Voi.

(11 Agree (α, β) if

. α, β have matching features

. α closely c-commands β (i.e. there is no γ with matching features such that α commands γ, and γ c-commands β); or β closely c-commands α

. α and/or β has unvalued F.
In trees:

(12) *R/def Pro*

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TP</th>
<th>/ \</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pro</td>
<td>T’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

iPers / \  
|T| vP|

uPers / \  
|Pro| VP|

  y-aktub-u
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(13) *Indef Pro*

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VoiP</th>
<th>/ \</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pro</td>
<td>Voi’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

iPers / \  
|Voi| vP|

uPers / \  
|Pro| VP|

  y-u-jlas-u
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C. More

a. (no) expletive null subjects, topic expletives, EPP

b. Re-Merge Pro, Topic, and Agree

c. Voi and T inflections and two level of Person interpretation.
2. Impersonal, indefinite, generic, episodic

2.1 Arabic

(14) baṣda l-xuṭab-i t-ajid-u ḍanna l-ʔasʕaar-a rtafaʕa-t

after the-speeches-gen 2-find-ind that the-prices-acc went.up-f

After speech, you will find that the prices have gone up.

(15) fii ʕ-ṣahraaʔ-i y-uḥibb-uu-na ʕ-ʕaay-a l-μuʔallaa

in the-sahara 3-like-pl-ind the-tea-acc the-sugared

In the Sahara, they like sweet tea.

(16) mina l-xaṭaʔ-i ṣan n-astashil-a l-ḥuluul-a

of the-mistake to we-easy-subj the-solutions-acc

It is a mistake to think that the solutions are easy.

(17) y-u-taxaʔašamu ṣilaʔ ᵃbii bakr-in

3-pass-complain to Abii Bakr

People complain to Abii Bakr.

(18) bnadem ta-yhder w-safi

son.Adam ind-3-talk and-clear

MAN only talks/chats. (Moroccan Arabic)

(19) ġurrir-ʔa bi-naa

trapped-pass-3 with-us

Someone trapped us. We were trapped.

(20) wa-y-u-xraj-u la-hu yawm-a l-ʔiyaamah-i kitaab-an

and-3-pass-bring-ind to-him day-acc the-resurrection-gen book-acc

And someone will bring to him a book the day of the resurrection.
3-pass-expect that 3-pass-announce-subj on formation the-government-gen

People expect that the formation of the government will be announced.

(22) a. šayʔ-un laa y-u-şaddaq-u

thing-nom not 3-pass-believe

It is an unbelievable thing.

b. ḥarr-un laa y-u-ṭaaq-u

heat-nom not 3-pass-bear

It is an unbearable heat.

(23) a. Active 3rd sg cannot be associated with a generic or indefinite pronoun.

b. Only passive 3rd sg can be associated with a generic or indefinite pronoun.

(24) Generic pro ([y-u]) : [Ø Number, Ø Pers, Ø Clusive].

2.2 Comparison with French, Finnish, Irish, and Italian

(25) a. On doit travailler jusqu’à l’âge de 65 ans.(generic)

ON must work until the age of 65 years.

b. On a travaillé pendant deux mois pour résoudre le problème. (arbitrary)

ON has worked for two months to solve the problem.

c. Hier soir on a été congédié. (specific)

Yesterday evening ON was fired.
(26) Taällä saa työtä jos puhuu saksaa (generic)
    here gets work if speaks German
    You get a job here if you speak German.

(27) Taällä puhutaan saksaa (arbitrary)
    here speak-pass German
    German is spoken here/They speak German here.

(28) (Me) puhutaan saksaa (specific)
    we speak-pass German
    We speak German.

(29) Gaeilge a labhartar anseo
    Irish C speak[PRES-AUT] here
    It is Irish that people speak here.

(30) Leriodh dramai leis san Abbey
    produce[PAST-AUT] plays by-him in-the Abbey
    Plays of his were produced at the Abbey.

(31) Bhi se an-deireanach faoiim am ar fagadh an
    was it very-late by-the time C leave[PAST-AUT] the
    Castle agus an ndeaachthas abhaile
    Castle and C go[PAST-AUT] home
    It was very late by the time people left the Castle and went home.

(32) Si mangia troppo
    ON eat-3 too much
    People eat too much.
(33) Mangia  troppo
eat-3 too much
He/she eats too much.

2.3 The human feature

(34) Zapukano-no  do drzwi
bark-pass.part[+hum] at door
There was barking at the door. (Polish; Frajzyngier (1982))

(35) An der Tur wurde gebellt
at the door was barked
At the door there was a human barking. (German; Abraham & Leiss (2006))

(36) Qui  si abbiaa tutto il giorno
here sî barks all the day
Here people bark all day long. (Italian; D’Alessandro (2004))

(37) ruğiṣ-a hunaa
danced.pass here
Some people (* bees) have danced here (Arabic; Fassi Fehri (1998b)).

(38) ʔukila kull-u t-tuffaaḥ -i
ate.pass all-nom the-apples-gen
All apples were eaten (dogs may have eaten the apples).

(39) Generic and referential subjects are always associated with a range restriction
(impersonals and expletives never; Cardinaletti & Starke (1999)).

3. The referential:non/referential pro divide
3.1 A topic approach

(40) t-aktub-na
     2-write-f.pl
     You (f.pl) write.

(41) ?antunna  t-aktub-na
     you.f.pl  2-write-f.pl
     You (f.pl) write.

(42) ?inna-kunna  t-aktub-na
     that-you.f.pl  2-write-f.pl
     Indeed, you (f.pl) write.

(43) * ?inna-hu  t-aktub-na
     that-it  2-write-f.pl

(44) ?inna-hu  y-utaxaanamu  ?ilaa  ?abii bakr-in
     that-it  3-pass-complain to  Abii Bakr
     Indeed, people complain to Abii Bakr.

(45) jaa?a-t  1-banaat-u
     came-f  the-girls-nom
     The girls came.

(46) ?inna-hu  jaa?a-t  1-banaat-u
     that-it  came-f  the-girls-nom
     Indeed, the girls came.

(47) 1-banaat-u  y-aktub-na
     the-girls-nom  3-write-f.pl
     The girls write.

(48) * Jean probablement a rencontré Marie.
(49) r-rajul-u ġalibammaa y-aktubu š-šišr-a
the-man-nom often-that 3-write the-poetry-acc

The man often writes poetry.

(50) * y-aktubu ġalibammaa r-rajul-u š-šišr-a
3-write often-that the-man-nom the-poetry-acc

(51) r-rajul-u y-aktub-u ūamd-an š-šišr-a
the-man-nom 3-write deliberately-acc the-poetry-acc

The man deliberately writes poetry.

(52) baqarat-un t-unšiš-u kull-a qaryat-in
cow-nom 3-make.alive every-acc village-acc

A cow makes alive every village.

(53) t-unšiš-u baqarat-un kull-a qaryat-in
3-make.alive cow-nom every-acc village-acc

A cow makes alive every village.

(54) kaana-t l-banaat-u y-aktub-na
was-f the-girls-nom 3-write-f.pl

The girls were writing.
A Probe-Goal Implementation

(55) TP (= (12))
   / \
  Pro, T'
iPers / \
  T vp
  uPers / \
  Pro, VP
   / \
  t-aktub-na

3. 2. Passive, impersonal, indefinite

(56) a. active: - v assigns external theta-role &
    - v checks accusative
b. passive: - v assigns external theta-role &
    - Voice checks accusative

(57) y-u-tasallalu fard-an fard-an Šabra l-ḥawaajizi
3-pass-infiltrate individual-acc individual-acc across the-barriers
dašimiina baḏ-un baḏ-an
supporting-pl.acc each-nom each-acc
People will infiltrate through barriers, supporting each other.

(58) y-u-nṭalaqu rukuub-an min hunaa
3-pass-depart riding.pl-acc from here
People will depart riding (horses) from here.
People were joining him, as individuals and as groups.

One washes oneself here.

Intended to mean: “it washed himself here”.

4. Expletives and EPP

4.1. Arabic expletives
(64) piove  
   rains  
   It rains.  

(65) è costoso  
   is expensive  
   It is expensive (around here).  

(66) a. ḥum-tara-t s-samaaʔ-u  
   rained-f the-sky-nom  
   It rained.  
   b. ṯalaja ṯ-ṯalj-u  
   snowed the-snow-nom  
   It snowed.  
   c. tahubbu r-riḥ-u  
   blows the-wind-nom  
   It is windy.  

(67) haaḍaa mukallif-un  
   this expensive-nom  
   This is expensive.  

(68) There arrived a man, * the man, * every man.  

(69) waṣala l-muʔtamir-uuna  
   arrived the-congressmen-nom  
   The congressmen arrived.  

(70) huwa l-laah-u rabb-ii  
   he Allah-nom lord-mine  
   It is Allah my Lord.
(71) hiyya l-ḥayaat-u
she the-life-nom
It is life.

(72) ?-udakkir-u-ka ?anna-hu tamma l-ittifaaq-u
I remind you that it achieved the-agreement-nom
I remind you that the agreement has been achieved.

(73) ?-udakkir-u-ka ?anna-hu waṣala kull-u l-muʔamir-iina
I remind you that it arrived all-nom the-congressmen-gen
I remind you that all the congressmen arrived.

(74) ?-udakkir-u-ka ?anna kull-a l-muʔamiina waṣal-uu
I remind you that all-acc the-congressmen arrived-pl
I remind you that all the congressmen arrived.

(75) y-anbağii ?an t-aquul-a l-ḥaqq-a
3-prefer that you-tell-acc the truth-acc
It is preferable that you tell the truth.

(76) y-u-ḥtamal-u ?an tatimma muraajaʔat-u d-dustuur-i
3-pass-probable that happens revision-nom the-constitution-gen
It is probable that the constitution will be revised.

(77) y-abduu ?anna-ka raɑḍin
3-seem that-you happy
It seems that you are happy.

(78) raɑʔa-nii ?an yahduṭa haɑḍaa
threatened-me that happens this
It threatened me that this happened.
It is impossible for us to agree.

Is it impossible for us to agree some day?

Consistent NSL have no subject expletives.

4.2 Pronouns and EPP

I became convinced.

Indeed, you will be killed.

We were betrayed.

(79) mustaḥiil-un ?an n-attāfīq-a
impossible that we-agree-acc

It is impossible for us to agree.

(80) ?a huwa mustaḥiil-un ?an n-attāfīq-a yawm-an
Q he impossible that we-agree-acc day-acc

Is it impossible for us to agree some day?

(81) Consistent NSL have no subject expletives.

(82) * ?inna-hu qṭanaʕ-tu
that-it convinced-I

(83) ?inna-niʔ qṭanaʕ-tu
that-me convinced-I

I became convinced.

(84) * ?inna-hu sa-t-u-qtal-u-lna
that-it fut-2-pass-kill-pl-indic

(85) ?inna-kum sa-t-u-qtal-u-lna
that-you.pl fut-2-pass-kill-pl-indic

Indeed, you will be killed.

(86) ?inna-hu ǧurrira bi-lna
that-it betrayed.pass with-us

We were betrayed.

(87) Personal pronouns are licensed in Spec T (and complement of C).
(88) Expletives agree with C only when T has no Person.

4.3 Finnish

(89) * Istuu mukavasti tässä
    sits comfortably here

(90) Tässä istuu mukavasti
    here sits comfortably

(91) Sitä istuu mukavasti tässä
    Exp sits comfortably here
    One can sit comfortably here.

(92) (Minä) istun mukavasti tässä
    I sit-1sg comfortably here
    I’m sitting comfortably here.

(93) * Sitä istun mukavasti tässä
    Exp sit-1sg comfortably here

5. Some consequences

5.1. Variation around Person

(94) 3rd Pers vs non-3rd Pers
    a. 1: [+1, -2]
    b. 2: [-1, +2]
    (c. 3: [-1, -2])

Or by using Speaker Participant decomposition:
(95) a. [+Spk, + Part] = 1
    b. [-Spk, + Part] = 2
    c. [- Spk, - Part] = 3
    d. [Ø Spk, Ø Part] = Ø (impersonal, generic).

(96) a. nixšalti ba-mivxan be-historia.
    failed-1ST-SG in-the-test in-history
    I failed the history test.
    b. nixšalta ba-mivxan be-historia.
    failed-2ND-SG-M in-the-test in-history
    You failed the history test.
    c. * nixšal/nixšela ba-mivxan be-historia.
    failed-3RD-M-SG/F-SG in-the-test in-history
    He/She failed the history test.

(97) a. reputin historian kokeessa
    failed-1ST-SG history’s in-test
    I failed the history test.
    b. reputit historian kokeessa
    failed-2ND-SG history’s in-test
    You failed the history test.
    c. * reputti historian kokeessa.
    failed-3RD-SG history’s in-test
    He/She failed the history test.

(98) Pers on T/C
    a. In consistent NSL, T/C is ‘strongly’ personal, or specified for Pers (= definite; ± valued).
b. In partial NSL, T/C is.can be ‘weakly’ personal, i.e. Ø Pers.
(specified is ±, but not Ø; underspecified is Ø; 3rd sg inflection can be valued as
either 3 or Ø).

(99) Person on Voi

a. Impersonal passive Voi Agrees with a [Ø Pers] Pro (Voi has Case).

b. Personal passive does not Agree with Voi (Voi has no Case).

5.2. Pro variation

(100) Range

a. Consistent NSL: pro exhaust all values (the superset), they can be \{1, 2, 3, Ø\}

b. Partial NSL (Finnish type): pro can only be \{1,2, Ø\}, but not [3].

(101) Pro positioning

Pros are

a. C/T pros (definite topics);

b. Voi pros (indefinite).

5.3. Two Persons, two pros, and two interpretations

(91)Space

Spatial Person is interpreted/anchored/ in C/T (‘definite’ anchoring), or in Voi/Asp
(‘indefinite’ anchoring).

(92) Time

Temporal Person is anchored/interpreted in C/T (deictic/logophoric anchoring), or in
Voi/Asp (imperfective/perfective or Imperfect/Perfect interpretation).
(93) Case variation

a. In Indo-European (SVO Subject EPP), Nominative is a valued in C-T (Subject comp of C).

b. In Arabic (VSO, no Subject EPP), Nominative is valued in Asp/Voi/v (Subject comp of v, Agrees with C-T; Fassi Fehri (2005, to appear)).

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