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The Structure of Pseudo-Verbs in Najdi Arabic: A Theoretical Account

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Abstract
The present paper focuses on the analysis of Najdi Arabic (NA) preposition-based pseudo-verbs within a theoretical framework. The majority of pseudo-verbs in NA, as is the case in Standard Arabic (SA), are formed from prepositions such as *ʕind* 'at', *maʕ* 'with', *li* 'to', and *fii* 'in'. Although these elements originate as prepositions, they display verbal-like properties, including pronominal suffixation, compatibility with verbal negation, and their occurrence across tense contexts, either with or without an overt copula. These constructions are widely used in NA; however, they have not been thoroughly investigated. In response, the paper aims to address this research gap. Using naturally empirical linguistic data, the paper first attempts to develop a morpho-syntactic description of NA pseudo-verbs that can uncover their characterizing linguistic properties. The paper also seeks to offer a formal theoretical analysis that can account for the underlying properties of NA pseudo-verbs and the constructions where they occur using the framework of Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG). This analysis represents the novelty of the current paper. Among the key findings is that the paper proposes two different formal accounts for pseudo-verbs in NA. The first goes in line with how pseudo-verbs are viewed from the angle of traditional Arab grammarians. The second account, on the other hand, treats pseudo-verbs in a way that is cross-linguistically attested with similar linguistic expressions. Both analyses reasonably account for the linguistic properties and structural constructions of pseudo-verbs in NA. This will contribute to the ongoing linguistic research in NA and other Arabic varieties, including SA. It will also enhance the understanding of the topic of pseudo-verbs across languages.
Keywords: Pseudo-Verbs; Najdi Arabic; HPSG; Analysis; Syntax

INTRODUCTION

Pseudo-verbs are a phenomenon that is widely attested across Semitic languages. According to Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander (1997) and Lucas (2009), pseudo-verbs are described as a non-verbal group of elements (mostly prepositions) that behave as verbs when they are attached to pronominal suffixes. Morphologically, pseudo-verbs can take pronominal suffixes that function as an agreement marker, even though they lack tense or aspect forms that are found in regular verbs (Huehnergard, 1987). Syntactically, these elements function in a verb-like manner by accepting verbal negation and expressing meaning such as existence, possession, obligation, or desire as what regular verbs do (McKenzie, 2022). In Semitic languages, Maltese has a clear system of pseudo-verbs which has been well-developed and described in the literature. As summarized in Čéplö (2025), previous research consistently classifies Maltese pseudo-verbs as a distinct class since they are characterized by obligatory pronominal attachment and verbal-like

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behavior. For instance, *ɡħad-ni* 'I am still' has pronominal suffixes that serve as subject markers and their negation is accomplished using the same methods of verbal negation as those used for regular verbs (Peterson, 2009). This shows that pseudo-verbal items have been gradually reanalyzed as verbal predicates. The process by which pseudo-verbs are formed is illustrated by how Maltese developed pseudo-verbs from prepositional or nominal forms into something resembling verbs through grammaticalization.

In Arabic, several varieties share a similar pattern with Maltese in this regard. Although the literature on pseudo-verbs is very limited, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, there are several recent studies that have provided some interesting insights regarding negation and pseudo-verbs across Arabic varieties. Lucas (2009) shows in his thesis that Palestinian Arabic has several items such as *fī* 'there is', *ʕind-/ʕand-* 'to have', *maʕ-* 'to have' and *bidd-* 'to want' that can be viewed as pseudo-verbs due to their attachment with pronominal suffixes and acceptance of negation. Moreover, Obeidat and Wardat (2022) argue that *maʕ-* and *ʕind* in Rural Jordanian Arabic pattern like pseudo-verbal predicates in their interaction with negation. Similarly, Lucas and Alluhaybi (2022) note that these non-verbal items are negated in the same way as regular verbs across a number of Arabic varieties, including Moroccan, Tunisian, Damascus, and Qassimi Arabic. In Saudi context, Alrasheedi (2019) points out that the construction formed by *ʕind* and a pronominal suffix in Najdi Arabic can be classified as a pseudo-verbal predicate due to two reasons. The first is that this construction can be negated by the negation marker *maa*, whose use is almost always restricted to verbal constructions. The second is that it semantically expresses the meaning of a possession verb 'have', which radically differs from meaning of the preposition *ʕind* 'at'. Furthermore, Alruwaili (2019), following the same linguistic criteria, proposes that pseudo-verbs in Turaif Arabic include constructions formed by *ʕind-, maʕ-, fī, li* 'have/own', along with nominal forms like *nafs* and *wudd* 'to want'.

This brief review shows that pseudo-verbs well exist in Arabic varieties. However, they have been referred to or indirectly studied within another broader linguistic topic (e.g., negation). The literature, to the best of researchers' knowledge, currently lacks research works particularly dedicated to analyzing the structure of pseudo-verbs in Arabic varieties using any of the recent linguistic approaches. Therefore, the present paper aims to fill this research gap by examining the structure of pseudo-verbs in NA, which is regarded as one of the widely spoken varieties in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Precisely, the paper seeks to describe pseudo-verbs in NA using empirical linguistic examples. It also attempts to analyze the structure of pseudo-verbs in NA using the theory of Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG), which represents the novelty of the current paper.

The remaining parts of this paper are structured as follows: Section [2] presents a literature review of pseudo-verbs across Arabic verities. Section [3] gives an overview of the theoretical framework (HPSG). Section [4] includes the linguistic examples (data) of the topic alongside their description. Section [5] offers possible theoretical analyses that can account for pseudo-verbs in NA within the HPSG framework. Finally, section [6] concludes the current paper.

Obeidat and Wardat (2022) offer a minimalist syntactic analysis of two lexical items that can be classified as pseudo-verbs, which are *maʕ-* and *ʕind-*, in Rural Jordanian Arabic. In addition to that, they relied on the NegP Hypothesis that has been used and developed by many linguists (e.g., Benmamoun, 1992; Chomsky, 1995; Ouhalla, 1991; Shlonsky, 1997). Within this analysis,

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negation is analyzed as an independent functional projection located between TP and VP (Benmamoun, 2000). This structural position helps in explaining elements that display verbal behavior despite their prepositional origin. Moreover, Obeidat and Wardat (2022) discuss that *maʕ* and *ʕind* typically function as regular prepositions, where *maʕ* means 'with' and *ʕind* means 'at'. Also, these elements can also function as pseudo-verbs in both affirmative and negative contexts. In such contexts, they are syntactically analyzed as verbal predicates generated within the VP domain. This contrast is illustrated in the examples shown in (1). In its typical contexts where it does not express possession, *maʕ* is considered the head of the prepositional phrase as shown in (1a). On the other hand, the same lexical item can act, in sentences with verbless predicates, like a verbal predicate (i.e., a pseudo-verb) either in negative or affirmative constructions as exemplified in (1b) and (1c).

(1) *maʕ* as a lexical preposition and a pseudo-verb in Rural Jordanian Arabic

a. *Ani* *ruħit* *maʕ* *ali*
I went with Ali
'I went with Ali.'

b. *ma-maʕ-i:* *masʿari*
NEG-with-1SG.POSS money
'I don't have money.'

c. *maʕ-i:* *masʿari*
with-1SG.POSS money
'I have money.'

(Obeidat & Wardat, 2022, p. 44-45)

Alrasheedi (2019) presents a minimalist analysis of the pseudo-verb *ʕind* shedding light on its function in predicative possession in NA. Based on the syntactic framework proposed by Harley (2002) for possessive constructions, he argues that *ʕind* should be treated as a pseudo-verbal element since it displays verbal properties like possessives in some syntactic contexts rather than as a simple locative preposition. One of the key pieces of evidence supporting this analysis is the obligatory agreement pronominal clitic that is attached to the pseudo-verb *ʕind* which encodes the φ-features of the possessor rather than the possessum. Furthermore, these obligatory agreement pronominal clitics work as a distinctive feature for recognizing 'grammatical' pseudo-verbs against their counterparts, 'lexical' prepositions. This can be illustrated in (2).

(2) The contrast between (a) pseudo-verbs and (b) typical prepositions

a. *muħammad* *ʕind-ah* *sijjaarah*
Muhammad at-3SG.M.POSS car
'Muhammad has a car.'

b. *muħammad* *ʕind* *sijjaarah*
Muhammad at car
'Muhammad is next to a car.'

Alrasheedi (2019) shows that the suffix *-ah* in (2a) does not function as a bound pronominal argument. Instead, it realizes an agreement relation between *ʕind* and the possessor DP. Within the analysis, he proposes that possessive *ʕind* is initially merged as the head of a PP and subsequently raises to little v°. In this position, *ʕind* enters into a c-command relation with the possessor DP, leading to licensing an Agree relation. As a result, the suffix attached to *ʕind* reflects agreement

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with the possessor in person, gender, and number. It is worth mentioning that in order to achieve the correct surface order, he further assumes that the possessor DP moves from [Spec, PP] to [Spec, vP] to satisfy the EPP feature on v°.

Alrasheedi (2019) also presents further supporting evidence for this analysis, based on the fact that possessive *ʕind* appears in sentential negation, following the negation marker *maa* specifically, which can be considered an exclusive characteristic of verbs. Moreover, in past tense possessive constructions, he assumes that the perfective copula *kaan* occupies T° while possessive *ʕind* remains within the verbal domain. To sum up, the two studies reviewed here show that pseudo-verbs, which originate from lexical prepositions, in two different Arabic varieties can be analyzed like verbs within transformational approaches. The question that may arise here is whether the same conclusion can be reached when such pseudo-verbs are analyzed within a non-transformational approach. Answering this will be the goal that the following sections of the current paper aim for.

Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar, or more popularly known as HPSG, is a non-transformational syntactic model developed by Carl Pollard and Ivan Sag in 1994. It is one of the theories that oppose those which depend on a transformational mechanism. It attempts to account for syntactic constructions without any use of movement or transformational processes (Borsley & Müller, 2024; Pollard & Sag, 1994). In other words, HPSG describes how words and phrases can structurally combine to produce grammatical sentences by focusing on the features of linguistic objects and the constraints that these objects must conform to rather than a list of rules that can generate a structure step-by-step (Abeillé & Borsley, 2024). For this reason, HPSG is referred to as a constraint-based theory. HPSG's focus is not on rules which generate a sentence, but on the constraints which must be satisfied for a linguistic structure to be grammatical. In this sense, grammar in HPSG, as Abeillé and Borsley (2024) argue, is much more about specifying what makes a structure well-formed than it is about how sentences are derived. In this context, a sentence is viewed as grammatical if every constraint is satisfied. Besides, one of the most important aspects of HPSG is the representation of linguistic information. Any linguistic entity, whether word or phrase, is described by a set of features that encapsulate all the relevant linguistic properties. These are arranged in an Attribute-Value Matrix (AVM), which formally represents how different kinds of information relate to each other (Pollard & Sag, 1994). For example, for a verb, tense, grammatical category, and what arguments it takes would all be included in its AVM (Sag et al., 2003). This would help make it easier to see how words interact within a sentence.

HPSG also follows a mono-stratal approach, meaning that sentences have a single structural level (Carnie et al., 2014; Wechsler & Asudeh, 2024). Unlike transformational models which employ the notion of deep and surface structures, HPSG assumes that all grammatical relations can be seen directly in one representation. Within this approach, syntax, semantics, and morphology could be incorporated with each other. Furthermore, the theory is called head-driven since it pays more attention to the significant role played by the head in determining the syntactic and semantic structure of the construction or phrase where it occurs (Abeillé and Borsley, 2024). In short, HPSG is a non-transformational, constraint-based, and feature-oriented theory of grammar. It attempts to account for the structure of sentences through the interactions of features and the constraints that bind them. It assumes that "grammar is a system of constraints that govern the relation between form and meaning. There are no operations in grammar other than constraints.

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This precludes, for instance, transformational operations" (Ginzburg & Sag, 2001, p.2). In HPSG, each lexical item is described as a feature structure and formally shown using an Attribute-Value Matrix (AVM). This representation integrates various kinds of linguistic information within a single unified structure (Richter, 2024). To demonstrate how words are represented as feature structures in HPSG by using AVMs, consider the lexical entry given in (3) which shows the linguistic information of the Arabic verb *kataba* "wrote" when used transitively.

Fig 1. **How Words are Represented as Feature Structures in HPSG by Using AVMs**

(3)

$$\begin{bmatrix} word \\ \text{PHON} \quad \langle kataba \rangle \\ \text{SYNSEM|LOCAL} \begin{bmatrix} local \\ \text{CATEGORY} \begin{bmatrix} cat \\ \text{HEAD} \begin{bmatrix} verb \\ fin \\ \text{AUX} - \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{VALENCE} \begin{bmatrix} \text{SUBJ} & \langle \boxed{1}\text{NP}_{\boxed{4}} \rangle \\ \text{COMPS} & \langle \boxed{2}\text{NP}_{\boxed{5}} \rangle \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{CONTENT} \begin{bmatrix} relation \\ \text{WRITER} \quad \boxed{4} \\ \text{THING-WRITTEN} \quad \boxed{5} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{ARG-ST} \langle \boxed{1}\text{NP}, \boxed{2}\text{NP} \rangle \end{bmatrix}$$

Within HPSG, the lexical entry of a word typically encapsulates integrated phonetic, syntactic and semantic information. In the case of the lexical entry *kataba* illustrated in (3), the PHON feature identifies the phonetic representation of the word as *kataba*. The second feature is SYNSEM (abbreviated form of syntax-semantics), which includes both the CATEGORY (CAT) and CONTENT (CONT) features that are integrated to create the complete linguistic structure of the word. CATEGORY provides syntactic information about the verb, while CONTENT concerns meaning-related properties. Furthermore, the HEAD feature under CATEGORY specifies the grammatical class of the word alongside other underlying grammatical properties. As for *kataba* in (3), HEAD specifies it as a non-auxiliary finite (i.e., tensed) verb.

Another important characteristic of a verb like *kataba* in (3) is its VALENCE, which determines the arguments it selects. Under VALENCE, there are two main features: SUBJ, referring to the subject and COMP, referring to the complement(s) selected by the head verb. The SUBJ feature indicates that *kataba* takes an NP subject. The value of COMPS also states that it takes an NP complement. These two NPs can be semantically distinguished via the role they play as stated in CONTENT. Taking into account the co-indexation with the value of VALENCE, CONTENT describes the subject's role as writer (i.e., agent or doer), whereas the thing-written (i.e., theme) is the complement.

The final key aspect of lexical entries is ARG-ST, which stands for argument-structure. The default value for ARG-ST is an ordered list of the arguments selected by the head. As shown in (3), the ARG-ST's value of *kataba* is ⟨ 1 NP , 2 NP⟩, which simply repeats the same value of VALENCE. What appears first in the ARG-ST's value of a verb is typically its subject and the subsequent items are the complements. What has been introduced so far shows how HPSG works at the lexical level. The same mechanism also applies at the phrasal level. HPSG employs both traditional tree diagrams and AVMs when analyzing the structure of phrases and sentences. Due to space constraints, a detailed introduction of how HPSG works at the phrasal level will not be included here. However, the analysis in section [5] is self-explanatory and can reasonably show this aspect of the theory.

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As introduced in the first section, pseudo-verbs are expressions that convey and display verbal meanings and behavior in particular syntactic constructions despite the fact that they lexically originate from non-verbal categories. The present paper particularly focuses on a specific subset of pseudo-verbs, which are the ones derived from prepositional elements. Other items that have been referred to in the relevant literature as pseudo-verbs fall outside the scope of this paper and are therefore excluded from the discussion; from a traditional perspective, the items that have been described as pseudo-verbs often include active and passive participles, intensive forms, stative adjectives, elative forms, and verbal nouns (maṣdar), as well as temporal, locative, and instrumental nominals (Al-Ghalayini, 1993). Accordingly, the NA data examined here are limited to pseudo-verbs derived or originated from these four prepositions *ʕind* 'at', *maʕ* 'with', *li* 'to', and *fii* 'in'. When used as pseudo-verbs, the first three *ʕind*, *maʕ*, and *li* express meanings related to 'possession or ownership' which are comparable to *have* or *own* in English, while *fii* commonly conveys existential meanings, corresponding to 'there is/are'. These four elements are selected here due to their frequent use in NA as pseudo-verbs. Unless otherwise specified, the term 'pseudo-verbs' in NA, from now on, refer to these four ones. This will make the discussion clearer and more concise.

A characterizing property of pseudo-verbs in NA is that they need to be immediately followed by a (pro)nominal expression. Provided that they have the meaning specified earlier (i.e., possession and existential), they function as a predicate in a manner similar to that of lexical verbs. It is worth noting that this predicate-like behavior is more common in pronominal structures. This, however, should not be treated as a necessary condition of pseudo-verbal status. While it is often assumed that only pronominal clitics can follow pseudo-verbs (e.g., Alrasheedi, 2019), the present paper proposes a different view that assumes that both pronominal and nominal expressions can follow pseudo-verbs in NA. The co-occurrence with pronominal, however, sounds more familiar. This can be illustrated through the sentence examples of the pseudo-verbs *ʕind*, *maʕ*, *li*, and *fii* shown in (4), (5), (6) and (7) respectively.

(3)

a.	*sarah*	*ʕind-ahaa*	*ʔiχtibaar*
	Sarah	at-3SG.F.POSS	exam
	'Sarah has an exam.'		

b.	*ʕind*	*sarah*	*ʔiχtibaar*
	at	Sarah	exam
	'Sarah has an exam.'		

(4)

a.	*saliħ*	*maʕ-ah*	*galam*
	Saliħ	with-3SG.M.POSS	pen
	'Saliħ has a pen.'		

b.	*maʕ*	*saliħ*	*galam*
	with	Saliħ	pen
	'Saliħ has a pen.'		

(5)

a.	*saliħ*	*l-ah*	*bait*
	Saliħ	to-3SG.M.POSS	house

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'Saliħ has a house.'

b. *li saliħ* *bait*
to Saliħ house
'Saliħ has a house.'

(6)

a. *fii-h* *ʔaħad* *daχil* *l-bait*
in-3SG.M one inside DEF-house
'There is someone inside the house.'

b. *fii ʔaħad* *daχil* *l-bait*
in one inside DEF-house
'There is someone inside the house.'

In possession contexts, the examples in (4a), (5a), and (6a) show that when pseudo-verbs are attached to pronominal possessive suffixes, they typically display a subject-predicate order. In addition, these pronominal clitics encode reference and agreement with the subject preceding them in person, gender, and number. However, the absence of an overt subject does not necessarily result in ungrammaticality. It can be used properly provided that the entity to which the clitic refers can be understood from the context. As shown in (4b), (5b), and (6b), pseudo-verbs can also be used without pronominal suffixes and still maintain the same predicate-like function. In these situations, possessive pseudo-verbal constructions can be understood from the general context despite the absence of explicit morphological agreement markers (i.e., clitics).

As for the existential pseudo-verb *fii*, an apparent exception is observed. The pronominal clitic, as in (7a), typically functions as an expletive element with no reference to any argument. Its meaning and function are similar to those of the English expletive *there*. In this case, the existential pseudo-verb always occurs in clause-initial position whether it is followed by a pronominal clitic as in (7a) or a nominal as in (7b). Interestingly, when the pseudo-verb *fii* is followed by a pronominal clitic referring to a particular entity, it can function as a possessive pseudo-verb like the other three pseudo-verbs as exemplified in (8). However, its use in this sense with a nominal instead of a pronominal clitic is odd, unlike the case with the other three pseudo-verbs.

(7) *as-sijjaarah* *fii-haa* *tahriib*
DEF-car in-3SG.F.POSS leak
'The car has a leak.'

In negative constructions, pseudo-verbs have the same negation mechanism used with verbs in NA. The negative particle *maa* is placed immediately before pseudo-verbs as illustrated in (9) which shows five negated constructions of pseudo-verbs with nominals and pronominal clitics and they all interact with negation similarly (i.e., the negator is placed immediately before them as is the case with negated verbs). As discussed earlier, this is one of the significant reasons why these items are viewed as pseudo-verbs.

(8)

a. *sarah* *maa* *ʕind-ahaa* *iχtibaar*
Sarah NEG at-3SG.F.POSS exam
'Sarah does not have an exam.'

b. *maa* *ʕind* *sarah* *iχtibaar*
NEG at Sarah exam

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'Sarah does not have an exam.'

c. *saliħ* *maa* *l-ah* *bait*
Saliħ NEG to-3SG.M.POSS house

'Saliħ does not have a house.'

d. *maa* *maʕ* *saliħ* *galam*
NEG with Saliħ pen
'Salih does not have a pen.'

e. *maa* *fii-h* *ʔaħad* *daχil* *l-bait*
NEG in-3SG.M one inside DEF-house
'There is no one inside the house.'

Lastly, pseudo-verbs in NA lack inherent tense morphology. In the absence of an overt temporal marker, pseudo-verbs receive a default present interpretation. For the past, it can be expressed through the past copula *kaan*, which precedes the pseudo-verb and provides the past temporal reference as exemplified in (10). The same applies to future reference which can be obtained by using independent future markers (e.g., *raaħ* and *b-* (author, 2026) together with the imperfective copula *yukuun* as shown in (11). Pseudo-verbs in both cases remain intact.

(9) Past (the past/perfective copula *kaan* + pseudo-verb)

a. *sarah* *kaan* *ʕind-ahaa* *iχtibaar* *(ʔams)*
Sarah COPULA.PFV at-3SG.F.POSS exam (yesterday)
'Sarah had an exam (yesterday).'

b. *kaan* *ʕind* *Sarah* *iχtibaar* *(ʔams)*
COPULA.PFV at Sarah exam (yesterday)
'Sarah had an exam (yesterday).'

(10) Future (*raaħ*/*b-* + the imperfective copula *yukuun* + pseudo-verb)

a. *sarah* *raaħ* *yukuun* *ʕind-ahaa* *iχtibaar* *(bukra)*
Sarah FUT COPULA.IPFV at-3SG.F.POSS exam (tomorrow)
'Sarah will have an exam (tomorrow).'

b. *raaħ* *yukuun* *ʕind* *sarah* *iχtibaar* *(bukra)*
FUT COPULA.IPFV at Sarah exam (tomorrow)
'Sarah will have an exam (tomorrow).'

To sum up, this section has presented a descriptive overview of pseudo-verbs in NA, with particular attention to their forms, word order, negation, and tenses' interpretation. It can be observed from the examples alongside their description that pseudo-verbs exhibit a set of consistent characterizing linguistic properties which make them function relatively like verbs despite their non-verbal origin. In one sentence, pseudo-verbs in NA can be viewed as grammaticalized verbal items which originate from lexical prepositions. Building on this description, the following section provides a formal analysis of pseudo-verbs within HPSG framework.

The current section attempts to analyze the structure of pseudo-verbs in NA which has been described in a theory-neutral way in the previous section. The analysis will be done by using the theoretical framework of HPSG, which has been introduced in the third section. Two different accounts will be proposed here to analyze the structure of pseudo-verbs in NA. The first is linked

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to a traditional view of constructions in Arabic that are comparatively similar to those of pseudo-verbs. The second views pseudo-verbs from a modern cross-linguistic perspective and treats them as belonging to the class of verbs.

Analysis (I)

Traditionally, verbless clauses in Standard Arabic can be analyzed as having an invisible head. This view applies to verbless clauses or sentences composed of a subject, traditionally referred to as topic, and a predicate. The predicate in such clauses is a prepositional phrase (Alnadery, 2009; Fassi Fehri, 1993). The proponents of this view identify the invisible head of such clauses as an invisible form of the copula. They also provide a crucial condition for this assumption. The condition simply states that this view only applies when the mood, tense, and aspect of such sentences are unmarked (i.e., in their default value). Fassi Fehri (1993) proposes this constraint: "spell out the copula as *kwn* when Mood, Aspect, and/or Tense are specified, otherwise spell it as zero" (p. 156). As already described in the previous section, the sentences where pseudo-verbs in NA occur match the same structure of these verbless sentences when used in the imperfective (i.e., default tense). They consist of a topic, typically an NP, and a PP predicate. They also do not have any visible verb unless the tense is marked. When the tense is marked (i.e., past or future), an overt form of the copula verb emerges (see the examples in (10) and (11)). Given this, it can be proposed that pseudo-verbs in NA occur in the same kind of verbless clauses that are traditionally analyzed as headed by an invisible copula. They also meet the same constraint that determines whether the copula will be visible or invisible.

(11) In HPSG, the linguistic information of a word can be analyzed within a lexical entry, as introduced in the second section. The question that may arise here is how to identify the linguistic information of the invisible copula that heads verbless sentences in which pseudo-verbs occur in NA. The answer to this is given concisely in the lexical entry shown in (12).

Fig 2. the lexical entry of the invisible copular, the head of verbless clauses where pseudo-verbs occur in NA

$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{PHON} & \langle \emptyset \rangle \\ \text{SYNSEM} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{CATEGORY} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{HEAD} & \begin{bmatrix} \textit{copula} \\ \text{TENSE} \quad \textit{present} \\ \text{MOOD} \quad \textit{ind} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{VALENCE} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{SUBJ} & \boxed{1} \\ \text{COMPS} & \boxed{2} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{ARG-ST} & \langle \boxed{1}, \boxed{2}\,\text{PP}[\text{HEAD } \textit{verbal}] \rangle \end{bmatrix}$$

The entry in (12) is a modified version of the one proposed by Author (2022) for verbless sentences in Standard Arabic where the predicate is an introductory PP. Recall that the PP predicate in our topic consists of a lexical preposition, viewed as a grammaticalized pseudo-verb, and a nominal or a pronominal clitic. This can be accounted for by illustrating the details of the entry in (12).

In simple words, the entry in (12) states that the phonological value of the copula in such constructions is empty (i.e., invisible or silent). The value of HEAD describes it as a copula in the present tense and indicative mood (i.e., unmarked tense and mood). This copula, as in VALENCE, takes a subject and a complement. The value of subject is intentionally left unspecified in ARG-ST because there is a possibility of having different phrases in this position though it is mostly an NP. The complement, on the other hand, is specified in ARG-ST as a PP headed by a preposition carrying the feature 'verbal'. In HPSG terms, verbal is a feature of linguistic expressions functioning as

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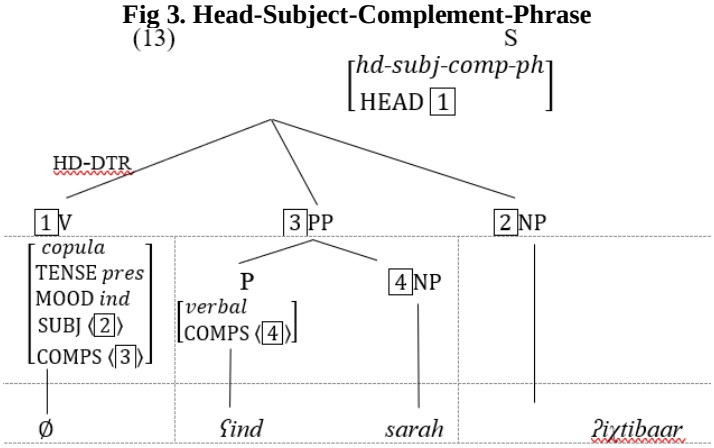
verbs. The value of the complement in this PP is intentionally unidentified. It has not been identified as a nominal or a pronominal clitic, which is true in sentences having pseudo-verbs, because all PPs in NA, as well as the other Arabic varieties, typically consist of preposition head and a noun or a pronoun complement. In line with the concept of underspecification in HPSG, default values need not be identified.

Given this, it can be argued that the entry in (12) reasonably accounts for the underlying properties of pseudo-verbs in NA, which have been described in the previous section. It specifies the sentences where pseudo-verbs occur as verbless sentences (i.e., they do not have an overt lexical verb) that consist of an invisible copula head with unmarked tense and mood, an NP subject, and a PP complement. The latter is the predicate that includes the pseudo-verb (i.e., a preposition functioning as a verb) and the nominal or pronominal expression following this pseudo-verb.
Applying the entry in (12) to the sentence example of pseudo-verbs in (13) will give it the structure schematized in (14).

(12) *ʕind* *sarah* *ʔiχtibaar*
at Sarah exam
'Sarah has an exam.'

Fig 3. Head-Subject-Complement-Phrase

(13)



The structure in (14) shows that the phrasal type of this sentence is *head-subject-complement-phrase*. In HPSG, this phrasal type assumes that both the head, its subject, and its complement(s) are analyzed as sisters, and it applies to verb-initial sentences in Arabic (Author 2014; Author, 2023; Author & X, 2026). The head here is an invisible copula verb in the present tense and indicative mood. This head takes the NP *ʔiχtibaar* as its subject. It also takes the PP *ʕind Sarah* as its complement. The PP complement, in turn, is headed by the verbal preposition (i.e., the pseudo-verb) *ʕind*, which takes the NP *Sarah* as a complement. The analysis presented in (14) applies, as already noted, to sentences where tense and mood are unmarked. When tense, for example, is marked as in the sentence given in (15), the only difference in the analysis will be that the copula becomes visible as shown in (16).

(13) *kaan* *ʕind* *sarah* *ʔiχtibaar*
COPULA.PFV at Sarah exam
'Sarah had an exam.'

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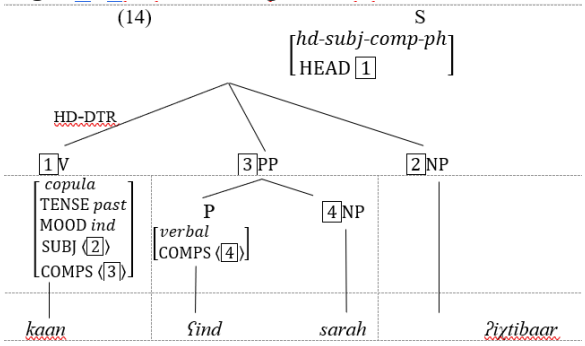
Fig 4. Sentences Having Pseudo-Verbal Predicates

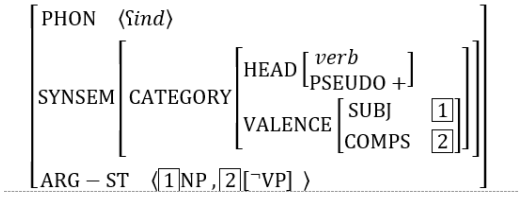


The analysis in (16) is the same as the one in (14) except that the copula here becomes visible and its tense is past. This supports the 'invisible-head' analysis proposed here for sentences having pseudo-verbal predicates.

Analysis 2

The second analysis that will be proposed here for pseudo-verbs in NA views them as belonging to the category of verbs. Cross-linguistically, some lexical items can develop over time into functional or grammatical ones through the process of grammaticalization. Since these pseudo-verbs in NA, as already discussed, structurally behave like verbs which does not apply to their original status (i.e., lexical prepositions), they will be analyzed here as verbs. However, recall that these pseudo-verbs also lack some of the features of verbs like tense inflection. This means that a sensible analysis of pseudo-verbs should include what distinguishes them from typical verbs. This can be achieved in HPSG by incorporating a relevant feature structure within the analysis. Therefore, the feature PSEUDO with the value +/– will be added in the lexical entries of pseudo-verbs, particularly in HEAD. This can straightforwardly account for the required distinction. Given this, the entry proposed for the pseudo-verb *ʕind* will be as in (17).

Fig 5. The Lexical Entry Of The Pseudo-Verb ʕind When Analyzed As A Verb



The entry in (17) simply states that *ʕind* is a verb carrying a positive value of the proposed feature PSEUDO. It also shows in VALENCE that *ʕind* always takes both a subject and complement. The former is specified in ARG-ST as an NP because pseudo-verbs in NA can have either a nominal or a pronominal subject. Although the value of the latter is mostly an NP, it is specified here as not a VP as indicated by the not symbol ¬. In addition to an NP, a CP or a PP in some specific contexts can function as a complement of a pseud-verb. Most importantly, pseudo-verbs in NA, as already discussed, occur in constructions that do not have overt verbs, and this is why a VP is excluded here as a possible value of COMPS.

The lexical entry in (17) reasonably accommodates all the underlying linguistic properties of pseudo-verbs in NA. Incorporating the feature PSEUDO particularly accounts for the contrast

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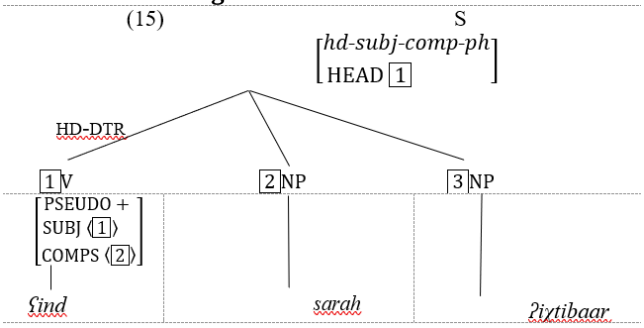
between normal or true verbs and pseudo-verbs in NA. Employing such a feature in the analysis reflects the flexibility of HPSG, which may not be available in other transformational approaches. Applying the entry proposed in (17) to the sentence example of pseudo-verbs repeated in (18) will give it the structure analyzed in (19).

(14) *ʕind* *sarah* *ʔiχtibaar*
at Sarah exam
'Sarah has an exam.'

Fig 6. The Pseudo-Verb



In brief, the analysis in (18) shows that the sentence is a *head-subject-complement phrase*. The head here, unlike what is assumed in the analysis given earlier in (14), is *ʕind* itself. This head is described as a verb carrying the feature [PSEUDO +] (i.e., it is a pseudo-verb, not a normal verb). The head pseudo-verb takes the NP *Sarah* as its subject and the NP *ʔiχtibaar* as a complement.

CONCLUSION

The present paper investigates the topic of pseudo-verbs in NA from empirical, descriptive and theoretical perspectives. It particularly focuses on four pseudo-verbs which are *ʕind*, *maʕ*, *li*, and *fii*. These four originally belong to the class of prepositions and over time they develop into pseud-verbs via grammaticalization. The use of these pseud-verbs is very common in everyday NA. They are also used, with minor differences, in other Arabic varieties. However, their linguistic structure is still understudied. In response, the paper offers a detailed descriptive account of the underlying linguistic properties of pseud-verbs using naturally occurring examples. The paper also proposes a theoretical analysis that can account for the structure of pseud-verbs in NA using the framework of HPSG. The proposed analysis, which represents the novelty of the current paper, is divided into two formal accounts. The first is related to a traditional view that is widely held about verbless clauses in Arabic. Employing a cross-linguistic concept, the second account, on the other hand, analyzes pseud-verbs as a special or exceptional class of verbs. It classifies them as verbs and, at the same time, makes them distinct from normal verbs. The two accounts reasonably analyze the structure of pseud-verbs and accommodate their core linguistic properties. The paper bridges the gap in the literature regarding the structure of pseud-verbs in NA. The topic of pseud-verbs in Arabic varieties, as noted in the paper, has been mostly a peripheral aspect studied indirectly within broader topics (e.g., negation). The paper, hence, will advance the understating of pseud-verbs in Arabic varieties or any relevant languages. It will also strengthen the ongoing research on NA, as a central variety of Arabic. Practical implications involve applying the two proposed accounts to pseudo-verbs of different origins in Arabic varieties. Future research might

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check for cross-linguistic similarities among pseudo-verbs and whether they need to be realized as a universal grammatical class.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

All participants received a comprehensive explanation regarding the research objectives and procedures, including their right to participate voluntarily. Participants were assured that participation was not mandatory and that they had the right to withdraw at any time during the study without negative consequences. To ensure the confidentiality of identities, all data obtained in this study underwent an anonymization process.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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