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ON THE SO-CALLED COMPOUND TENSES
IN MODERN STANDARD ARABIC

Abstract

Modern Standard Arabic has constructions composed of the verb *kāna* 'to be' and a concomitant verb which in most grammars and texbooks of this language are described as compound tenses, the verb *kāna* functioning as auxiliary, the other verb being the main verb. While such an analysis seems appropriate for most constructions of this kind, it is unable to explain those in which *kāna* and the main verb show different features with respect to person, gender or number. This problem seems to be either unnoticed or ignored by the authors who adopt the conception of compound tenses. Such constructions are better describable in terms of concepts used in the Arab grammatical tradition, i.e. as based on the topic-comment construction (*mubtada'-ḫabar*) rather than as involving compound tenses. Most Arabists who approached this problem in this way have based their argument on Classical Arabic examples but numerous relevant examples can be found in modern texts, some of which are adduced in this paper. It is also observed that constructions with *kāna* and a concomitant verb exist that seem to be only describable as compound tenses.

According to most Western grammars and textbooks of Modern Standard Arabic, this language has compound tenses. Thus, for instance, Fischer (1972: 95) speaks of "zusammengesetzte Verbalformen", Danecki of "czasy złożone" ("compound tenses", 2007: I 230), El-Ayoubi et al. (2010) of "zusammengesetzte Tempus- und Modusformen" (2010: 122)[1], Badawi et al. of "compound tenses" (2004: 367-371), and Ryding of "compound verbs" (2005: 446-448). Some authors do not refer explicitly to "compound tenses" but only characterize *kāna* as an auxiliary. Here one could mention: "auxiliary verb" (Buckley 2004: 559), "auxiliaire temporel" (Kouloughli 1994: 237), "verbos modificadores"

(Corriente 2002: 227f), and "vspomogatel'nyj glagol" (Kovalev-Šarbatov 1969: 513). Holes considers *kāna* an "auxiliary verb" that is "preposed" to verbs (Holes 2004: 233) (although he uses the term "compound tenses" only once and in quotation marks).

Both components of these compound tenses, the auxiliary verb *kāna* and its concomitant verb (sometimes referred to as the "main verb"), are described as inflecting. For instance, Buckley says that "both *kāna* and the subordinate verb agree with the subject" (Buckley 2004: 559), while according to Danecki they agree "in person" (Danecki 2007: I, 230); similarly El-Ayoubi et al.: "Beide Teile werden personal flektiert" (El-Ayoubi et al. 2010: 122). Actually, all examples adduced by the authors mentioned so far, even by those who do not state this explicitly, show that the two verbs are identical with respect to the categories of person, gender and number (see, however, footnote 10). Usually, the following four main compound tenses are described:

(i)   *kāna (qad) faʿala*, i.e. the perfect[2] of *kāna* with the perfect of the main verb (the latter usually preceded by the particle *qad*);
(ii)   *kāna yafʿalu*, i.e. the perfect of *kāna* with the imperfect of the main verb;
(iii)   *yakūnu (qad) faʿala*, i.e. the imperfect of *kāna* with the perfect of the main verb (the latter usually preceded by the particle *qad*);
(iv)   *yakūnu yafʿalu*, i.e. the imperfect of *kāna* with the imperfect of the main verb[3].

Below examples are given illustrating each of these tenses, respectively (without negation of any component or *sa-* or *sawfa* denoting future with the imperfect form). Examples (1)-(3) are taken from El-Badawi et al. (2004), with a slightly modified transcription, and (4) from El-Ayoubi et al. (2010).

1   (...)   **kāna**   *l-maṭaru*   *qad*   **sakana**
         be.PRF.3M.SG   DEF-rain   qad   calm.down.PRF.3M.SG
   'the rain had calmed down' (El-Badawi et al., p. 368)[4]

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     [2]   I use the terms "perfect" and "imperfect" as "labels indicating morphological structures", the former term being equivalent to the suffix conjugation, the latter to the prefix conjugation (cf. Zaborski 1995: 534).

     [3]   This type is very infrequent (El-Ayoubi et al. 2010: 144). Badawi et al. exemplify it with *sa-yakūnu yuʾaddī* 'will be performing', i.e. with *yakūnu* with a prefixed *sa-* denoting future (Badawi et al. 2004: 370).

     [4]   The following glosses are used in this paper: PRF – perfect, IPF – imperfect, M – masculine, F – feminine, NH – non-human, SG - singular, DU – dual, PL – plural, DEF – definite, SBJV – subjunctive. For the sake of brevity, singular nouns and verbs are not glossed as such. Gender, voice and mood are indicated only when necessary. The particle *qad* is left untranslated.

2 **kāna**   **yataʿahhadu**-*hā*   *bi-r-riʿāyati* (...)
   be.PRF.3M.SG   provide.IPF.3M.SG-her   with-DEF-protection
   'he looked after her (...)' (El-Badawi et al., p. 369)

3 *hunā* **yakūnu**   *l-wazīru*   *qad* **waṣala**   *ilā* *bayti* *l-qaṣīdi*
   here be.IPF.3M.SG DEF-minister qad reach.PRF.3M.SG to house DEF-desired
   'here the minister will have reached the essential point' (El-Badawi et al., p. 370)

4 (...) *ʿindamā* **yakūnu**   **yašraḥu**   *qāʿidatan* *fī* *n-naḥwi*
      when   be.IPF.3M.SG explain.IPF.3M.SG rule   in   DEF-grammar

   l-ʿarabiyyi (...)
   DEF-Arabic
   'Wenn er eine Regel der arabischen Grammatik zu erklären pflegt (...)' (El-Ayoubi et al., p. 144)

The description presented above differs from how traditional Arabic grammar understood these constructions and how Arab authors, following the tradition, describe them today in modern grammars and textbooks (e.g. Ḥasan n.d.: I 543; al-Ġalāyīnī 2002: 605; ad-Daḥdāḥ 1989: 164). In order to present it, one has to begin with the concept of the so-called nominal sentence (*ǧumla ismiyya*). A nominal sentence, usually beginning with a nominal part of speech (*ism*), is a dichotomous entity composed of a *mubtadaʾ* and a *ḫabar*, closely corresponding to the Western concepts of topic and comment, respectively. The nominal sentence can be exemplified by the following: *Zaydun kabīrun* 'Zayd is big', more literally: 'Zayd is such: big', *Zaydun ṭabībun* 'Zayd is a doctor', more literally 'Zayd is such: a doctor', *Zaydun fī d-dāri* 'Zayd is in the house', more literally 'Zayd is such: in the house', but also *Zaydun yaktubu* 'Zayd writes/is writing', more literally 'Zayd is such: he writes/is writing'. In the first three examples the *ḫabar*/topic is an adjective, a substantive, a prepositional phrase, respectively, while in the last one the *ḫabar*/topic is a clause, specifically a verbal clause, i.e. beginning with or being limited to a verb.

This structure may accept various verbal copulae (*nawāsiḫ*, sing. *nāsiḫa* or *afʿāl nāsiḫa*, sing. *fiʿl nāsiḫ*), including *kāna* 'to be'[5]. Then, according to the Arab grammarians, the *mubtadaʾ* changes into the *ism kāna* ("the noun of *kāna*") and the *ḫabar* into the *ḫabar kāna* ("the *ḫabar* of *kāna*"). Thus, for instance, if *kāna* is added to the nominal sentences in Table 1:

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[5] See, for instance, Ṣaqr (n.d.: 148): *tadḫulu hāḏihi n-nawāsiḫ ʿalā l-mubtadaʾ wa-l-ḫabar* 'these *nawāsiḫ* are added to the *mubtadaʾ* and the *ḫabar*'.

mubtada'	ḫabar
(topic)	(comment)
Zaydun	kabīrun
	ṭabībun
	fī d-dāri
	yaktubu

Table 1. Nominal sentences.

they yield the following sentences with *kāna*:

fiʿl nāsiḫ	ism kāna	ḫabar kāna
(copula)	(topic)	(comment)
kāna	Zaydun	kabīran
		ṭabīban
		fī d-dāri
		yaktubu

Table 2. Sentences with *kāna*.

As it can be seen, the addition of *kāna* brings about some morphological changes (this is why the category of such words is called *nawāsiḫ*, i.e. "those which cause a change", Ḥasan n.d.: I 543-4), namely, if its predicate (*ḫabar kāna*) inflects for case, it must be in the accusative (cf. the accusative ending *-an* in *kabīran* and *ṭabīban*). This is why the Arab grammarians postulated for the resulting construction a description and terms different from those proposed for *ǧumla ismiyya*, where both the *mubtada'*/topic and the *ḫabar*/comment are in the nominative. For our purposes, however, constructions with *kāna* can also be analyzed in this way as far as the topic-comment relation is concerned, i.e. with the *ism kāna* interpreted as the topic and the *ḫabar kāna* as the comment. Thus, the sentences in Table 2, if translated more literally, should be understood as 'Zayd was such: big/a doctor/in the hose', and 'Zayd was such: he writes/is writing'[6]. Similarly, examples (1)-(4) should be interpreted in the following way: 'The rain was such: it calmed down', 'he was such: he looks/is looking after her', 'The minister will be such: he has reached the essential point', 'He is such: he explains a rule...'[7].

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[6] The imperfect form (*yaktubu*) conveys here the meaning of simultaneity with the past action indicated by the perfect form of *kāna*. The perfect form, *kataba*, e.g. in *kāna Zaydun (qad) kataba* 'Zayd was such: he had written', would convey the meaning of anteriority (see Kuryłowicz 1972: 80-83).

[7] Since such constructions with *kāna* are based on the topic-comment structure, they can be reduced to topic-comment sentences in the present tense. This also means that any topic-

As it has been said, the comment (the *ḫabar* in a nominal sentence and the *ḫabar kāna* in a sentence with *kāna*) may be a verbal clause. If this is the case, its subject (henceforth referred to as SVC − the subject in a comment which has the form of a verbal clause) may be, and in most instances is, coreferential with the *ism kāna*/topic. This is so in examples (1)-(4), their topics and their SVCs being, respectively: in 1, *l-maṭaru* 'the rain' and an implied *huwa* 'it'; in 2 and 4, an implied *huwa* 'he' for both topic and SVC; in 3, *l-wazīru* 'the minister' and an implied *huwa* 'he'. Given that (i) the predicate verb in the comment agrees with respect to person, gender and number with its subject (the SVC) and (ii) the copula *kāna* agrees with respect to the same categories with the topic, in sentences in which the topic and the SVC are coreferential the predicate verb in the comment always shows the same person, gender, and number as *kāna*[8]. This is why one may have the impression that the "main verb" (i.e. the verbal predicate in the comment) is always in the same form (person, gender, and number) as *kāna* and, consequently, one is tempted to describe such constructions in a Western manner, i.e. as compound tenses.

Not always, however, are the *ism kāna*/topic and the SVC coreferential. This was remarked in Western grammar as early as 1810 by de Sacy (cf. Larcher 2003: 143), who adduced examples including the following:

5   *wa-**kuntu**   qad   **qīla**   l-ī   min   qablu* (...)
    and-be.PRF.1.SG   qad   tell.PRF.PASS.3M.SG   to-me   from   before
    'and I had been told before...' (de Sacy 1810: I 213)

In this sentence, the topic is an implied *anā* 'I' (inferrable from the form of *kāna*), whereas the comment clause (*qad qīla lī min qablu* lit. 'it was told to me before') has no subject at all because its verb *qīla* is a subjectless passive. Consequently, the two verbs, *kuntu* 'I was' and *qīla* 'it was told', do not show the same grammatical feature with respect to the category of person (the same number is merely coincidental; as for gender, *kuntu* is indefinite in this regard).

It should also be noted that if the topic and SVC are not coreferential, the *ḫabar*/comment must contain a "linker" (*rābiṭ*) referring to the topic, usually in the form of a resumptive pronoun (*'ā'id*) (e.g. Ḥasan n.d.: I 466f, 'Īd 1982: 213f). In (5), the *rābiṭ* is the suffixed pronoun -*ī* in *lī* 'to me', referring to the topic 'I'[9].

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comment sentence in the present can be transformed into a topic-comment construction with *kāna*.

   [8]   This, however, does not mean that they a g r e e with one another. This apparent "agreement" in person, gender and number results from their agreeing with two coreferential words (even though one of these tends to be only implied).

   [9]   According to Arab grammarians, a *rābiṭ* exists also if the topic/subject of *kāna* is coreferential with the SVC. In such a case, the *rābiṭ* is an implied (*mustatir*, *muqaddar*) pronoun functioning as the subject of SVC (e.g. Ḥasan n.d.: I 467).

Arab authors of grammars and texbooks written in the traditional way do not discuss cases with non-coreferential *mubtada'*/topic and svc, perhaps because they are obvious to them and being easily explainable within their grammatical tradition do not deserve special treatment. In contrast, those Western authors who describe examples (1)-(4) as constructions with compound tenses simply overlook the problem exemplified in (5), which, if perceived, would make their conception in need of at least a serious rethinking[10]. Nevertheless, there have been Arabists who did see this problem and challenge the idea of compound tenses in Arabic, however, limiting their analyses to Classical Arabic. Thus, the idea of "compound tenses" was rejected by Reckendorf (1895-98), who observed that although "Einige Zusammensetzungen erwecken den Schein von Verbalformen" in reality they do not form a new grammatical category (p. 53). Such "zusammengesetzte Formen" do not form a verbal paradigm but are created freely (p. 292). In an analysis relatively similar to that of the Arab grammarians, Reckendorf observes that the verb *kāna* usually has the same subject as the dependent verb ("das abhängige Verbum", p. 788) but if used in a construction with "Isolirung des natürlichen Subjekts" (p. 782) – which corresponds to the topic-comment construction – the subject of *kāna* becomes "isolated" (i.e. the topic; these ideas are repeated in Reckendorf 1921: 295, 368-369). Reckendorf was, generally, followed in this opinion by Bravmann (1953: 71-84) (who, however, concentrated on challenging Reckendorf's diachronic ideas concerning the origins of the construction). The idea is expressed also, albeit rather vaguely, by Cantarino (1974, 1975) in his description of Modern Written Arabic. Cantarino rejected the idea of "compound tenses", arguing that *kāna* "cannot (...) be considered as forming part of a compound tense since it has always preserved a certain degree of independence in position and agreement" (1974: I 71). He tried to describe it in terms of attraction to another noun occurring frequently in sentences with 'anacoluthon' (1975: 455, 457)[11] – yet another term for the topic-comment construction – however, without arriving at a formulation of explicit rules. Larcher (2003) was another Arabist who saw that the two verbs may differ with respect to relevant grammatical categories and rejected the idea of compound tenses with *kāna* as an auxiliary and instead interpreted it – again in line with the Arab grammatical tradition – as a "verbe opérateur appliqué à une phrase à tête nominale" (Larcher 2003: 143), i.e. as a *fiˈl nāsiḫ* added to a *ǧumla ismiyya*. Moreover, he provided an additional justification for this interpretation,

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[10] El-Ayoubi et al. give two examples of sentences with uninflected *kāna* and non-agreement ("Nichtkongruenz") between *kāna* and its verb (El-Ayoubi et al. 2010: 123), which, however, is a different phenomenon that might be explained either as less careful usage or as a separate trend.

[11] Cantarino considered the anacoluthon to be an interruption of "the natural grammatical construction" (1975: 455) or „disruption of the gramamatical order" (1975: 457). This idea must be dismissed since such constructions are perfectly grammatical in Arabic.

namely that two *ḫabar*s/comments ("propos") of different types (in Larcher's example 8 on p. 144 the first being a prepositional phrase, the second – a verbal clause) can be juxtaposed – which, let us add, would be difficult to analyze in terms of a construction involving a "compound tense".[12]

      Perhaps because constructions like the one in (5) are by far less frequent than those with full "agreement", the analysis based on the topic-comment relation is rather absent in the grammars and textbooks of Modern Standard Arabic, which limit the description of the constructions in question to analyzing them as compound tenses. Another reason for this development, which was a step not only occidentalizing but also a step away from a more adequate description of the language, may be that all scholars concerned with the phenomenon of "non-agreement" (de Sacy, Reckendorf, Bravmann, Nebes, Larcher) based their argument on examples from Classical Arabic (Cantarino being an exception). It seems as though the "non-agreement", or, more precisely, the non-coreferentiality of the topic and SVC, has come to be considered a merely classical phenomenon that does not deserve being described in the grammars of modern language (thus the conception of compound tenses remains completely unchallenged). In order to show that this is not the case and that sentences with "non-agreement" are in use in Modern Standard Arabic, in what follows some relevant examples are given. They have been gathered in the course of chance readings in Modern Standard Arabic texts representing various genres, journalistic, artistic and others, from the 20th and 21st centuries.

1. **Perfect** of *kāna* with a **perfect** verb in the comment:

6	*wa-**kāna***	*waliyyu*	*l-ʿahdi*	*r-rāḥilu*	*l-amīru*	*S.i.ʿA*
	and-be.PRF.3M.SG	guardian	DEF-covenant	DEF-late	DEF-prince	S.i.A.

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[12] Some Arabists have analyzed sentences with *kāna* and a concomitant verb in line with the Arabic grammatical tradition without, however, turning their attention to sentences in which the two verbs differ with respect to the relevant categories. These scholars include Beeston, who speaks of "modification of the thematic sentence" (i.e. of the topic-comment construction) in which the predicate of *kāna* is a verbal clause (1968: 63-64), and Paradela Alonso, who also remarks that considering *kāna* to be an auxiliary of the other verb is "óptica occidental" (2005: 79). By contrast, the "non-agreement" was observed by Grande (1963: 158) and was one of the reasons why he refused to consider *kāna* to be comparable to auxiliaries in the Western languages (p. 155, 157) and did not speak of a separate type of tenses but of "sočetanija s glagolom *kāna* byt'" (combinations with the verb *kāna* 'to be'). Grande, however, failed to associate the "non-agreement" with the *mubtada'-ḫabar* construction. "Non-agreement" (called this time "Disgruenz") between *kāna* and the imperfect verb "in Kontaktstellung" was identified (however, only in Classical Arabic relative clauses) by Nebes (1982) as a result of "Subjektswechsel" in the relative clause (Nebes 1982: 50).

qad **wāfat**-*hu*   *l-maniyyatu*   *faǧra* (...)
qad   overtake.PRF.3F.SG-him   DEF-fate(F)   in.the.morning
'and fate had overtaken the late heir to the throne, prince S.i.A, in the morning...',
lit. 'and the late heir to the throne, prince S.i.A, was such: the fate overtook him in the morning...' (al-Ǧazīra)

7   **kunnā**   *qad*   **aṣāba**-*nā*   *ḏ-ḏuʿru*
   be.PRF.1.PL   qad   seize.PRF.3M.SG-us   DEF-panic(M)
   'we had been seized with panic' lit. 'we were such: panic seized us' (al-Ahrām)

8   **kuntu**   *qad*   **wattarat**-*nī*   *ḥarakātu-hu*   *d-dā'ibatu*
   be.PRF.1.SG   qad   stress.PRF.3NH.PL-me   movements-his   DEF-tireless
   'I had been stressed by his constant movements',
   lit. 'I was such: his constant movements stressed me' (Saʿīd, p. 251)

In (9), the fact that the topic, *l-finā'u* 'courtyard', and the SVC, *baṣīṣun* 'ray', show the same grammatical features with respect to person, gender and number results in a coincidental identity of their verbs with respect to these categories:

9   *wa-***kāna**   *l-finā'u*   *qad*   **anāra**-*hu*   *baṣīṣun*   *min...*
   and-be.PRF.3M.SG   DEF-courtyard(M)   qad   light.PRF.3M.SG-it   ray(M)   from...
   'and the courtyard had been lit by a ray from...',
   lit. 'and the courtyard was such: a ray from (...) lit it' (as-Sibāʿī, p. 85)

      Remark: when the verbal predicate precedes its overt subject, it agrees with it only in person and gender, but not in number, the verb being always singular. It is for this reason that in (10) *kāna*, being the predicate of the plural *l-ǧamīʿu* 'all the people', is not plural but singular. A coincidental identity of the verbs with respect to the three relevant categories results:

10   **kāna**   *l-ǧamīʿu*   *qad*   **aʿyā**-*humu*   *l-ǧahdu*
   be.PRF.3M.SG   DEF-all.the.people   qad   wear.out.PRF.3M.   DEF-effort(M)
                                                        SG-them
   'everybody had been worn out by effort',
   lit. 'everybody was such: effort wore them out' (as-Sibāʿī, p. 224)

      In example (11), a coincidental morphological identity between *kāna* and the verb in the comment results from the formal identity of feminine singular and non-human plural forms in the 3 person:

11 **kānat**   is-samā'u   (...) qad **aḫaḏat**   aṭrāfu-hā tašḥubu
    be.PRF.3F.SG   def-sky(F)   qad   begin.PRF.3NH.PL edges-its fade.IPF.3NH.PL
    'the edges of the sky had begun to fade',
    lit. 'the sky was such: its edges began to fade' (al-Ḥarrāṭ, p. 164)

2. **Perfect** of *kāna* with an **imperfect** verb in the comment:

12 *wa-iḏā mā*   *waǧada-hā*   *'alā* *š-šāt*   **kānat**   *bi-muǧarradi*
    and-whenever   find.PRF.3M.SG-her   on   DEF-chat   be.PRF.3F.SG   with-mere

    muḥāwalati-hi *l-ittiṣāla*   *bi-hā*   **yaḫtafī**   *ḍaw'u*   *mawqi'i-hā*
    attempt-his   DEF-contact   with-her   disappear.IPF.3M.SG light(M) position-her
    'and whenever he found her on an online chat, her status indicator disappeared as
    soon as he tried to contact her',
    lit. 'and whenever he found her on an online chat, she was such: with a mere attempt
    of him to contact her her status indicator disappears' (Sa'īd, p. 209)

13 **kānat**   *sa'ādatu-humā*   (...) **lā**   **yašūbu**-hā   *šay'un*
    be.PRF.3F.SG   bliss(F)-their.DU   NEG   disturb.IPF.3M.SG-it(F)   thing(M)
    'nothing disturbed their happiness',
    lit. 'their happiness was such: nothing disturbs it' (al-Ḥarrāṭ, p. 207)

14 *anna* *l-'araba* **kānū**   (...) **yakṯuru**   *fī-him*   *iš-ši'ru*
    that   def-Arabs be.PRF.3M.PL   be.frequent.IPF.3M.SG among-them DEF-poetry(M)
    'that poetry had been frequent among Arabs',
    lit. 'that Arabs were such: poetry is frequent among them' (Ḥusayn, p. 110)

        Example (15)-(16) show a coincidental identity of the verbs with respect
to the three relevant categories (cf. Remark at example 10):

15 **kāna**   *Mīḫā'īl* *wa-Rāma* **yašūqu**-humā   *ḥanīnun*   *ilā* (...)
    be.PRF.3M.SG   Mikhail   and-Rama   fill.IPF.3M.SG -them longing(M)   to
    'Mikhail and Rama were filled with longing for...',
    lit. 'Mikhail and Rama were such: a longing for (...) fills them' (al-Ḥarrāṭ, p. 267)

16 **kāna**   *kilā* *r-raǧulayni* (...)**laysa**   *la-hu* *ḥaẓẓun*   *min dīnin*
    be.PRF.3M.SG   both DEF-men.DU   not.be.IPF.3M.SG to-him portion(M) of   religion
    'both men had absolutely no religion'
    lit. 'each of the two men was such: there is not an amount of religion in him' (Ḥusayn,
    p. 131)

For (17), cf. example (9):

17   **kāna**   *kullu*   *šay'in*   **yumkinu**   *an*   *yataṣawwara*
     be.PRF.3M.SG   every   thing(M)   be.possible.IPF.3M.SG   that   imagine.IPF.3M.SG.SBJV

     l-insānu   *ḥudūṯa-hu*
     DEF-human   occurrence-its
     'one could expect that anything might happen',
     lit. 'everything was such: it is possible that one imagines its occurrence' (as-Sibāʿī, p. 305)

 3. **Imperfect** of *kāna* (*yakūnu/yakūna*) with a **perfect** verb in the comment:

18   *an*   **takūna**   *hāḏihi l-qaṣīdatu*   *qad*   **qāla-hā**   *n-Nābiġa*
     that   be.IPF.3F.SG.SBJV   this   DEF-poem(F)   qad   say.PRF.3M.SG-it(F)   an-Nabigha
     'that this poem has been composed by an-Nabigha',
     lit. 'that this poem is such: an-Nabigha composed it' (al-ʿAšmāwī, p. 82)

19   *wa-qad*   **takūnu**   *dawlatu-hu*   *qad*   **aṣāba-hā**   *maraḍu*
     and-maybe   be.IPF.3F.SG   country(F)-his   qad   affect.PRF.3M.SG-it(F)   illness(M)

     š-šayḫūḫati
     DEF-old.age
     'maybe his country has been affected by the illness of old age',
     lit. 'maybe his country is such: the illness of old age has affected it' (Tāmir, p. 113)

     In (20), a coincidental identity of the verbs with respect to the three relevant categories occurs (cf. example 9).

20   *wa-**yakūnu***   *Rustam*   *qad*   **aʿyā-hu**   *l-ǧahdu*
     and-IPF.3M.SG   Rustam   qad   wear.out.PRF.3M.SG-him   DEF-effort(M)
     'and Rustam would be worn out by effort',
     lit. 'and Rustam would be such: effort has worn him out' (as-Saʿdāwī, p. 134)

 4. **Imperfect** of *kāna* (*yakūnu/yakūna*) with an **imperfect** verb in the comment:

     Sentences illustrating this configuration are rather difficult to find (cf. footnote 3). In (21), a coincidental identity of the verbs with respect to the three categories occurs (cf. example 9):

21 *yu'sifu-nī* *an* **yakūna** *hāḏā* *l-kitābu* **yas'alu**
    sadden.IPF.3M.SG-me that be.IPF.3M.SG.SBJV this def-book(M) ask. IPF.3M.SG

   fī-hi *muqaddimu-hu* *'an...*
   in-it foreword's.author-its about
   'it makes me sad that in this book the author of the foreword asks about...',
   lit. 'it makes me sad that this book is such: the author of its foreword asks in it
   about...' (al-'Uṯaymīn_A, p. 342)

     In (22), the verb in the comment is *laysa*, which, although inflecting as a perfect verb, semantically behaves as an imperfect:

22 *wa-qad* **takūnu** *hāḏihi* *š-šātu* **laysa** *fī-hā* *waladun*
    and-maybe be.IPF.3F.SG this DEF-sheep(F) not.be.IPF.3M.SG in-her young(M)
    'there may be no young in this sheep',
    lit. 'this ship may be such: there is no young in her' (al-'Uṯaymīn_B, p. 172)

     Finally, let us remark that there are sentences with *kāna* and a concomitant verb which cannot be analyzed in the way described above. Let us consider the following example:

23 *kamā* **kāna** *qad* **in'aqada** *l-ittifāqu* *bayna-humā*
    also be.PRF.3M.SG qad be.concluded.PRF.3M.SG DEF-deal(M) between-them.DU
    'Also, a deal had been concluded between them' (al-Ḫarrāṭ, p. 335)

     Here, both *kāna* and the verb which should be interpreted as the predicate verb of the comment clause precede the noun (*l-ittifāqu*). This noun, however, cannot be interpreted as the topic in a topic-comment construction because a topic should not be preceded by its comment. The Arab grammatical tradition may allow the so-called "anteposition of the comment before the topic" (*taqdīm ḫabar kāna 'alā ismihā*), thus, one might try to think of "anteposition of the *ḫabar kāna* before the *ism kāna*" – but then both components would be linearly discontinuous. Indeed, such constructions, which are by no means rare, seem to be better describable as compound tenses. This means that Modern Standard Arabic has constructions with *kāna* and a concomitant verb of which some are better describable as topic-comment constructions, others – as compound tenses, and yet others, probably the greatest number of them, can be analyzed in both ways.

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