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**JAALS/GAAD "SIT" SEMANTIC FUNCTIONS IN  
THE NORTHERN SAUDI DIALECT OF ARABIC**

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**ABSTRACT**

*In a number of investigated varieties of Arabic, the progressive aspect interpretation of sentence has been linked to the use of the participle jaals/gaad 'sit'. In other words, in a sentence where the participle jaals/gaad 'sit' is used before the imperative form of the verb, the sentence is interpreted as progressive; that is to say jaals/gaad 'sit' is viewed as a progressive aspectual marker. In this descriptive paper, through providing data from a variety of Arabic spoken in the northern border region of Saudi Arabia, it is shown that the participle jaals/gaad 'sit' is not only used in sentences with progressive interpretation, ongoing events but it is also used in sentences with non-progressive interpretation, non-ongoing events. More importantly, the paper shows that there are semantic functions behind using jaals/gaad 'sit'; something that has not been shown before.*

**Keywords:** Aspect, Jaals/Gaad 'Sit', Progressive and Habitual Interpretation, Semantic Functions

**1. Introduction**

Aspect is a grammatical category that expresses how an action denoted by a verb extends over time, whether it is complete, ongoing, repetitive, durative or habitual. In most languages, the distinction is made between perfective and imperfective aspects. The former describes complete events; it views an event as a single bounded unit with beginning and end, whereas the latter describes repeated or habitual events; it views an action as taking place during a limited time period and does not make any reference to its beginning or end. Aspect is usually expressed by the verb morphology or by means of aspectual particles, separate verbs, auxiliaries, etc. In a language like English, for example, the distinction is made between two aspects, the perfect and the progressive. That is to say, English is a language with no general perfective or imperfective although perfect aspect in English is sometimes referred to as perfective. Sometimes both aspects are combined forming the perfect progressive. The perfect aspect describes events taking place before the time of speaking and is expressed by the

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use of the past tense of the verb as in "He visited his neighbour." or events taking place in the past but linked to the present which is expressed by the use of 'have' followed by the past participle of the verb as in "He has made an accident.". The progressive aspect describes ongoing and habitual events. Ongoing event is expressed by the use of 'be' followed by the present participle of the verb as in "He is visiting his neighbour." and "He was visiting his neighbour yesterday night."; and habitual event is expressed by the use of present form of the verb as in "He always travels.". 'Used to' is used with past habitual actions as in "He used to travel". More on English aspect, readers are referred to the works of Zandvoort (1962), Scheffer (1975), Comrie (1976), and Joos (1964) among others.

In a number of investigated varieties of Arabic done by Arab and non-Arab linguists, the progressive aspect interpretation of sentence has been linked to the use of the participle *jaals/gaad 'sit'*. In other words, in a sentence where the participle *jaals/gaad 'sit'* is used before the imperative form of the verb, the sentence is interpreted as progressive; that is to say *jaals/gaad 'sit'* is interpreted as a progressive aspectual marker as the following shows.

1. a. *yalab-uun kuura*

play-pl.masc. ball

They are playing football.

They play football.

b. *jaals/gaad-een yalab-uun kuura*

AS/PROG-pl.masc. play-pl.masc. ball

They are playing football.

\*They play football.

From the English gloss in (1a), one notices that the sentence without the use of the participle *Jaals/gaad-een 'sit'* is interpreted as either progressive or non-progressive. In (1b) compared to (1a), where *Jaals/gaad-een 'sit'* is used before the imperative verb *yalab-uun 'play.pl.masc.'*, the sentence is only interpreted as progressive; non-progressive interpretation is not accepted.

In this descriptive paper, through providing data from a variety of Arabic spoken in the northern border region of Saudi Arabia, it is shown that the participle *jaals/gaad 'sit'* is not only used in sentences with ongoing events but it is also used in sentences with non-ongoing events. More importantly, the paper shows that there are semantic functions behind using *jaals/gaad 'sit'*.

The paper is constructed as follows. Section 2 discusses aspect in standard Arabic and other varieties of Arabic. In section 3, aspect and the participle *jaals/gaad 'sit'* use in the northern border region of Saudi

Arabic is discussed. Semantic functions of *Jaals/gaad 'sit'* is discussed under section 4. Section 5 concludes the paper.

## 2. Aspect in Standard Arabic and other Varieties of Arabic

In standard Arabic, the verb has two forms, perfect and imperfect which are referred to as *al-maadhi* and *al-mudhaari* respectively; the perfect form expresses completed events, whereas the imperfect form expresses incomplete, ongoing and habitual events; According to Comrie (1976), perfective indicates both perfective meaning and relative past time reference, while imperfective indicates imperfective meaning or relative non-past time reference. However, there is no agreement among linguists whether these two verb forms encode tense, aspect or both of them. It is also argued that the aspectual marking in Arabic is indicated by words like *qad 'qad'* and *kana 'be'*. The former is followed by the perfect; and the latter is followed by the imperfect. For more details on aspect and tense in Arabic, readers are referred to the work of Mobaidin (1988), Sibawayh (1988), Ibn Jenni (1952), Wright (1974) Chomrie (1976), Fehri (1993), Fassi Fehri (2004), Juhfah (2006), Bahloul (2008), Michalski (2011), Badawi, Carter, and Gully (2016), and Gadalla (2017), Benmamoun (2000), Aoun, Benmamoun and Choueiri (2010), Ryding (2005), and Zainab (2019).

As a matter of fact, verb morphology in Standard Arabic in context-less situations does not suffice to show the intended aspect which makes it important to use certain elements, particles or adverbs, like *undhur* 'look', *dhala* 'stay' and *lazaal* 'still' to express the sentence intended aspect.

2. a. al-awlaad-u                      ya-lab-uun  
       the-boys.pl.masc.-nom. play/are playing-pl.masc.  
       The boys are playing.  
       The boys play.
- b. undhur, al-awlaad-u              ya-lab-uun  
       look. the-boys.pl.masc.nom. are playing-pl.masc.  
       Look, the boys are playing.  
       \*The boys play football.

We observe that in (2a), without the use of any adverb *undhur* 'look', the sentence with the verb *yalabuun* 'play' has habitual/progressive interpretations. When *undhur* 'look' is used, the habitual interpretation is not accepted.

Aspect in other varieties of Arabic has received much attention by Arab and non-Arab linguists; these linguists have shown that speakers of those varieties have developed various strategies to express progressive aspect in ongoing events. Varieties like Egyptian Arabic, Laventine Arabic and Dhofari dialects in Oman use a preposition-like prefix '*b-*' before the imperfect verbs. Libyan Arabic uses the preposition '*fi*' before

the object to mark progressive. Other varieties such as Jordanian, Sudani, Omani, Tunisian, Iraqi, and Moroccan, just to name a few, use *gaals* or *gaad* 'sit' before the imperfect to mark progressive aspect; for more details on the use of those markers, readers are referred to the work of Eisele (1999), Jarad (2015), Dickens (2011), Borjars, K., Ghadgoud, K. and Payne, J. (2016), Al-Balushi (2016), Davey (1016), and McNil (2017). As the focus of this paper is the use of *jaals/gaad* 'sit', the paper will not say anything about the other markers. What all of those studies discussed the use of *jaals/gaad* 'siy' have in common is that those linguists emphasize that those markers are used to mark progressive aspect of ongoing events; that is to say, they are not used with habitual actions. The following are examples taken from works done on four Arabic varieties: Al-Khartuum, Tunisian, Omani and UAE cited by Dickins (2011), McNil (2017), Al-Blalushi (2016), and Jarad (2015) respectively.

3. gaad            tasawwi        sinu  
   sit. AP.msg. do.IPFV.2sg what  
   What are you doing?
4. maks        gada            timsi                mastwiyya  
   not.2SG sit.AP.FSG walk.IPFV.2SG straight  
   You are not walking straight.
5. l-awlad        gals-in    y-kitb-u                wagb-a-t-hum  
   the-boys.nom PROG-pm impf-write-3pm homework.acc-p--their  
   The boys are (in the process of) writing their homework.
6. yirana        kanow yalsin    yi-trayg-un        yom sabbat l-harija  
   Neighbour.our were PROG they-have breakfast when started the-  
   fire  
   fi-l-matbah  
   in-the-kitchen

Our neighbours were having breakfast when the fire broke out in the kitchen.

One observes that in (3, 4, 5 and 6), as shown by the English glosses, with the use of *gaad*, *gada*, *galsin* and *yalsin* 'sit' before the imperative forms of the verbs *tasawwi* 'do', *timsi* 'walk', *yktibu* 'write', *yitraygun* 'have breakfast', the sentences are interpreted as progressive; (3, 4 and 5) are sentences with present progressive interpretation; and (5), with the use of *kanow* 'were', is a sentence with past progressive interpretation. It is clear from those sentences and other sentences linguists use and discuss in their papers that the sentences express ongoing events; none of the linguists use or discuss the so-called aspectual marker with sentences with habitual interpretation. This paper shows that *jaalis/gaad* 'sit' is not only used with sentences with progressive interpretation but it

also used with sentences with habitual interpretation. Next, aspect and the use of *jaals/gaad* 'sit' in northern border region of Saudi Arabia Arabic are discussed.

### 3. Aspect and *Jaals/Gaad* 'Sit' in Northern Border Region of Saudi Arabic

As in standard Arabic, in northern border region of Saudi Arabic, in context-less situations, verb morphology does not suffice to show the intended aspect which makes it obligatory to use certain elements, particles or adverbs to express the sentence intended aspect.

7. a. nibeea-ih b-agal al-asaar

sell.1pl.-it in-the least the-prices

We are selling it with the lowest prices. Ongoing event

We sell it with the lowest prices. Habitual event

- b. h-al-yuumeen nibeea-ih b-agal al-asaar

this-the-two days sell.1pl.-it in-the least the-prices

These days, we are selling it with lowest prices. Ongoing event

\*These days, we sell it with the lowest prices. Habitual event

In (7a), one observes that the sentence with the verb *nibeea* 'sell' has two interpretations, progressive and habitual. In (7b), with the use of *halyuumeen* 'these days', only ongoing aspect is accepted.

More importantly, when *jaals/gaad* 'sit' is used, the interpretation stays the same.

8. jaals/gaad-een nibeea-ih b-agal al-asaar

sit-pl.masc. sell.1pl.-it in-the least the-prices

We are selling it with lowest prices. Ongoing event

We sell it with the lowest prices. Habitual event

One observes that in (8), with the use of *jaals/gaad* 'sit', as in (7a), the sentence has two interpretations, progressive and habitual.

Here are more examples where *jaals/gaad* 'sit' is used in the future and past. As in other varieties of Arabic, in sentences with progressive aspect interpretations, speakers use the future marker *rah* 'will' followed by the verb *kun* 'be' before *jaals/gaad* 'sit'. The past form of *kan* 'be' in is used with past aspect sentences.

9. a. rah nik-uun jaals/gaad-een nibeea-ih b-agal al-asaar

will be-pl.masc. sit-pl.masc. sell.1pl.-it in-the least the-prices

We will be selling it with least prices. Ongoing event

We will sell it with the least prices. Habitual event

- b. kin-na jaals/gaad-een nibeea-ih b-agal al-asaar

were-1pl. sit-pl.masc.      sell.1pl.-it in-the least the-prices

We were selling it with least prices.      Ongoing event

We used to sell it with the least prices.      Habitual event

One observes that in (9a and b), with the use of *jaals/gaad* 'sit', the sentence has two interpretations, progressive and habitual.

After showing that *jaals/gaad* 'sit' is used with ongoing and non-ongoing events, we, next, provide two supporting evidence for this use.

The first supporting evidence comes from Vendler's (1967) verb classification in which Vendler states that stative verbs do not occur in the progressive; it is an evidence that is used by Jarad (2015) for showing that the use of *jaals/gaad* 'sit' mark the imperfect verb following it as progressive. According to him, *jaals/gaad* 'sit' cannot be used with static verbs such *karah* 'hate' and *yihib* 'love'.

The following examples taken from Jarad's (2015) work.

10. a. \*omar yalis yi-krah Maryam

Omar PROG he-hate Maryam

b. \*l-yal yalsin yi-hib-un l-chaklait

the-kids PROG they-love the-chocolate

Interestingly enough, in northern border region of Saudi Arabic, *jaals/gaad* 'sit' appears before stative verbs.

11. a. yishik-uu n b-kalam-ih

dout-pl.masc. in-talk-his

They doubt his speech.

b. jaals/gaad-een yishik-uun b-kalam-ih

sit-pl.masc. dout-pl.masc. in-talk-his

They doubt his speech.

12. a. yikrih-uun al-mideer b-sibab gararat-ih

hate-pl.masc. the-manager in-cause decisions-his

"They hate the manager because of his decisions."

b. jaals/gaad-een yikrih-uun al-mideer b-sibab gararat-ih

sit-pl.masc. hate-pl.masc. the-manager in-cause decisions-his

"They hate the manager because of his decisions."

One notices in (11a and b) and in (12a and b) *jaals/gaad* 'sit' is used before the stative verbs *yishikuun* 'doubt' or *yikrihuun* 'hate'.

The other piece of supporting evidence comes from inchoative verbs. According to McCarus (1976), imperfect forms of inchoative verbs such as *ynaam* 'fall asleep' and *ysuum* 'fast' do not have progressive

meaning; while their participle forms *naayim* 'sleeping' and *saayim* 'fasting' have aspectual meaning. In the dialect under investigation, *jaals/gaad* 'sit' can be used with the imperfective and the participle forms of the verb.

13. a. *yisuum-uun w-an-naas miftirah*  
 fast-pl.masc. and-the-people not fasting  
 They are fasting while the people are not.  
 "They fast while the people do not."
- b. *jaals/gaad-een yisuum-uun w-an-naas miftirah*  
 sit-pl.masc. fast-pl.masc. and-the-people not fasting  
 They are fasting while the people are not.  
 They fast while the people do not.
14. a. *saaym-een w-an-naas miftireen*  
 fasting-pl.masc. and-the-people not fasting  
 They are fasting while the people are not.
- b. *jaals/gaad-een saaym-een w-an-naas miftirah*  
 sit-pl.masc. fast-pl.masc. and-the-people not fasting  
 They are fasting while the people are not.

From (13b and 14b), one observes that *jaals/gaad* 'sit' is used with the static verb *yishik-uun* 'doubt' and the inchoative verb *ysuum-uun* 'fast'. To this point, data from the dialect spoken in the northern region border of Saudi Arabia show that the participle *jaals/gaad* 'sit' is used with ongoing and habitual events. Now, since it used with both aspects, one might ask "what is the point behind using it?" *Jaals/gaad* 'sit' is actually used to serve certain semantic functions. In the Next section, the semantic functions of *jaals/gaad* 'sit' is discussed.

#### 4. Semantic Functions of *Jaals/Gaad* 'Sit'

In this subsection, by providing some examples, it will be shown that the use of *jaals/gaad* 'sit' is not redundant as one might think. Its use influences sentence interpretation; that is to say, it serves certain semantic functions. For showing the various semantic functions of *jaals/gaad* 'sit', examples with hypothetical situations are presented.

##### a. Reassurance Function

One of the semantic functions of *jaals/gaad* 'sit' is to reassure something done or said.

15. Father: *asawit la-k ma tirid al-i!!*  
 call.1sg. to-you not answer.2sg. on-me  
 I am call you and you do not answer me!!

Son: *athaakir*

study.1sg.

I am studying.

Father: *siheeh?*

true

Is that true?

Son: *aquul la-k jaals/gaad athaakir*

say.1sg. to-you sit.1sg. study.1sg.masc.

I am saying, I am studying.

One observes that the son uses the participle *jaals/gaad* 'sit' before the verb *athaakir* 'study' to assure his father that he is really studying and not wasting his time. We have here an ongoing event. Here is another situation with non-ongoing event.

16. Mother: *khayfah ala wileed-i, ya abu saad*

fear.1sg.fem. on son-my, Oh father Saad

Oh, abu Saad, I am worried about my son.

Father (abu Saad): *la takhaf-een al-ih; amuuri-h zeenah*

no fear-2sg.fem. on-him; affairs-his good

No; you do not need to be worried about him; he is fine.

Mother: *ma haqwit-i, ya abu saad.*

no thought-my, Oh father Saad

I do not think so, abu Saad.

Father: *la; wleedi-k ma al-ih; hatha hu jaalis ysaali,*

no, son.your no on-him this he sit.sing.masc. pray.2sg.masc.

*w-ythaakir w-daayim huuli-na*

and-studies and-always around-us

No, your son is fine; he prays, studies and is always near us.

Mother: *Allah yasmia min-k*

Allah responds from-you

I hope so.

In this situation, the father is reassuring the mother that her son Saad is fine by using *jaals/gaag* 'sit' before the imperative verbs *ysaali* 'prays', *ythaakir* 'studies'. The mother last sentence *allah yasmia min-k* "I hope so" shows that the mother is being reassured.



b. Dissatisfaction Function

The other semantic functions of *jaals/gaad* 'sit' is to express dissatisfaction of something done or said.

17. Grandpa: keef iyaal-ak ali w-fahad?

how sons-your Ali and Fahad

How are your sons Ali and Fahad?

Father: alhamdu li-Lilah zeen-een

praises to-Allah good-pl.masc.

Thanks to Allah; they are fine.

Grandpa: w-keef hum b-al-drasah

and-how they in-the-school

How are they in schools?

Father: ali yadris b-al-jaamah w-fahad jaalis/gaad

Ali studys.2sg.masc. in-the-university and-Fahad sit.2sg.masc.

yadris baad

studys.2sg.masc. as well

Ali studies at the university and Fahad studies as well.

Grandpa: leeh wish balaah fahad

why what problem Fahad

Why? What is wrong with Fahad?

Father: ma hu mdanee-ha. tigil yabi yatrik-ha

not he likes.2sg.masc.-it seems wants leaves.2sg.masc.-it

He does not like; it seems he want to leave it.

Grandpa: ailmin ma hu tayyib

piece of new not it good

It is a bad piece of news.

One observes that when the father talks about his other son Fahad, he uses *jaals/gaad* 'sit' before the imperative form of the verb *yadris* 'studies'. This use makes the grandpa infer that there is something wrong with the other son, Fahad. That is why the grandpa comments by saying *leeh wish balaah fahad* 'why, what is wrong with fahad?'. So, *jaals/gaad* 'sit' is used by the Fahad's father to show his dissatisfaction of Fahad's performance.

c. Disambiguating Function

*Jaals/gaad 'sit'* is also used to disambiguate something.

18. Doctor: kam yuum takl-een ad-dwa?

how day eat.2sg.fem. the-medication

How many days do you take the drug?

Patient: thalath marrat b-al-isbuua

three times in-the-week

Three times a week.

Doctor: la, ana asal kam yuum jaals/gaad-ah takleen ad-dwa

no, I ask how day sit. 2sg.fem. eat. 2sg.fem. the-medication

How many days are you taking the drug?

Patient: ahaa, aakl-ih l-i thalath ayyaam

ok; eat 1sg.fem-it for-me three days

I have been eating it for three days.

One observes that when the doctor asks the patient *kam yuum takleen addawa* 'how many days you eat the medicine?' without using *jaals/gaad 'sit'*, the patient incorrectly interprets the doctor's intention and replies by saying *thalaath marraat balisbuua* 'three times a week'. In other words, the patient gives details about the medicine usage time prescribed for her. When the doctor uses *jaals/gaad 'sit'* before the verb *takleen addawa* 'eat the medicine', the patient provides the right answer the doctor looks for by saying *li thalath ayyaam* 'for three days'. In other words, the patient gives details about the period the patient has been taking the medicine before seeing the doctor.

d. Reliability Function

Speakers also use *jaals/gaad 'sit'* for reliability function.

19. The car dealer: wish raaya-k b-as-sayarah?

what opinion-your in-the-car

What do you think of the car?

The car inspector: asayyarah tishtighil

the-car works.2sg.fem.

The car works.

or

as-sayyarah jaals/gaad-ah tishtighil

the-car sit.2sg.fem.-it works.2sg.fem.

The car is working.

In (19), when the inspector's answer is without the use of *jaals/gaad* 'sit', it is understood that the car is ok; and the dealer is implicitly advised to buy it; but with the use of *jaals/gaad* 'sit', the inspector sends a message to the dealer to avoid buying the car as he expects it to cease working soon. In other words, he says to the dealer buying it is a failure.

In this section, it is shown that there are four semantic functions behind using *jaals/gaad* 'sit': reassurance, dissatisfaction, disambiguating, and reliability.

## 5. Conclusion

In this descriptive paper, through providing data from a variety of Arabic spoken in the northern border region of Saudi Arabia, it is shown that the participle *jaals/gaad* 'sit' is not only used in sentences with ongoing events but it is also used in sentences with non-ongoing events. More importantly, the paper shows that reassurance, dissatisfaction, disambiguating, and reliability are semantic functions behind using *jaals/gaad* 'sit'; something that has not been shown before. Future work is to investigate whether the same semantic functions are manifested in other varieties of Arabic. Moreover, syntactically speaking, one may need to provide a syntactic account for this use.

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