Title	Agent defocusing in Egyptian Arabic
Sub Title	エジプトアラビア語における動作主の脱焦点化
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Publisher	慶應義塾大学外国語教育研究センター
Publication year	2019
Jtitle	慶應義塾外国語教育研究 (Journal of foreign language education). Vol.16, (2019.) ,p.23- 49
JaLC DOI	
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Notes	研究論文
Genre	Departmental Bulletin Paper
URL	https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AA12043414-20190000-0023

Agent Defocusing in Egyptian Arabic

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Abstract

This paper explores 'agent defocusing' strategies in Egyptian Arabic. Many studies have been dedicated to the syntactic structures in standard Arabic, but Egyptian Arabic has not received the same amount of attention. Even standard Arabic, no research has been dedicated to Agent defocusing. Agent defocusing phenomenon is related to more than one construction, for example, middle constructions, passives, and others related to voice phenomena. In this paper I aim to bring together different perspectives on voice, centering on the notion of 'agent defocusing' from a syntactic-semantic perspective.

This paper provides analyses of constructions in Egyptian Arabic that function as 'agent defocusing' or 'agent backgrounding' in an event.

Three constructions in Egyptian Arabic share a function referred to as 'agent defocusing'. Through sharing this common function, these three constructions differ in other aspects, such as morpho-syntactic characteristics, semantic aspects, and the degree of agent defocusing. The three constructions are:

1. Vague agent construction
2. Intransitive prefix *et-* construction
3. Passive participle construction

This study will provide meaningful data concerning Egyptian Arabic for linguists.

Keywords: Egyptian Arabic; agent defocusing; passive; degree of emergence and backgrounding of agents; meaning and function.

1. Introduction

'Agent defocusing' was first mentioned by Shibatani (1985) as a universal function of passive. However, in this paper it is argued that we should look at this notion as an independent phenomenon, and find out more about its realization across multiple constructions in many languages, as well as analyzing the degree of defocusing the agent in consideration to morpho-syntactic characteristics.

First, we should explain what the term 'agent defocusing' means here. As mentioned before, agent defocusing is realized within constructions such as passives (example 1.), non-agentive constructions (example 2.), unaccusative constructions (example 3.), middle constructions (example 4.), where the agent is omitted from the syntactic construction.

1. Das Haus ist zertort worden   (German)
   this house was destroyed
2. Auto-sid pes-ti hoolikalt   (Estonian)
   they/someone washed cars carefully.
3. takitate no gohan ga tabetai.   (Japanese)
   I want to eat freshly steamed rice.
4. This book sells well.   (English)

The term 'agent defocusing' is related in meaning to 'agent demotion', but here the term 'defocusing' is chosen as it is broader than just demoting the agent from the syntactic construction and implies more than one level or degree. In other words, 'agent defocusing' refers to removing focus to some degree or totally, with respect to semantic and syntactic realization as well.

Also the term 'agent' here is defined as an entity that performs an action. 'Agent' here is referred to in a broader sense which implicates both intentional actor, and nonintentional cause. As we will observe later that 'intentionality' plays a determinative role concerning syntactic realization of the agent within one of the constructions discussed in this paper.

Actually the notion of 'agent defocusing' has not been in concern as an independent information structure and semantic function as well, thus I hope this paper may help in rising its importance for further analyses, taking both perspectives into consideration to benefit the understanding of voice and related phenomena.

Two of the three constructions discussed in this paper have been in concern, not from an

'agent defocusing' perspective but as 'passive constructions' in a few studies: one of them is intransitive prefix *et-* construction. Watson (2002) mentioned that prefix *in-* (*et-*in Egyptian Arabic) is used to form passive constructions. Watson considered this usage common in some dialects in the Arabic language, however, passive constructions differ in frequency and the situation used. The problem in Watson's analysis is that he did not identify the usage or the meaning of prefix *et-*. It was only morphophonemic research, thus no semantic-pragmatic explanation was given.

Another study was made by Abdel Massih (1978) from the perspective of descriptive grammar. Like Watson, Abdel Massih also claimed that prefix *et-* is used in passive formation; moreover, he restricted the passive usage to one of the following cases: (A) when the agent is unknown, (B) when the agent is concealed for some reason, (C) when the agent is obvious and therefore need not be mentioned. He restricted passivization to transitive verbs or verbs having an object of a proposition: no intransitive verbs were used. Abdel Massih (1979) is one of the important descriptive grammar references, if not the most, but his work has some problems concerning overgeneralizing passive function, and does not reveal the function of *et-* construction; the nature of the so-called passive in Egyptian Arabic. In addition, we find that not only transitive verbs but also intransitive verbs can be used in prefix *et-* construction. In Watson's and Abdel Massih's studies, neither what is meant by passive, nor the reason to call this construction as 'passive construction' is explained. Due to the points argued thus far, there is no clear definition of passive in Egyptian Arabic. Therefore, such grammatical terms are avoided in this paper.

The other construction discussed in this paper is 'passive participle construction'. The passive participle has been known to express the state of an object. However, it has not been analyzed from the aspect of 'agent defocusing'. In this paper, 'passive participle construction' is analyzed as an agent defocusing construction, considering the degree of defocusing in comparison to other constructions.

On the other hand, 'vague agent construction' has not been in concern at this point. In this paper, the characteristics of this construction are syntactically as well as semantically explored. Furthermore, this construction is analyzed in terms of 'agent defocusing'.

This paper tries to focus on these three constructions from an aspect free of grammatical categorization. Due to the fact that it is difficult to analyze the three constructions under one grammatical category: passive, I found it more worthy to analyze these constructions sharing 'agent defocusing' as common semantic function relating to their syntactic characteristics,

which means getting useful data concerning this semantic function 'agent defocusing', and how its realization differs within the same language.

This study is supposed to be one of the first researches dedicated to 'agent defocusing' in the most spoken Arabic dialect: Egyptian Arabic, and the findings will redound to the benefits of linguistic researchers to uncover unknown areas concerning 'agent defocusing' that many researchers were not able to explore.

2. Agent defocusing constructions in Egyptian Arabic
2.1. Egyptian Arabic and standard Arabic

Arabic is the official language of modern-day Egypt, and Egyptian Arabic is a form of Arabic used in daily conversation. Egyptian Arabic and standard Arabic are quite different, in vocabulary, pronunciation, lexicon, and word order. These differences are considered to have occurred due to effects inherited from the Coptic and Greek languages.

Pronunciation Differences

First, let us turn to differences in pronunciations between Standard Arabic and Egyptian Arabic. The phonetic value of [j] in standard Arabic is represented in Egyptian Arabic as [g]. Consequently, written text containing the phonetic value [j] in standard Arabic is pronounced as [g] in Egyptian Arabic. There are also differences in the phonetic value of [q]. [q] in standard Arabic is pronounced with a strong inflection, but this is modified to a glottal [a] in Egyptian Arabic. For example, the word that means *pen* is written as *qalam*, but pronounced as *ʔalam* in Egyptian Arabic. However, there are some instances, though less frequent, when [q] in standard Arabic is pronounced as [q] in Egyptian Arabic as well, such as in *elqa:hera* (Cairo), *qabi:la* (tribe), etc.

The following table shows significant differences in pronunciation.

Table 1

Differences in pronunciation between standard Arabic and Egyptian Arabic

Arabic character	IPA	Description	Pronunciation in Egyptian Arabic
ث	θ	Like the [th] sound in *think*, but not like [th] in *that*.	[t] or [s]
ذ	ð	Like [th] in *that*, but not like [th] in *think*.	[d] or [z]
ص	sˤ	Like the sound [s], but more emphatic and darker.	[s]
ض	dˤ	Like the sound [d], but more emphatic and darker.	[d]
ط	tˤ	Similar to the sound [t], but more emphatic and darker.	[t]
ظ	ðˤ	Similar to the sound [th] in *that*, but more emphatic and darker.	[z]

Syntactic differences

   The word order in standard Arabic is typically VSO, whereas Egyptian Arabic favors SVO. The SVO word order exists in standard Arabic also, but only in marked constructions in which the focus is on a targeted theme.

   Differences also exist in the word order of interrogative sentences. The interrogative in standard Arabic is commonly placed at the beginning of sentences, but is often placed at the end of sentences in Egyptian Arabic.

   Syntactical differences between standard Arabic and Egyptian Arabic also include many differences in the use of negatives, a few of which are highlighted as examples in the following chart.

Table 2

Differences in use of negatives between Egyptian Arabic and Standard Arabic

	Verbal negation	Nominal negation	Question

Egyptian Arabic	ma-kol-ʃ
	neg-eat.1sing.pres-neg.
	I don't eat.
		muʃ tˤa:lib
		neg. student
		(I/you/he) is not a student.
			Q1: enta tˤa:lib?
			   you student
			   Are you a student?
			Q2: hatsafer fe:n?
			   you.travel where
			   Where will you travel?

Standard Arabic	la ʔa:kol
	neg. eat.1sing.imper.
	I don't eat.
		lastu tˤa:lib-an
		neg.v. student-acc.
		I am not a student.
			Q3: hal ʔanta tˤa:lib
			   intrg. you student
			   Are you a student?
			Q4: ʔila: ʔaina tusa:firu
			   to where you.travel
			   Where do you travel?

The use of negatives in the sentences above are different in Egyptian Arabic and in standard Arabic, in that in Egyptian Arabic, the adverb *mush* is used in nominal and verbal negation, while this type of negation is not found in standard Arabic. With regard to the use of the imperfective aspect in verbs, in standard Arabic there is only one imperfective form, and there is no form for expressing the present continuous. Egyptian Arabic has a present simple verb form, but in informative sentences (for example, *baru:ħ eʃʃughl* which means 'I go to work') the present simple verb form is not used, and instead the present continuous or future tense is used.

Lexical differences

In addition to pronunciation and grammar, standard Arabic and Egyptian Arabic are different in terms of vocabulary as well. The differences in vocabulary between the two languages are seen in a substantial number of words, including the examples shown below in table (3).

Table 3

Examples of lexical differences between standard Arabic and Egyptian Arabic

Meaning of word	Standard Arabic	Egyptian Arabic
father	wa:led	baba
mother	wa:leda	mama
head	raʔs	dema:ɣ
shoes	ħiða:ʔ	gazma
skirt	tannoura	ji:ba
trousers	sirwa:l	bantalo:n
bread	xubz	ʕe:ʃ
rubber	mimħa:t	ʔasti:ka
evening	fi^lmasa:ʔ	belle:l
tomorrow	ɣadan	bokra
only	faqatˤ	bas
some	baʕdˤ	ʃwayya
go	ðahaba	ra:ħ
come	ʔata:	geh
work	ʕamila	eʃtaɣal
meet	qa:bala	ʃa:f

2.2. Agent defocusing in Egyptian Arabic

In this section we will discuss agent defocusing expressions in Egyptian Arabic, which exist in three different types of constructions. We will then examine the constructional characteristics, functions, and restrictions.

One of these construction types is the noun construction with the passive participle. The other two types of constructions are verbal, with one type characterized by the prefix *et-* which is used when deriving an intransitive verb counterpart from a basic transitive verb. For explanatory purposes, this paper refers to this intransitive prefix as the '*et-* construction'. The other verbal sentence form has no subject, but the verb agrees with the third person plural subject, and this is referred to as the 'vague agent construction'. This construction has not yet been the subject of any studies that I am aware of.

Constructions that express agent defocusing in Egyptian Arabic share the common function of demoting the agent, therefore defocusing it, but these constructions vary in their respective focuses. Constructions using passive participles defocus the agent while focusing on the 'resultant state' of the subject, or the logical object of the event. 'Prefix *et-* construction' and 'vague agent construction' are verbal constructions that defocus the agent, focusing on the event itself. However, these two forms of constructions differ in terms of the degree of backgrounding/defocusing of the agent. The verb in 'vague agent construction' takes on the active transitive form, and the object of the event grammatically remains as the object, meaning it uses the same construction that expresses [someone does something on someone]. Therefore, the awareness of the existence of the agent is strong, although the agent is defocused by diffusing its identity. On the other hand, 'prefix *et-* construction' simply suggests the existence of the agent while placing the focus on the event itself, and in comparison to 'vague agent construction' the degree of the defocusing of the agent is much stronger.

The 'passive participle construction' is common in standard Arabic, but the other two verbal constructions only exist in Egyptian Arabic.

2.3. Vague agent construction (active-transitive construction)

Although vague agent construction in Egyptian Arabic uses verbs in the active-transitive form in agreement with the third person plural subject, it does not express a definite agent. Examples are shown below for reference purposes.

5. Q: ʕali   mal-u?

   Ali   how-3sing.ml.poss

   'What is wrong with Ali?'

   A: *darabu-h*   *fil-madrasa*

   hit.perf.3pl-3sing.ml.acc.   at.def-school

   'He *was hit* at school.' (lit: (They) hit him *at school*)

6. ʕala -fekra,   ħosna   *hazzaʔu-ha*   *fi-ʃʃoɣl*

   by the way,   Hosna.acc.   insult.perf-3pl-3sing.fem.acc.   at.def-work

   'By the way, Hosna *was insulted* at work.'(lit: (They) insulted Hosna *at work*.)

From the examples above, the following seven characteristics of vague agent construction emerge, differentiating it from unmarked active-transitive construction.

(i)   The verb is in the active form.

(ii) The verb agrees with a third person plural subject but a definite agent can never appear syntactically.

(iii) Despite the fact that the verb agrees with a third person plural subject, the pronoun 'they' (the third person plural subject) is not expressed. If a third person plural personal pronoun is expressed clearly, the agent defocusing function would be lost.

(iv) The verb matches up with the third person plural subject, and may be expressed in the plural form even if the agent is in the first person. The agents [hit] and [insult] in examples 5. and 6. match up with the third person plural subject, but the verb will also match up with the third person plural even when the agent is in the first person, regardless of the number of people the agent is expressing.

The prerequisite of the absence of a specific third person subject alone cannot determine whether the construction functions as agent defocusing, or as an unmarked active construction that has a specific third person plural agent. If the third person plural has appeared once in a prior clause, it can be abbreviated later in that context.

(v)   The consenting agents are restricted to human beings.

(vi) A phrase suggesting the identity of the agent is required. A common method is to use location phrases that describe the place of occurrence of the event and that express the attributes of the agent. For example, the phrases [at school] and [at work] in the aforementioned examples 5. and 6. respectively perform this task, and they represent the place of occurrence of the event as well as the place related to the event.

7. *homma*   *darabu*   ʕali   fel-madrasa

    3pl.nom.   hit.perf.3pl.   Ali.acc.   at.def-school

    '*They* hit Ali at school.'

8. Q: we,   *ʕamalu*   eh   baʕd   keda?

    And,   do.perf.3pl.   what   after   that

    'Then, what did *they* do, after that?'

   A: *darabu*   ʕali ,   w

    hit.perf.3pl.   Ali.acc.   while

    howa   b-yelʕab   maʕa   ʔasħa:bu

    he.nom.   cont-pres.3pl.ml.   with   friend.pl.poss.3sing.ml.

    '*They* hit Ali, while he was playing with his friends.'

Both examples 7. and 8. break away from the above-mentioned restrictions (owing to the fact that example 8. clearly expresses the third person plural pronoun and that the context of example 8. becomes a topic with the specific [they]). These sentences can only be interpreted as unmarked active sentences that do not express agent defocusing.

2.4. Prefix *et-* construction

In Egyptian Arabic, intransitive verbs are usually productively created from transitive verbs with the use of prefixes. Intransitive verb constructions and passive systems, as shown below, are created by adding the prefix *et-* to transitive verb forms. This section examines agent defocusing constructions that use the intransitive verb prefix *et-*.

2.4.1. Main usage of the prefix *et-*

The prefix *et-* was originally imported from standard Arabic. However, the pronunciation of this prefix in standard Arabic is not [et] but rather [en]. The method of usage also differs between standard Arabic and Egyptian Arabic.

The prefix *en-* modifies transitive verbs into intransitive verbs in standard Arabic, but they are not as productive as the prefix *et-* in Egyptian Arabic. Intransitive verbs can be created by adding the prefix to the beginning of the word.

9. *en- fataħa*   al-bab-u   (intransitive construction)

   intr-open.3sing.perf.ml.   def-door-nom.

   'The door opened.'

10. *futiħa*   al-bab-u   (passive construction)

    open.pass.3sing. perf.ml.   def-door-nom.

    'The door is opened.'

In example 9., adding the prefix *en-* to the beginning of *fataħa*, which means 'open' in standard Arabic, forms an intransitive verb, the derivative *en-fataħa*. Whereas in example 10., the transitive verb *fataħa* is modified to a passive verb by changing the vowels so that it becomes *futiħa*.

On the other hand, in Egyptian Arabic, in expressions containing converted intransitive verbs, the prefix *et-* is used instead. The prefix *en-*, which is used to create intransitive verbs in standard Arabic, was imported into Egyptian Arabic and phonologically modified to *et-* to change its function. The prefix *et-* is used to form intransitive verbs by prefixing it to any transitive verb. The prefix *et-* demotes the agent syntactically by making the agent completely invisible, as if the event occurred on its own.

11. el-bab   et- fataħ

    def-door   intr-open.3sing.perf.ml.

    'The door opened/the door is opened.'

In standard Arabic, the intransitive prefix *en-* is used when the subject changes on its own, or spontaneously. However, in Egyptian Arabic, as discussed above, the *et-* prefix is used in two different scenarios: one when the subject changes on its own, or spontaneously, and the other, when the event needs an external power or agent to be realized. In the former case, where the expression changes in the subject state and does not always require the existence of an external cause to be suggested, such as with *fataħ* (to open), *ʔafal* (to close) , it is acceptable to interpret the expression as meaning either [(someone) opens] or [opened (by itself)],[(someone) closes] or [closed (by itself)], [(someone) dampens] or [dampened (naturally)], etc. This can lead to ambiguity. On the other hand, verbs such as *saraʔ* (to steal) and *ħatt* (to place) that express events related to changes in the subject through external causes are interpreted as only [stolen] and [placed] by someone, specifically an agent.

In standard Arabic, derivative intransitive verbs are formed by adding the prefix *en-* to transitive verbs, where the verb lacks action or intention on behalf of the subject (such as a tree falling over, which is not achieved intentionally by the tree). Such verbs are used to refer to a natural state not requiring the existence of an agent, where subjects move or change on their own under certain situations. Examples of these intransitive verbs include *en-fataħa* (to open (by itself/automatically)), *en-ɣalaqa* (to close (by itself/automatically)), *en-sa:ba* (to flow (naturally)), and *en-qalaba* (to be reversed (by itself)). On the other hand, intransitive verbs such as *rattaba* (to line up) and *nazˤzˤafa* (to clear up) differ from the former intransitive verbs in that the actions of [lining up] and [clearing up] do not exist in a natural state. Thus, it would be unthinkable for these actions to be expressed as actual events from which the existence of the agent has been removed. The use of the intransitive prefix *en-* to express these actions does not exist in standard Arabic, and these actions are therefore expressed through passive constructions. In contrast, in Egyptian Arabic, the following derivatives can also be formed by adding the prefix *et-* to transitive verbs.

Table 4

Transitive-intransitive verb pairs in Egyptian Arabic

transitive verb	meaning	intransitive verb in Ar.	passive meaning in Eng.
naʕkeʃ	to scatter	et-naʕkeʃ	to be scattered
ratteb	to clear up	et-ratteb	to be cleared up
rass	to line up	et-rass	to be lined up
saraʔ	to steal	et-saraʔ	to be stolen
ʔakal	to eat	et-takel	to be eaten
katab	to write	et-katab	to be written
ʃereb	to drink	et-ʃarab	to be drunk
lebes	to wear	et-labas	to be worn

It is possible to add the aforementioned *et-*prefix to transitive verbs that cannot be imagined as natural changes happening under normal circumstances, such as the verbs shown above in table (4), as an alternative to the clear passive construction that exists in other languages. Although passive expression in standard Arabic would be considered unnatural without a supporting context, prefix *et-* construction can be used productively when the speaker wants to demote the existence of the agent and focus on the event itself, where the change or sequence

happened due to the occurrence of the event.

12. el-blouza　　di　　et-labaset　　　　　　emba:reħ
　　def-blouse　　this　　intr-wear.3sing.fem.perf.　　yesterday
　　'Someone has worn this blouse yesterday.' (Alternatively, 'I wore this blouse
　　yesterday.')

12'. *lubisat^　　　　　　　　il-bulu:zat-u　　　　Ɂamsi.
　　pass-wear.3sing.perf.fem.　　def-blouse-nom.　　yesterday
　　'This blouse was worn yesterday.'

As shown in example 12. passive construction that would not be possible in standard Arabic (example 12'.), English, or Japanese, is possible in Egyptian Arabic. In other words, it would be unnatural to use verbs such as [to wear] in passive construction in English or Japanese (for example, 'my blouse was worn yesterday') without the existence of an appropriate context, or some sort of suffering being expressed through the context. This is considered to be due to the different roles and functions assigned to passive expressions in these languages. Since passive construction is unavailable in Egyptian Arabic, intransitive verb construction serves as its alternative, demoting the agent at the syntactic level, and placing the focus on the occurrence of an event as well as the resultant change. The problem is that prefix *et-* construction does not place the emphasis on the existence of an agent, but rather on the fact that the event actually happened. For this reason, the agent is not expressed even when in the first or second person (representing the speaker or hearer), and the focus is placed on the occurrence of the event and resultant change. On the other hand, active sentences concentrate on 'who did what', in other words on the agent, consequently expressing the event in the [do] form.

2.4.2. Constructional restrictions on the agent

There are three types of restrictions on the appearance of the agent, in prefix *et-* constructions including those comprising the *men* 'from' clause, summarized as:

(1) The agent should be unintentional. The appearance or non-appearance of the agent in prefix *et-* constructions is decisive in informing the hearer whether the agent initiated the event intentionally or by accident. Agents only appear if the event was unintentionally initiated.

(2) Agents appearing in the *men* 'from' clause do not act as prototypical agents, but express the cause of the event. Such agents may also be used to explain motivation[i] of an animal or an inanimate cause.

(3) Agents may appear in the *men* 'from' clause as semantic agents of emotional verbs, such as *et-basat* 'to delight' and *et- garaħ* 'to hurt', even if the event is caused intentionally by the agent (example 16.).

13. el-bab   et-ʔafal

    def-door   intr-close.imper.3sing.ml.

    'The door closed.'

14. el-bab   et-ʔafal   men   Tamer

    def-door   intr-close.3sing.perf. from   Tamer

    'The door was closed by Tamer.' (<-- only possible if interpreted as unintentionally caused)

15. el-pantalon   et-ɣasal   (*men mama)

    def-trousers   intr-wash.imper.3sing.ml. (*from mom)

    'The trousers were washed (*by mom).'

16. et-garaħ   men-ha

    intr-hurt.perf.3sing.ml.   from-gen.3sing.sing.fem.

    'He was hurt by her.'

In prefix *et-* construction, intentionality, as it relates to the occurrence of an event, has an extremely important correlation with the appearance of an agent in the event. In example 15., the verb *ɣasal* (to wash) implies a strong intention of a normal agent (intentional interpretation). This presence of this intentionality prevents the agent from making an appearance in the event. Whereas, verbs such as *et-kasar* (to be broken) and *et-ʕattal* (to be spoiled), formed by adding the *et-* prefix to the verbs *kasar* (to break) and *ʕattal* (to spoil), suggest actions caused by natural changes rather than the intention of agents (unintentional interpretation). The weaker intentionality of these verbs allows for the possibility of the appearance of the agents. Note however, that interpretations of intentionality can change in accordance with context, including relationships with surrounding information and interpretations of unintentional events. That is to say, depending on context, *et-kasar* (to be broken) and *et-ʕattal* (to be spoiled) may be deemed less as natural changes and more as intentional events, which would then decrease the

likelihood of the appearance of an agent in the event.

There is an added layer of complexity that factors into this relationship between the appearance of agents and intentionality in prefix *et*-construction. As mentioned above, when an agent is sighted in an event, it indicates the absence of intentionality, but the opposite is not necessarily true. Non-appearance of an agent does not always make an interpretation of strong intentionality conclusive, where use of certain verbs creates ambiguity over intentionality. For example in 13., the use of the verb *et-ʔafal* (to be closed) without the appearance of an agent leaves room for more than one possibility: either that the [door was closed] by somebody (intentional interpretation), or that an agent simply does not exist (unintentional interpretation). This kind of doubt over ambiguous intentionality disappears if an agent makes an appearance in the event, such as in example 14. where 'the door was closed by Tamer' can only be interpreted as being an unintentional event. Conversely, use of a verb like *et-ɣasal* (wash) leaves no room for ambiguity in determining strong intentionality, such as in the aforementioned example 15. where the intentionality associated with this verb automatically rules out any possibility of an appearance of an agent.

In other words, in prefix *et*- construction, where a verb permits both the possibilities of the presence and absence of intentionality, what determines the interpretation is: the appearance of an agent which indicates an unintentional event; or the non-appearance of an agent which indicates that the agent was either blocked from appearing due to being intentional, or that no agent existed in the first place. In summary, interpretation of intentionality on behalf of the agent is linked with whether the agent makes an appearance.

This concludes the explanation on the different ways in which the possibility of the appearance of an agent in restriction (1) is affected by the intentionality on behalf of the agent.

Restriction (2) is logically derived from restriction (1). In other words, it is possible for an animal or inanimate object that lacks intentionality to easily make appearances as causing elements in passive construction as an agent without intention. Below are some examples.

17. ʔamis-i   et-ʔataʕ   men   el-mosmar
    shirt-poss.1sing.   intr-tear.imper.3sing.   from   def-nail
    'My shirt is torn up by the nail.'

18. el-ʔouda   et-wassaxet   men   el-kalb
    def-room   intr-dirty.imper.3sing.fem.   from   def-dog
    'The room was dirtied by the dog.' (interpreted as [unintentional])

19. el- laħma   et-taklet   (*men el-kalb)

    def-meat   intr-eat.3sing.imper.fem.   (*from def-dog)

    'The meat was eaten (*by the dog).'

In all of these examples, the agents and equivalent subjects are animals or inanimate objects.

It is easy to interpret actions of animals, such as in example 18., as unintentional. Moreover, it is easier to imagine [the room was dirtied by the dog] as an unintentional event than it is to imagine [the meat was eaten *by the dog] as the same. Thus, a discrepancy arises between examples 18. and 19. in the possibility of the agent appearing.

Inanimate objects can appear as agents with more freedom than people or animals, as we can be sure that the event was not caused intentionally.

Finally, restriction (3) provides an exception, in that if used with emotional verbs, agents are permitted to appear in prefix *et-* construction.

20. mama   *et-basatet*   men   oxt-i,

    mom   intr-please.3sing.imper.fem.   from   sister-poss.1sing.

    ʕaʃa:n   naddafet   ʔoudetha

    because   clean.perf.3sing.fem.   room-her

    'Mom was *pleased* with my sister, because she cleaned up her room.'

21. saħb-i   *et-garaħ*   men   xabar   wafa:t

    friend-poss.1sing.   intr-suffer.3sing.imper.ml.   from   news   death

    ʔaxu:h

    brother-poss.3sing.ml.

    'My friend was *tortured* by the news of his brother's death.'

As shown above, agents may appear along with verbs that express emotions (such as *et-xanaʔ* (to be distressed), *et-daɣat* (to be in pressure), *et-narves* (to be angered), *et-gannenn* (to be crazy), in addition to the examples above).

This concludes the discussion on limitations that are placed on the agent in *et*-prefix construction in Egyptian Arabic.

Use of the preposition *men* with agent/cause appearances

A true understanding of the agents' limitations is derived from studying essential functions of the preposition *men*, which is used in sentences where agents appear. The following two principles summarize the functions of the preposition *men*.

1. The *men* preposition was originally imported from standard Arabic to Egyptian Arabic, to be used to indicate starting points of time and space (like *kara* in Japanese and [from] in English.)

2. Although the *men* proposition has maintained its original function of indicating starting points, it has evolved since being imported into Egyptian Arabic, to include the additional function of indicating causes of events. Events expressed with the use of *men* are caused by agents such as inanimate objects, natural phenomena, and other events that lack intentionality. This is the essential characteristic of *men* sentences in Egyptian Arabic. Let us reference for example the following sentences.

22. ana   tʕebet   *men*   el-maʃi
    1sing.   get tired.1sing.imper.   from   def-walking
    'I was exhausted *from* walking.'

23. bnakol   kti:r   *men*   el-bard
    eat.imper.   1pl.   a lot   from   det-cold
    'We eat a lot *because of* the cold weather.'

24. ma-ʕreft-eʃ   ana:m   *men*   eddawʃa
    neg-can.imper.1sing-neg.   sleep.imper.1sing.   from   def.noise
    'I couldn't sleep *because of* the noise.'

The *men* preposition evolved to satisfy the need for expressing agents in *et*-prefix constructions and for indicating starting points and causes as explained in (2), however also allows for agents to appear, if and only if agents lack intentionality. This is due to the characteristic outlined in (2), limiting the use of the preposition *men* only for the expression of causes that are unintentional.

2.4.3. Basic verbs as intransitive or transitive verbs?

With the exception of verbs classified as unergative verbs, like to run, to walk, to talk, etc, and a few groups of verbs listed below, most verbs in their basic form are transitive verbs.

However, there are also several basic verbs that are intransitive verbs, as well as some that are used as both transitive and intransitive verbs, although very few and far between. These can be categorized using the following three classifications.

(1) Basic verbs as intransitive verbs

This group includes non-ergative verbs, in addition to a few non-accusative verbs that express changes in status. Either animate or inanimate objects may be the subject for these verbs. Group (1-1) includes verbs expressing changes in the state of inanimate subjects that can easily take place. Group (1-2), which caters to animate objects that can easily become subjects, mostly expresses movement. For both of these groups, the verbs need not be interpreted as suggesting the involvement of agents. The basic intransitive verbs are listed below.

The subjects of the verbs in group (1-1) are generally inanimate and the subjects of group (1-2) tend to be animate.

(1-1) *neʃef* (to dry out), *ba:z* (to become useless), *neʔes* (to diminish), *da:ʕ* (to be lost), *sa:ħ* (to melt), *da:b* (to dissolve)

Additionally, below are verbs that are paired more naturally with human subjects.

(1-2) *weʔeʕ* (to fall), *teleʕ* (to ascend), *nezel* (to descend), *weʔef* (to stand), *xarag* (to exit), *daxal* (to enter), *texen* (to get fat), etc.

(2) Verbs used as both transitive and intransitive

Very few of these exist. The following are some of the examples.

Table 5

Transitive/intransitive verbs

Transitive/intransitive verbs	Meaning
ran	to ring, rung
laff	to turn, turned
ʕaffen	to rot, rotted
nawwar	to turn on the power, power turned on
tˤafa	to turn off the power, the power turned off
ʔatˤaʕ	to cut off, be cut of

Intransitive verb constructions using the verbs in groups (1-1) and (1-2) can express unintentional causes by using the *men* preposition.

(3) Basic Verb forms as Transitive Verbs

The transitive verb forms in this group serve as the base to which the prefix *et-* can be added to create intransitive verb forms.

Table 6

Transitive basic verb forms

Transitive form	Meaning	Intransitive form	Meaning
gammaʕ	to gather	et-gammaʕ	to be gathered
fataħ	to open	et-fataħ	to be opened
rafaʕ	to raise	et-rafaʕ	to be raised
tana	to bend	et-tana	to be bent
ħaraʔ	to burn	et-haraʔ	to be burnt

2.4.4. Summary on transitive and intransitive verbs

The intransitive verbs in group (1-1) are basic verb forms from which causative verbs can be derived. The verbs in group (1-2) remain the same in both their intransitive and transitive forms, so there is no need to create derivatives. The verbs in group (3) are transitive in their basic form, and the intransitive counterpart is obtained by adding the prefix *et-*. A detailed explanation is provided below.

First of all, let us look at group (1-1). As the base form of verbs such as [neʃef] (to dry) and [nezel] (to go down/descend) is intransitive, it is necessary to derive their transitive counterpart as causative. In other words, 'intransitive-transitive/causative' pairs can be created in the same way they are in Japanese, as shown below.

Table 7

Intransitive-transitive/causative pairs in Japanese and Egyptian Arabic

intransitive verb	Meaning	transitive/causative	meaning
sagaru	to lessen	sageru	to lower
dame-ni-naru	to become useless	dame-ni-suru	to spoil
kawaku	to become dry	kawakasu	to dry out
tokeru	to melt	tokasu	to unfreeze

As in the case of Japanese causatives such as [saseru], which is formed from the intransitive [suru], Egyptian Arabic verbs can be established as causative in a productive manner. In group (1-1) this is done by doubling the middle consonants and changing the vowels from [e] to [a] to form causatives.

Table 8

Intransitive-transitive/causative pairs (2)

intransitive (basic) form	Meaning	transitive/causative	meaning
ba:z	to become useless	bawwaz	to spoil
neʃef	to become dry	naʃʃef	to dry out
weʔef	to stand	waʔʔaf	to cause (something/someone to) stand
deħek	to laugh	daħħak	to cause (someone to) laugh
meʃi	to walk	maʃʃa	to make (someone to) walk

As discussed earlier in this paper, the verbs in group (1-1) generate events that are achieved by inanimate subjects on their own, regardless of whether any causative elements that trigger the event exist.

The prefix *et-* can be attached to form the causative verb form, demoting the agent from the event and shifting the focus to be placed on the event itself along with any resultant incidental changes.

25. es-seggada   neʃf -et

       def-carpet   dry.perf.3sing.fem.

       'The carpet dried.'

26. el-hawa   naʃʃef   es-seggada

     def-air   dry.caus.perf.3sing.ml.   def-carpet

     'The air made the carpet dry.'

27. es-seggada   et-naʃʃefet

     def-carpet   intr-dry.caus.perf.3sing.fem.

     'The carpet got dried.'

The most natural interpretation of example 25. is [the carpet dried naturally]. [The air made the carpet dry] in example 26. is a causative expression, and in example 27. an involvement with the demoted agent is emphasized.

In group (1-2), the intransitive verbs and transitive verbs share the same form, so it is not necessary to create derivatives.

28. el-walad   ʕaffen   al-ʔakl

     def-boy   spoil.perf.3sing.ml.   def-food

     'The boy spoiled the food.'

29. el-ʔakl   ʕaffen

     def-food   rot.3sing.perf.ml.

     'The food had gone bad.'

Examples 28. and 29. both use the same verb form *ʕaffen* [to spoil, spoilt], paired with the noun [food] which is used as the object in example 28. and the subject in example 29.

However, there are fewer verbs that belong in this group compared with other verb groups. The prefix *et-* cannot be attached to this type of verb nor be used in passive expressions in Egyptian Arabic.

In summary, the verbs in group (3) come in pairs to support the most fundamental type of transitive and intransitive forms. The intransitive verb forms are derived by adding the prefix *et-* to the transitive verb forms.

In the next section, we will examine passive participles, the last of the agent defocusing expressions. The same shared passive participles are used in Egyptian Arabic and standard Arabic.

2.5. Passive participles

In addition to vague agent active construction and prefix *et-* construction which creates intransitive verbs, Egyptian Arabic comprises passive participle construction, which functions similarly to agent defocusing construction in standard Arabic. The main function of passive participles is to express change in objects (change of state). Additionally, it should be noted that passive participle constructions do not permit the appearance of agents.

Passive participles in standard Arabic grammar are categorized as nouns. Passive participles in both standard Arabic and Egyptian Arabic share almost the same characteristics and functions, but differences do exist in how derivatives are created from different verb forms. The functions and characteristics of passive participles enable the expression of the resultant states of subjects that have been affected or changed by previous events (Haspelmath 1994).

30. el-bab   maftu:ħ   ʕala: mesraʕaihi
    def-door   open. part   completely
    'The door is fully opened.'

31. el-ragel   maʔtu:l   baʔa:lo   yome:n
    def-man   kill.part.   ago   2 days
    'The man has been murdered since 2 days before.'

In example 30. the state of the subject is expressed as [is opened] and in example 31. as [has been murdered], as a state that [is] or that [has been] in existence as a result of a previous event.

3. Comparing the three types of agent defocusing constructions

Let us now discuss the differences between the three types of agent defocusing constructions we explored in this paper.

Although in some cases these construction forms can be used interchangeably to express the same event, differences do exist in how the event is viewed and what the speaker is attempting to get across. The three sentences listed below express the same event, but the construction for each is different in that the focus is placed on the existence of the agent, on awareness, or on the status of the subject respectively.

→ Vague agent construction

32. darabu   Samra   fe-l   madrasa

    hit.perf.3pl.nom.   Samra.acc.   at-def.   school

    'Samra was hit at school.' (lit: 'They hit Samra at school.')

→ Prefix et- construction

33. Samra   et-darabet

    Samra   intr-hit.perf.3sing.fem.

    'Samra is (was) hit.'

→ Passive participle construction

34. Samra   madru:b-a

    Samra   hit.part-fem.

    'Samra is hit.' (still being affected by the event [hit])

All three samples above express the event of Samra being hit. However, the methods of how focus is placed on the agent and how awareness of the agent is expressed are different.

First of all, the vague agent construction in example 32. requires a location to express attributes of the agent. By using the verb in its active form and by adding a phrase that suggests the identity of the agent, the existence of the agent can be sensed very strongly.

In prefix *et-* construction, the agent is semantically deleted, causing the focus to be placed instead on the entire event. The fact that the agent is demoted does not contradict its logical existence. The prefix *et-* functions to demote the agent syntactically to the extent that the agent is unable to appear in any way whatsoever, as if the event happened on its own without any agent. Thus, even though the agent exists logically, since it is demoted at least syntactically, the focus on the agent is weakened.

Finally, in passive participle construction, focus on the agent is minimized, which maximizes the focus placed on the subject (example 34.).

Use of the passive participle also alters other aspects, for example, increasing focus on the object. In example 33., the focus is only on the [hit] object, and not on any other element in the event. Example 35. is therefore an incorrect sentence, because the latter clause indicates that no effects exist. In other words, the event of 'healing' in the latter clause contradicts the function of the passive participle, which expresses the current status of the subject.

35. *heiya   metʕawwar-a,   bas   xaffet

    she   part.hurt-fem.   but   heal.3sing.perf.fem.

    'She is hurt, but the wound healed up.'

Therefore, it is permissible to use vague agent construction or *et-* prefix construction instead.

36. heya   et-ʕawwar-et,

    she   intr-hurt.3sing.perf-fem.

    bas   xaff-et

    but   heal.3sing.perf-fem.

    'She got hurt, but the wound healed up.'

37. ʕawwar-u:-ha

    hurt.tr.perf-3pl.nom-3sing.fem.acc.

    f-el   rehla,   bas   xaffet

    in-def.   excursion   but   heal.3sing.fem.

    'She got hurt on the excursion, but the wound healed up.'

4. Conclusion

Agent defocusing is known to be a universal function that exists in passive constructions across languages. In this paper, I explored this familiar topic from a new angle, examining agent defocusing as an independent function not restricted to passive construction, and examining constructions in Egyptian Arabic that utilize this function.

This paper identifies three types of agent defocusing constructions in Egyptian Arabic. Although the three constructions share the same function of agent defocusing, they differ in morpho-syntactic characteristics, in other words in the degree of agent defocusing and where the focus falls instead.

The first of the three constructions I referred to as 'vague agent construction'. The verb in this construction takes on the active form, and the patient still fills the role of the object. The morpho-syntactic and semantic characteristics of this construction are summarized as follows.

A.   The verb is in the active form.

B.   The verb agrees with the third person plural subject ('they'), but the pronoun *homma*, which means 'they', cannot be expressed. In other words, the construction does not

have an explicit subject.

    C. A clause identifying the agent's identity (work place, etc) is needed.

Next, I will summarize below the semantic characteristics of this construction.

    D. Although the verb agrees with the plural subject, the agent in the real world may be singular.

    E. The agent is construed to be an intentional agent. Therefore, the event is an intentional event and not an accidental one.

In this construction, although the agent is defocused by deleting its specific identity, and is not expressing himself/herself at the morpho-syntactic level, the speaker/listener has a clear sense of the existence of the agent, due to the connotation of the agent's intention towards the event, and its implied identity.

The second agent defocusing construction introduced in this paper is prefix *et-* construction. This construction is known widely as passive construction in Egyptian Arabic. However, because we have no clear definition for passive construction, nor a clear consensus on what should and should not be considered as passive, I avoided using the term "passive construction" in this paper, and instead discussed the construction in terms of morpho-syntactic and semantic characteristics. Below, let us review the list of these morpho-syntactic and semantic characteristics, before explaining the agent defocusing realized in the prefix *et-* construction. The morpho-syntactic characteristics are as follows.

    F. The prefix *et-* is added to transitive verbs, converting them to intransitive verbs.

    G. The agent is demoted and the patient becomes the subject.

    H. The logical agent can be indicated with the preposition *men* (which means 'from'), but in this case is perceived as an unintentional agent.
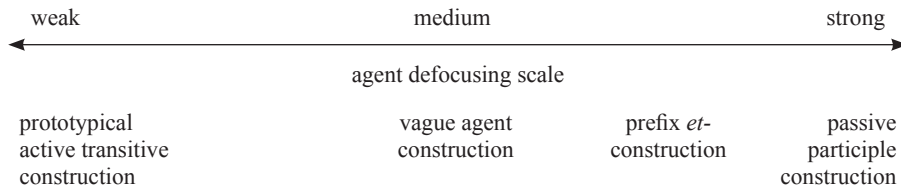
Prefix *et-* construction demotes the agent morpho-syntactically, and promotes the patient to be the subject. In this construction, the agent is defocused, and the focus instead falls on 'what happened', in other words, on the event itself and on its sequence.

Agent defocusing in prefix *et-* construction causes a more dramatic shift in focus compared to that in vague agent construction. This is due to how the verb is detransitivized via the

intransitive prefix *et-*, and how the intentional agent is not mentioned or expressed. Prefix *et- construction* demotes the agent at the syntactic level, and the event is construed as if it happened without external power or agent, although the agent exists at the logical level.

The last of the three agent defocusing constructions discussed in this paper is the passive participle construction. The passive participle is classified as a noun in Arabic. No verbal elements are used in this construction, and the logical patient is the subject. No agent can be expressed in this construction, by any means. The agent is highly defocused in this construction, and the focus is only on the resultant state of the subject.

The following figure visualizes the degrees of agent defocusing in the aforementioned three constructions.

weak	medium		strong

agent defocusing scale

prototypical active transitive construction	vague agent construction	prefix *et-* construction	passive participle construction

Figure 1

Egyptian Arabic constructions on agent defocusing scale

Abbreviations

acc: accusative

cont: continuous

def: definite article

dl: dual

fem: female

gen: genitive case

imper: imperfective

intrg: interrogative

ml: male

neg: negation

nom: nominative case

part: participle

pass: passive

perf: perfective

poss: possessive

rel.cl: relative clause

v.:   verb

3sing: third person, singular

1sing: 1st person, singular

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音声記号
Journal of Arabic Linguistics: Tradition International Electronic Journal, (2018),（最終閲覧日：2019年09月10日）http://www.jalt.net/jIpa.aspx.

Note

[i] In this paper, the term 'motivation' is used for animals and 'intention' for human beings.

アラビア語フォント対応のため、本論文のみフォントとして Times New Roman を使用しました
（事務局）