In the literature, cognate objects (CO), namely the objects which an intransitive verb can take, have been used as a diagnostics to differentiate between unergative and unaccusative verbs. It has been argued that intransitives which can take a cognate object are typically unergative verbs, i.e., verbs whose subjects are (non-)volitional initiators (1a-b), but not unaccusatives with undergoer subjects (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995, Massam 1990, Larson 1988, Keyser and Roeper 1984, Macfarland 1995). However, it has also been shown that a subset of unaccusative verbs can also take COs subject to certain semantic restrictions (2a-b) (Kuno and Takami 2004, Nakajima 2006). The aim of this study is to investigate the patterns of COs in Sason Arabic (SA) – an endangered dialect of Arabic spoken in Turkey – which can be used not only with unergatives but also very productively with all types of unaccusatives without any semantic restriction. We will propose that COs of both unergatives and unaccusatives in SA are not true arguments, but constitute rhematic complements in the lines of Ramchand (2008), therefore cannot be used as a diagnostics for unergative-unaccusative distinction in the language.

(1) a. Malinda smiled her most enigmatic smile. (Levin and Rappaport Hovav, 1995: 40) 
   b. The baby slept a sound sleep. (Nakajima 2006: 677)

(2) a. The tree grew a century’s growth within only ten years. (Nakajima 2006: 674) 
   b. The stock market dropped its largest drop in three years today.

As in (3-4), in SA not only unergatives but also unaccusatives can very productively take COs:

(3) a. zake-ma kotti zak. 
   b. sabi bayu ibki 
   laugh-a bad laughed.3m 
   ‘He laughed a bad laugh.’
   boy crying cry.3m 
   ‘The boy is crying a cry.’

(4) a. badıcanad pat-ma gize kotti patto. 
   b. çiçak ıbs-ma boş kotti ubes. 
   tomatoes rotting-a such bad rottened.3pl 
   ‘The tomatoes rottened such a bad rottening.’
   flower fading-a very bad faded.3m 
   ‘Flower faded a bad fading.’

Kuno and Takami (2004) argue that COs are acceptable if they denote a resultant object/product of an activity/process that the verb denotes. If the verb denotes only the result without involving a process, as in the case of break, occur, appear, or only the manner of the process, then COs are not possible. However in SA there is no such restriction, as not only the verbs denoting processes, but also the ones denoting only results (5) or manner (6) are compatible with COs:

(5) a. şuça qarfınqaraf 
   glass breaking broke.3m 
   ‘The glass broke a breaking.’
   b. nahar talu-ma koys tala ala sari 
   sun appearing-a beautiful appeared.3m this morning 
   ‘The sun appeared a beautiful appearance this morning.’
   c. dave say sare, hama boş nes ma-ca. 
   wedding occurring occurred.3f but many person neg.3m 
   ‘The wedding occurred an occurring, but not many people came.’

(6) a. bade fadu-ma hedi infada 
   door opening-a slow opened.3m 
   ‘The door opened a slow opening.’
   b. John maju-ma xifef ca 
   c. şeç zabu-ma hedi zab 
   John coming-a quick came.3m snow melting-a slow melt 
   ‘John came a quick coming.’
   ‘The snow melted a slow melting.’
Nakajima (2006), furthermore, makes a distinction between argumental and adverbal COs. He argues that argumental COs are only possible with unergatives, whereas the COs certain unaccusatives take are adverbial, thus, they are adjuncts, as only the COs of unergatives (7a), but not those of unaccusatives (7b) can be passivized.

(7) a. A sound sleep was slept by the baby.
   b. *A century’s expansion was grown in only ten years by the tree trunk.

In SA, however, both COs of unergatives and unaccusatives behave as non-argumentals. First, unlike English, no COs in SA can be the target for passivization:

(8) a. *nom in-nam
    b. *pat in-pat

sleep pass-slept rottening pass-rottened

‘Sleep was slept.’ ‘A rottening was rottened.’

Second, while true non-specific objects can occur postverbally in neutral word order (9), COs of both unergatives and unaccusatives cannot occur in the postverbal position (10), thus, they behave differently than true object arguments:

(9) zıxar ayalo dondurma

a. *faqaztu faqız
    b. *şuşa inqaraf qarf

tests ate.3pl ice cream ran.1sg running glass broke.3m breaking

The kids ate ice cream. I ran a running. The glass broke a breaking.

Finally, COs in SA can only be questioned with the wh-word ıṣṭaba ‘how’, rather than şine ‘what’, which can be used to question true objects. This implies that they are adverbials:

(11) a. kemal faqız-ma ıṣṭaba faqaz.
    b. badilcanad pat-ma ıṣṭaba patto.

Kemal running-a how ran.3m tomatoes rottening-a how rottened.3pl

How a running did Kemal run? How a rottening did the tomatoes rottened?

Thus, the COs in SA are not argumental, but behave more like adjuncts. We argue that they constitute rhematic materials, that is, they are complements which modify the subevent they attach to in the sense of Ramchand (2008). COs that unergatives take are the rhemes of ProcessP (12a), while the ones in unaccusatives are the complements of ResultP (12b):

(12) a. InitP
      b. ProcessP

Initiator ProcessP

Undergoer ResultP

Undergoer Process CO

Resultee Result CO

The highly productive and unrestricted use of COs in SA is due to their non-argument status and as such COs cannot be a testing ground for unergative-unaccusative distinction in the language.

References: