

L'ANALISI LINGUISTICA E LETTERARIA

FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE LINGUISTICHE E LETTERATURE STRANIERE
UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

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THE DERIVATION OF NOMINAL SENTENCES IN STANDARD ARABIC

MURDHY ALSHAMARI
 UNIVERSITY OF HA'IL
 mr.alshamari@uoh.edu.sa

This research paper investigates the derivation of the so-called nominal sentences in Standard Arabic (SA). The focus is primarily placed on the syntactic account of the derivation of different word orders allowed in such sentences. This article shows that the type of the predicate (PP, AP or DP) plays a significant role in determining the word orders allowed in such type of sentences. For example, when the predicate is a PP, all possible word order permutations are allowed. On the other hand, when the predicate is an AP or an (indefinite) DP, some word orders are not allowed. We ascribe this to the informational value assigned to each predicate type as well as the intervention effects invoked by different types of the predicate when they move to information-related position. APs and DPs are shown not to be used to stand for given information, hence the ban on word orders where such elements would occupy the topic slot in the left periphery. This research is further evidence in favour of the viability of cartographic approaches to syntactic representations and interpretations.

Keywords: Standard Arabic, nominal sentences, topics, foci, word order

1. Introduction

In Standard Arabic (SA), non-verbal sentences (or verbless sentences) (known traditionally as nominal sentences or *ʔal-dʒumal ʔal-ʔismijjah*) are allowed. In such sentences, the DP subject normally starts the sentence, followed by the predicate which can be another DP (mostly indefinite), an Adjective Phrase (AP), or a Prepositional Phrase (PP), as shown in the following illustrative examples:

- (1) a. ʔal-radʒul-u muʔallim-u-n¹
 DEF-man-NOM teacher-NOM-NUN
 ‘The man is a teacher.’
 b. ʔal-radʒul-u saʕi:d-u-n
 DEF-man-NOM happy-NOM-NUN
 ‘The man is happy.’

¹ The nunation suffix ‘-n’ is used in SA mainly to mark indefinite elements (see W. Fischer – J. Rodgers, *A grammar of classical Arabic*, Yale University Press, Yale 2002 and K.C. Ryding, *A reference grammar of modern standard Arabic*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2005, among many others). However, this suffix can also appear on proper nouns which are definite in their own (see A. Fassi-Fehri, *Issues in the Structure of Arabic Clauses and Word Order*, Kluwer, Dordrecht 1993 and M. Jarrah – A. Zibin, *Syntactic investigation of nunation in Haili Arabic*, “SKY Journal of Linguistics”, 29, 2016, pp. 39-62). In this research, we will not comment on the status of this suffix.

- c. ?al-radʒul-u fi-l-madi:nat-i
 DEF-man-NOM in-DEF-city-GEN
 ‘The man is in the city.’

The sentences in (1) are existentially interpreted with the present tense (i.e., the subject refers to an actual entity in the real world). The subject in each example starts the sentence, followed directly by the predicate. Prosodically, the subject is separated from the predicate by an intonational pause/comma that sets off the subject from the predicate.

On the other hand, when the sentences in (1) are turned into the past tense, the past tense marker *ka:n* ‘be.PST’ is used, as shown in the following sentences:

- (2) a. ?al-radʒul-u ka:n muʕallim-a-n
 DEF-man-NOM be.3SG.M.PST teacher-ACC-NUN
 ‘The man was a teacher.’
 b. ?al-radʒul-u ka:n saʕi:d-a-n
 DEF-man-NOM be.3SG.M.PST happy-ACC-NUN
 ‘The man was happy.’
 c. ?al-radʒul-u ka:n fi-l-madi:nat-i
 DEF-man-NOM be.3SG.M.PST in-DEF-city-GEN
 ‘The man was in the city.’

As shown in the examples in (2), the past tense marker *ka:n* appears between the subject and the predicate. Note also that the DP predicate and the adjective are assigned with Accusative Case (rather than Nominative Case) whose presence is linked to the overt occurrence of the overt past tense marker. On the other hand, the subject remains assigned with Nominative Case. In this research, we will not discuss the assignment of the accusative Case in nominal clauses but see Al-Balushi² for a proposal.

Benmamoun³ and related works by other colleagues⁴ have argued that sentences in (1) include a present-tense marker which is phonologically null, but syntactically present. In other words, the primary difference amongst the sentences in (1) and those in (2) lies in the fact that the tense marker is covert in the former but overt in the latter⁵. However, a neglected aspect of the derivation of sentences like those in (1-2) is associated to their pos-

² R. Al-Balushi, *Case in standard Arabic: The untraveled paths*, Doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, 2011.

³ E. Benmamoun, *The feature structure of functional categories: A comparative study of Arabic dialects*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2000.

⁴ N. Al-Horais, *Arabic verbless sentences: is there a null VP?*, “Pragmalingüística”, 14, 2006, pp. 101-116; R. Al-Balushi, *Subject licensing in non-verbal clauses in Arabic*, “Brill’s Journal of Afroasiatic Languages and Linguistics”, 11, 2019, 2, pp. 249-282.

⁵ In our analysis we consider sentences (2) nominal in the sense that they do not include a verb. The presence of the past tense marker *ka:n* does not change the status of such sentences into verbal. This does not mean that *ka:n* can only occur in nominal sentences; it can be used in verbal sentences as well, in which case it is normally followed by a verb which can be present or even past (see M. Jarrah, *A cartographic approach to embedded word order in Jordanian Arabic*, “Folia linguistica”, 53, 2019, 2, pp. 367-409 for more discussion on the position of *ka:n* in Arabic grammar).

sible word order permutations (or patterns) as well as the syntactic constraints that restrict the occurrence of such permutations, especially with respect to the type of the predicate. As we show below, the type of the predicate used (AP, DP, or PP) is crucial in determining all possible permutations, a fact which is barely investigated in the related literature.

In order to make this point clearer, we discuss sentences that include the overt tense marker *ka:n* because it is easier to observe various word order permutations in this type of sentences. For instance, sentence (2c) above can have the following permutations whose differences are related to the relevant order of the subject (1), the past tense marker (2) and the predicate (3):⁶

- | | | | | | |
|-----|----|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------|
| (3) | a. | ka:n
be.3SG.M.PST | ʔal-radʒul-u
DEF-man-NOM | fi-l-madi:nat-i
in-DEF-city-GEN | (2>1>3) |
| | | ‘The man was in the city.’ | | | |
| | b. | ka:n
be.3SG.M.PST | fi-l-madi:nat-i
in-DEF-city-GEN | ʔal-radʒul-u
DEF-man-NOM | (2>3>1) |
| | | ‘The man was in the city.’ | | | |
| | c. | ʔal-radʒul-u
DEF-man-NOM | fi-l-madi:nat-i
in-DEF-city-GEN | ka:n
be.3SG.M.PST | (1>3>2) |
| | | ‘The man was in the city.’ | | | |
| | d. | fi-l-madi:nat-i
in-DEF-city-GEN | ka:n
be.3SG.M.PST | ʔal-radʒul-u
DEF-man-NOM | (3>2>1) |
| | | ‘The man was in the city.’ | | | |
| | e. | fi-l-madi:nat-i
in-DEF-city-GEN | ʔal-radʒul-u
DEF-man-NOM | ka:n
be.3SG.M.PST | (3>1>2) |
| | | ‘The man was in the city.’ | | | |

As apparently shown in the examples (3) all possible word order permutations are allowed on the condition that the predicate be a PP. However, there are some differences related to the meanings within these examples, especially in terms of the informational value of the subject or the PP (topical vs. focused) as we will discuss in detail in the following sections. The fact that all possible word order permutations are allowed in non-verbal sentences in Arabic is not surprising in itself. Arabic (Standard and vernaculars) is in fact a well-known example of a language with free word order even in verbal sentences⁷. According to many typological studies, free word order correlates with declension

⁶ We do not provide an approximate translation to each example that does not show the normal word order in verbless sentences. However, as we show below, the informational value assigned to the subject and/or the predicate might be different. For instance, the subject can be a topic whereas the predicate can be corrective focus.

⁷ M.J. Bakir, *Aspects of clause structure in Arabic: a study in word order variation in literary Arabic*, Indiana University Linguistics Club, Bloomington 1980; M.A. Mohammad, *Word order, agreement and pronominalization in Standard and Palestinian Arabic* (Vol. 181), John Benjamins Publishing, Amsterdam 2000; Y. Peled, *Sentence types and word-order patterns in written Arabic: Medieval and modern perspectives*, Brill, Leiden/Boston 2008; C. Holes, *Word order and textual function in Gulf Arabic*, in *Information structure in spoken Arabic*, J. Owens – A. Elgibali ed., Routledge, London 2009, pp. 79-92; M.R. Alshamari – M. Jarrah, *A minimalist-based approach to phrasal verb movement in North Hail Arabic*, “International Journal of English Linguistics”, 24, 2016, 6 (1),

on the verb⁸. However, the interesting point to underscore here is that not all word order permutations are allowed, e.g., sentence (2b) of which the predicate is AP. This is clearly shown in the following sentences:

- (4)
- | | | | | |
|----|----------------------|---------------|---------------|----------|
| a. | ka:n | ʔal-radʒul-u | saʕi:d-a-n | (2>1>3) |
| | be.3SG.M.PST | DEF-man-NOM | happy-ACC-NUN | |
| | ‘The man was happy.’ | | | |
| b. | *ka:n | saʕi:d-a-n | ʔal-radʒul-u | (*2>3>1) |
| | be.3SG.M.PST | happy-ACC-NUN | DEF-man-NOM | |
| | ‘The man was happy.’ | | | |
| c. | *ʔal-radʒul-u | saʕi:d-a-n | ka:n | (*1>3>2) |
| | DEF-man-NOM | happy-ACC-NUN | be.3SG.M.PST | |
| | ‘The man was happy.’ | | | |
| d. | saʕi:d-a-n | ka:n | ʔal-radʒul-u | (3>2>1) |
| | happy-ACC-NUN | be.3SG.M.PST | DEF-man-NOM | |
| | ‘The man was happy.’ | | | |
| e. | *saʕi:d-a-n | ʔal-radʒul-u | ka:n | (*3>1>2) |
| | happy-ACC-NUN | DEF-man-NOM | be.3SG.M.PST | |
| | ‘The man was happy.’ | | | |

The adjective *saʕi:d-a-n* is not free to occur in all positions in the sentence. For instance, sentences (4b-c) show clearly that the adjective is not permitted to appear in a position between the subject and the past tense marker, while sentence (4e) shows that the adjective is not allowed to take place sentence-initially if it is immediately followed by the subject which is in turn followed by the past tense marker *ka:n*.

Interestingly enough, the same restrictions imposed on the position of the adjective are obtained when the predicate is a DP, as evidenced in the following sentences:

- (5)
- | | | | | |
|----|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------|
| a. | ka:n | ʔal-radʒul-u | muʕallim-a-n | (2>1>3) |
| | be.3SG.M.PST | DEF-man-NOM | teacher-ACC-NUN | |
| | ‘The man was a teacher.’ | | | |
| b. | *ka:n | muʕallim-a-n | ʔal-radʒul-u | (*2>3>1) |
| | be.3SG.M.PST | teacher-ACC-NUN | DEF-man-NOM | |
| | ‘The man was a teacher.’ | | | |
| c. | *ʔal-radʒul-u | muʕallim-a-n | ka:n | (*1>3>2) |
| | DEF-man-NOM | teacher-ACC-NUN | be.3SG.M.PST | |
| | ‘The man was a teacher.’ | | | |
| d. | muʕallim-a-n | ka:n | ʔal-radʒul-u | (3>2>1) |
| | teacher-ACC-NUN | be.3SG.M.PST | DEF-man-NOM | |
| | ‘The man was a teacher.’ | | | |

pp. 24-37; M. Jarrah, *Record your Agree: A case study of the Arabic complementizer ʔinn*, “Journal of Linguistics”, 55, 2019, 1, pp. 83-12; Id., *Factivity and subject extraction in Jordanian Arabic*, “Lingua”, 219, pp. 106-126.

⁸ See, e.g., J. Hawkins, *Word order universals*, Academic Press, London 1983.

- e. *muʕallim-a-n ʔal-radʒul-u ka:n (*3>1>2)
 teacher-ACC-NUN DEF-man-NOM be.3SG.M.PST
 'The man was a teacher.'

The indefinite DP *muʕalliman* 'a teacher' is not free to occur in all positions in the sentence. The examples in (5b,c) show that the DP predicate is not permitted to take place in a position between the subject and the past tense marker *ka:n*. Likewise, sentence (5e) reveals that the DP predicate is not allowed to appear sentence-initially when it is immediately followed by the subject which is followed directly by the past tense marker *ka:n*.

In view of this, the constraints imposed on word order permutations when the predicate is a DP or AP are similar. The following patterns are not permitted:

- (6) a. *2>3>1
 b. *1>3>2
 c. *3>1>2

By contrast, the following patterns are allowed in nonverbal sentences, regardless of the type of the predicate (DP vs. PP vs. AP).

- (7) a. 1>2>3
 b. 3>2>1
 c. 2>1>3

The present work aims to provide an answer to the question as to why the type of the predicate plays an underlying role in restricting the word order permutations of nonverbal sentences in SA grammar. This requires us to delve into the syntactic derivation of both permitted and non-permitted word order permutations, which is also an important topic that the current work intends to explore. Our main hypothesis is that the non-permitted word order permutations are syntactically derived through the movement of the predicate to a left-periphery position⁹, which can only be filled with a special type of information. This constraint on the form of the information that fills the given position gives rise to the restriction on the position of the predicate relative to the subject and the past tense marker *ka:n*, which ultimately derives the differences that we observe on the surface.

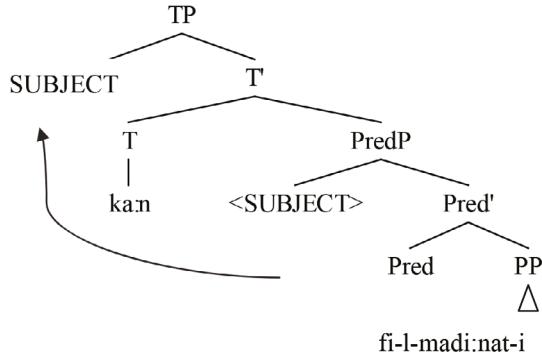
The following discussion is structured as follows. In section 2, we examine the derivation of non-verbal sentences with a PP predicate which, as we have shown above, is the only case that allows all possible word order permutations in SA grammar. This discussion gives us the required level of representation through which we can explore the constraints on surface word order when the predicate is not a PP (i.e., when the predicate is a DP or AP) which is the main task we carry out in section 3. Section 4 concludes the paper.

⁹ See L. Rizzi, L. *The Fine Structure of the Left Periphery*, in *Elements of Grammar: Handbook of Generative Syntax*, L. Haegeman ed., Kluwer, Dordrecht 1997, pp. 281-337.

2. Derivation of Non-Verbal Sentences with a PP Predicate

Following the related literature¹⁰, sentence (2c) which we repeat below for convenience in (8) is derived in the way shown in (9):

- (8) ʔal-radʒul-u ka:n fi-l-madi:nat-i
 DEF-man-NOM be.3SG.M.PST in-DEF-city-GEN
 ‘The man was in the city.’
- (9)



The subject *ʔal-radʒulu* ‘the man’ is base-generated in the Spec position of PredP which merges as a complement of T⁰. The PP *fi-l-madi:nat-i* ‘in the city’ merges as a complement of Pred⁰. This derivation operates in this way in order to derive the interpretation that the PP predicates about the subject, which is also located within the local domain (PrdP) which also houses PP. Because TP in Arabic has an EPP feature¹¹, the subject raises to Spec,TP. The movement of the subject to Spec,TP derives the word order where the subject starts the sentence followed directly by the past tense marker *ka:n* which lexicalizes T⁰ in such cases.

Let us now turn our attention to instances where the subject appears as the second element in the sentences (2>1>3), as shown in the following example (repeated from the discussion above):

- (10) ka:n ʔal-radʒul-u fi-l-madi:nat-i (2 > 1 > 3)
 be.3SG.M.PST DEF-man-NOM in-DEF-city-GEN
 ‘The man was in the city.’

¹⁰ M. Eid, *Verbless sentences in Arabic and Hebrew*, “Perspectives on Arabic linguistics”, 3, 1991, pp. 31-61; E. Benmamoun, *The feature structure of functional categories*; O. Abdel-Ghafer, *Copular constructions in modern standard Arabic, modern Hebrew and English*, Doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas, 2003; N. Al-Horais, *Arabic verbless sentences*.

¹¹ U. Soltan, *On formal feature licensing in minimalism: Aspects of Standard Arabic morphosyntax*, Doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, 2007.; M.R.D. Alshamari, *Topic particles in the North Hall dialect of Najdi Arabic*, Doctoral Dissertation, Newcastle University, 2017.

One direct proposal offered to the derivation of the sentence in (10) is that the subject does not move to Spec,TP but remains in situ. This has the effect that the subject appears in a position between the past tense marker and the predicate PP. However, one complication here is that assuming this analysis requires us to propose that T^0 of the nonverbal sentences may be acquired by an optional EPP feature. In sentences where this feature is borne by T^0 , the sentence starts with the subject. By contrast, when T^0 does not bear this feature, no trigger for the subject to raise to Spec,TP is made. Although optionality of features is pursued in several accounts of syntactic structures¹², the proposal that T^0 may be optionally endowed with an EPP is less desired. The main reason for this critique is that we have no ground to account independently for the presence of this optionality in the grammar. Additionally, this approach makes the theory very strong, so it becomes less analytical.

Another proposal that can be pursued here is that the subject in sentence (10) is a low topic/focus that is base-generated in the so-called low IP area of the clause¹³. This area is a discourse-related field that is projected between TP and vP. It is called the low IP area in order to distinguish it from the functional fields that project above TP. Jarrah and Abusalim¹⁴ argued extensively for the presence of such an area in the Arabic grammar. The bottom line here is that the subject moves to the low IP area position that is located between TP and PredP. Once the subject moves to this position, it is stuck in place due to the so-called criterial freezing (the element that fills a criterial position is frozen in place) in the sense of Rizzi¹⁵. Jarrah and Abusalim propose that Spec,TP in such cases is projected but is filled with an expletive pro. With this proposal in hand, it can be claimed that the subject in (10) is a low IP area while Spec,TP is filled with a pro. Following this line of analysis, the derivation of the sentence (10) is schematically represented in (11):

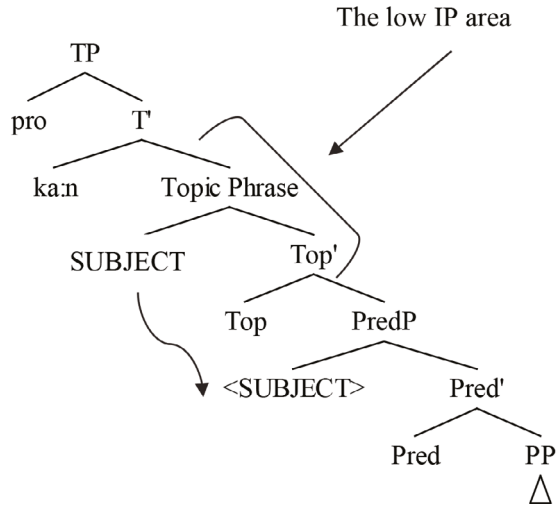
¹² A.M. Pettward, *Movement and optionality in syntax*, Doctoral dissertation, SOAS University of London, 1997; S. Miyagawa, *Optionality*, in *The Oxford handbook of linguistic minimalism*, C. Boeckx ed., Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011, pp. 616–641; E. Titov, *Optionality of movement*, “Syntax”, 23, 4, 2020, pp. 347-374.

¹³ A. Belletti, *Aspects of the low IP area. The structure of Cp and IP*, “The cartography of syntactic structure”, 2, 2004, pp. 16-51; Ead., *Extended doubling and the VP periphery*, “Probus”, 17, 2005, pp. 1-35.

¹⁴ M. Jarrah – N. Abusalim, *In favour of the low IP area in the Arabic clause structure: evidence from the VSO word order in Jordanian Arabic*, “Natural Language & Linguistic Theory”, 39, 2021, pp. 123-156.

¹⁵ L. Rizzi, *On the form of chains: Criterial positions and ECP effects, WH-Movement: Moving On*, L. Lai-Shen Cheng – N. Corver ed., MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 2006, pp. 97-133.

(11)



Although we have no direct evidence for the validity of this approach to sentences like the one in (10), we suggest that this approach is superior to the approach that stipulates the presence of optionality of features in the grammar. Notice firstly that the presence of the low IP area is well-documented in a number of languages such as Chinese¹⁶, Turkish¹⁷, English¹⁸, among many others. There is no a priori reason that precludes the assumption that this area is also manifested and projected in SA grammar. We take this approach as cross-linguistically favourable to proposals that suggest that some features may be optional on heads, just to offer an account of the syntactic phenomena under discussion.

The approach that draws on the presence of the low IP area provides us with a tangle account of the derivation of the sentences where the PP predicate intervenes between the past tense marker *ka:n* and the subject as shown in the following example:

- (12) *ka:n* *fi-l-madi:nat-i* *?al-radʒul-u* (2>3>1)
 be.3SG.M.PST *in-DEF-city-GEN* *DEF-man-NOM*
 ‘The man was in the city.’

In such a type of sentence, what is located in the low IP area of the clause is the predicate PP. According to the natural interpretation of such sentences (by five professors of SA), the PP should be interpreted here as a topic or even a focus when the proper context is used. For instance, the natural interpretation of sentence (12) is that the man was in the city, not in another place (e.g., in the market), the context in which the city is being con-

¹⁶ W. Paul, *Low IP area and left periphery in Mandarin Chinese*, “Recherches linguistiques de Vincennes”, 33, 2005, pp. 111-134.

¹⁷ S. İşsever, *A syntactic account of wh-in-situ in Turkish*, in *Essays on Turkish Linguistics*, S. Ay – Ö. Aydın – İ. Ergenç – S. Gökmen – S. İşsever – D. Peçenek ed., Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden 2009, 103-112.

¹⁸ K. Jayaseelan, *Topic, focus and adverb positions in clause structure*, “Nanzan Linguistics”, 4, 2008, pp. 43-68.

trasted against other places. This sentence is used to correct some previous assumptions already held by the hearer. According to Ouhalla¹⁹, the corrective interpretation gives rise to a corrective reading which is one manifestation of focus. Accordingly, the PP is a focus (that stands for the corrective information). One challenge arising here is that the corrective focus in Arabic is morphologically marked by movement²⁰. Therefore, the PP should have left its base-generation position and moved to a position that is amenable to focused information. In standard accounts, this position can be Focus Phrase which is part of the CP domain²¹. Hence the prediction is that the PP starts the sentence due to its movement to the left periphery (i.e., to the CP zone of the clause). However, the fact that the PP appears to the right of *ka:n*, which has no reason to vacate its position in such a case, indicates that this focus position should be located in a low position relative to *ka:n*. The proposal that there is a low IP area projected in the grammar of natural language provides us with straightforward solution to this challenge. The PP moves to a low focused position (in Spec, Focus Phrase) rather than the high focus place.

Another problem arising here pertains to the position of the subject. Under the assumption that the PP is a focus in the low IP area, nothing in theory prevents the subject from moving to Spec,TP attracted by the EPP feature on T⁰. However, this problem dissolves if we assume that the PredP is a phase which is an incremental chunk that forms a cyclic domain that subsumes all of its operations²². PredP is a complete propositional phrase in the sense that it has a subject and a complement that predicates about this subject. Therefore, it stands for a full event, a complete thought²³, hence it can be qualified as a phase. Following this, the PP, which is a focused element, should move to the edge of the phase before it moves to the low IP area following the effects of the Phase Impenetrability Condition that requires any movement from inside the phase to target the edge of the phase before it moves on²⁴. This movement of the focused PP prevents any movement of the subject to Spec,TP because the featural content of the focused PP is heavier than the subject. According to Starke²⁵, an element with a richer featural content creates an opaque domain against any movement of the element that falls within its c-command domain (the domain that includes all elements that one entity c-commands). Following this, the derivation of sentence (12) is schematically represented as follows:

¹⁹ J. Ouhalla, *Remarks on focus in Standard Arabic*, in *Perspectives on Arabic linguistics X: papers from the Tenth Annual Symposium on Arabic Linguistics*, M. Eid – R.R. Ratcliffe ed., John Benjamins, Amsterdam 1997, pp. 9-45.

²⁰ A. Moutaouakil, *Pragmatic functions in a functional grammar of Arabic* (Vol. 8), Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, Dordrecht 1989.

²¹ L. Rizzi, *The fine structure of left periphery*.

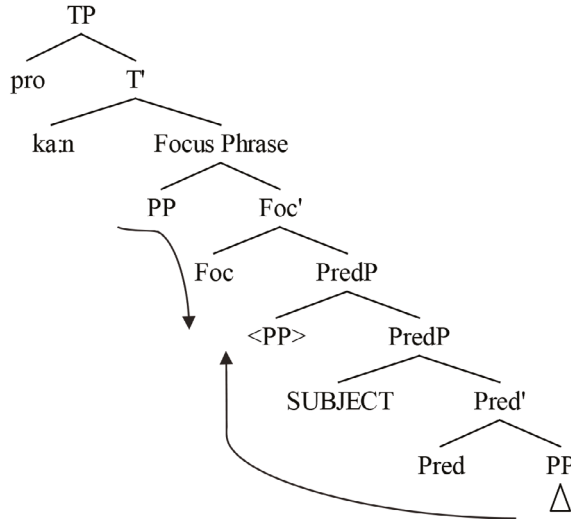
²² N. Chomsky, *Derivation by phase*, in *Ken Hale: A life in language*, M. Kenstowicz ed., MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 2001, pp. 1-51.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ M. Starke, *Move Dissolves into Merge: a Theory of Locality*, Doctoral Dissertation, Université de Genève, 2002.

(13)



Because the subject can not overcome the intervention effect caused by the presence of the focused PP in the edge of the phase, it remains in situ. As a result, an expletive *pro* is used to fill Spec,TP, fulfilling the requirements of the EPP on T^0 . It should be noted that most works that address the derivation of focal elements in different Arabic varieties have argued that the focus is not generated in the left periphery. Any focal element that appears in this area of the sentence structure should be derived in the sense that it reaches this position by movement rather than base-generation²⁶.

As for instances where the subject and the predicate appear in a position to the left of *ka:n*, it can be proposed that the subject and the predicates are located in the left periphery (the CP domain). Consider the following sentence that we repeat from the discussion above.

- (14) ʔal-radʒul-u fi-l-madi:nat-i ka:n (1>3>2)
 DEF-man-NOM in-DEF-city-GEN be.3SG.M.PST
 ‘The man was in the city.’

In fact, there is prosodic evidence in favour of this analysis. In such cases, the subject should be separated by the rest of the sentence by an intonational comma, which is the signature property of the presence of topics in SA grammar²⁷. The subject is a topic whereas the PP can be a focused element that is located in the high focus position in the clause. This analysis derives the word order where the subject and the PP are located to the left of the past tense marker *ka:n*. According to the related literature, high topics are base-generated in the CP domain²⁸. This indicates that the subject in (14) is directly merged in its surface

²⁶ See A. Moutaouakil, *Pragmatic functions in a functional grammar of Arabic*.

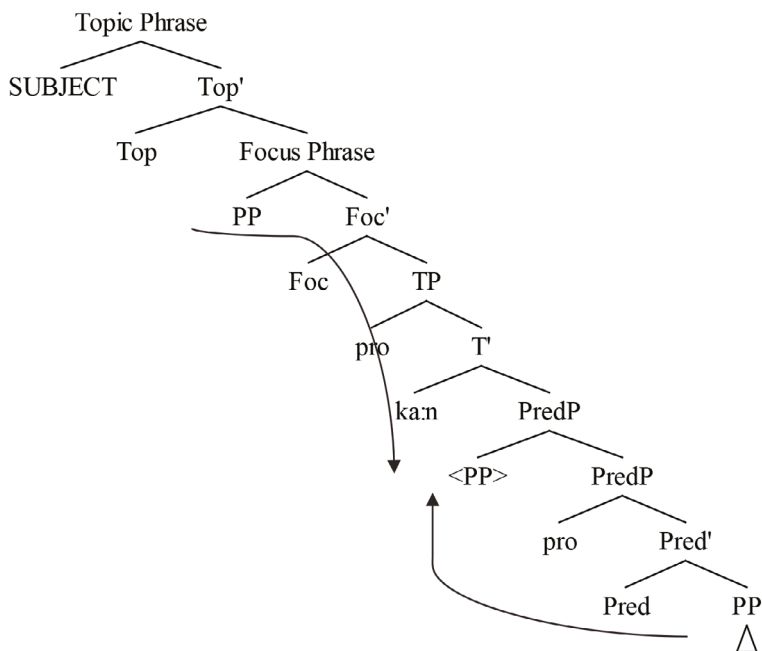
²⁷ See M.A. Mohammad, *Word order, agreement and pronominalization*.

²⁸ See U. Soltan, *On formal feature licensing in minimalism*.

position. The PP is a focused element that moves from its base position to the high Focus Phrase. However, one might wonder why the PP does not target the low IP area in such cases. This inquiry can be remedied by work offered in Jarrah and Abusalim’s paper²⁹, stating that the low focus has information which differ from the high focus in that the former should be corrective while the latter can be the exhaustive focus (the speaker picks an element from a set of alternatives that are not known to the hearer).

Under this proposal, the subject slot in the PredP is filled with a pro that is paired in Φ -features with the topical subject. In other words, the pro that fills Spec,PredP is not expletive and has Φ -content; however, this Φ -content is not independent. It should be similar to the Φ -content of the topical subject. This dependency relation between the pro and the topical subject can be implemented through the Agree operation where the topical subject is a goal whereas the pro is a probe³⁰. On the other hand, Spec-TP is filled with an expletive pro. This is clearly shown in the following tree structure:

(15)



Consider sentences with a PP predicate starting the clause followed by the past tense marker *ka:n* and the DP subject as in (16).

²⁹ M. Jarrah – N. Abusalim, *In favour of the low IP area*.

³⁰ See N. Chomsky, *Minimalist inquiries: The framework*, in *Step by step: Essays on minimalist syntax in honor of Howard Lasnik*, R. Martin, David Michaels, and Juan Uriagereka eds., MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 2000, pp. 89-155.

- (16) fi-l-madi:nat-i ka:n ?al-radʒul-u (3>2>1)
 in-DEF-city-GEN be.3SG.M.PST DEF-man-NOM
 ‘The man was in the city.’

The derivation of this sentence, following the analysis developed in this paper, can be pursued in this way. The subject is a low-IP element. In other words, the subject is not *in situ* but re-merged and is located in the topic/focus position of the low IP area. This has the effect to make the subject appear to the right of the past tense marker *ka:n*. Note here that the subject should be definite/specific in such situations, as shown in the following sentence:

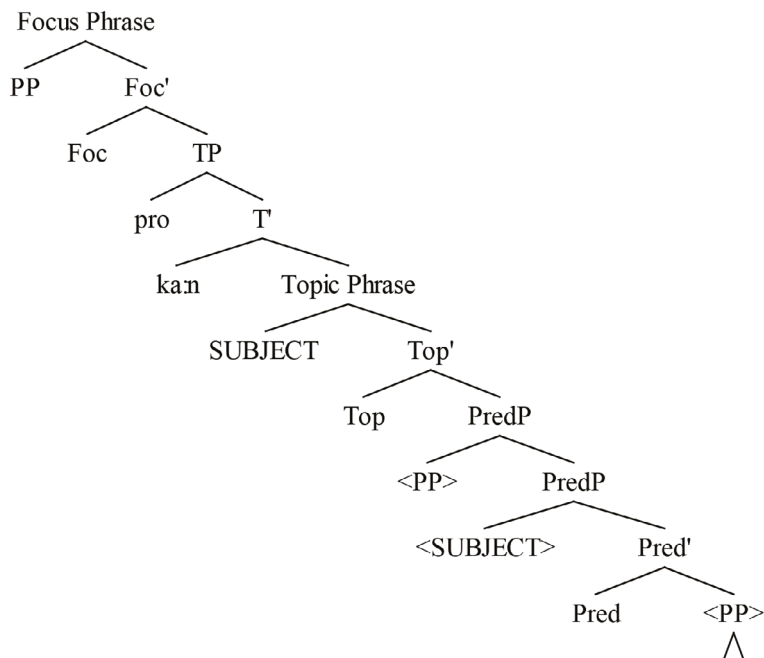
- (17) fi-l-madi:nat-i ka:n (?al-)radʒul-u (3>2>1)
 in-DEF-city-GEN be.3SG.M.PST DEF-man-NOM
 ‘The man was in the city.’

The fact that the subject should be definite/specific is important because it is evidence for the topicality of subjects. As is cross-linguistically known, topics can not be indefinite DPs³¹. As for the PP, it is located in the CP domain as a focus. The natural interpretation of this sentence is that PP expresses contrastive information. The speaker means that the man was in the city, not in another place. In such case, we have a topical subject and the contrastive element. This type of information triggers the subject to move to the low IP area whose topics are known for their high anaphoricity in terms of the context they occur in³². The PP leaves its position to the CP domain crossing the topical subject.

³¹ See L. Rizzi, *On the form of chains*.

³² See Jarrah – Abusalim, *In favour of the low IP area in the Arabic clause structure*, pp. 123-156.

(18)



One question that should be responded here is why the movement of the PP to the left periphery does not invoke an intervention effect against the movement of the topical subject to the low IP area. The answer to this question lies in the fact that the subject is rich in its featural content. The subject bears [TOP] feature while the PP bears [FOC] feature. The presence of the topical feature on the subject makes it strong and hence it is able to overcome any intervention effect caused by elements that bear an informational feature like the PP in such cases.

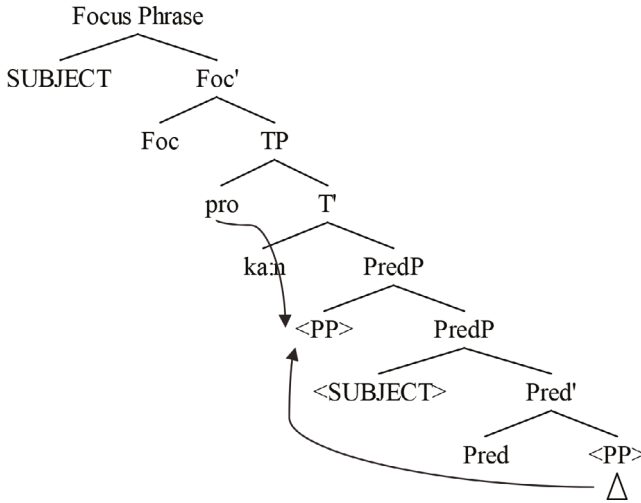
The last case here pertains to instances where the PP starts the sentences and is immediately followed by the DP subject.

- (19) fi-l-madi:nat-i ?al-radʒul-u ka:n (3>1>2)
 in-DEF-city-GEN DEF-man-NOM be.3SG.M.PST
 'The man was in the city.'

In such cases, it can be suggested that the subject and the PP both occur in the left periphery. The PP is a topic whereas the subject is a contrastive focus. This is consistent with the natural interpretations of the sentence in such cases. The speaker expresses that the man, not anybody else in the common ground such as his wife, was in the city. This is perceived as a given information that can be accessible through the global discourse of the utterance. Note here that if we assume that the subject is located in Spec,TP, we run into a problem of how the subject, which is not topical or focused, overcomes the intervention effects of the correctively focused PP.

One important issue to mention here concerns the question whether the topical PP is base-generated in the left periphery or is derived (it moves to the surface position through some A-bar movement). The related literature is silent in this regard as the main bulk of related literatures discusses cases with topical DPs not PPs³³. For this, I propose that the PP is derived in such clauses. Firstly, the featural content of the PP makes it able to overcome any intervention effect caused by the contrastive subject. Additionally, it is theoretically less desired to propose that there is a null PP in the complement of the PredP as such elements have never been attested in cross-linguistic syntax. Therefore, the derivation of such sentences is derived in this way:

(20)



In this section, we have shown that different word orders of verbal clauses in SA are possible when the predicate is a PP. Such different word orders are syntactically derived through the movement of the subject or the PP to the low IP area or to the left periphery. Additionally, we have shown that some word orders can be imposed by the intervention effect caused by one element against another element. This is clearly shown when the PP is focused/topical whereas the subject is not as such. In such cases, the subject is enforced to remain in situ because it could not overcome the intervention effect caused by the topical/focused PP. Table 1 below summarizes the derivation of non-verbal sentences with a PP predicate.

³³ See U. Soltan, *On formal feature licensing in minimalism*; M. Jarrah, *A cartographic approach to embedded word order in Jordanian Arabic*.

Table 1 - *The derivation of non-verbal sentences with a PP predicate*

<i>The word order</i>	<i>The subject</i>	<i>The predicate</i>
S > <i>ka:n</i> > PP	Spec,TP	In situ
S > PP > <i>ka:n</i>	Spec,Topic Phrase [_{CP}]	Spec,Focus Phrase [_{CP}]
<i>ka:n</i> > S > PP	Spec,Topic Phrase [_{IP}]	In situ
<i>ka:n</i> > PP > S	In situ	Spec,Focus Phrase [_{IP}]
PP > S > <i>ka:n</i>	Spec,Focus Phrase [_{CP}]	Spec,Topic Phrase [_{CP}]
PP > <i>ka:n</i> > S	Spec,Topic Phrase [_{CP}]	Spec,Focus Phrase [_{CP}]

In the following section, we discuss the derivation of non-verbal clauses when the predicate is AP/DP.

3. *The Derivation of Sentences with a Non-PP Predicate*

As we have shown above, when the predicate is an AP or a DP, not all possible word orders are permitted. Sentences (21) are licit whereas sentences (22) are illicit³⁴.

- (21) a. ʔal-radʒul-u *ka:n* *saʕi:d-a-n*
DEF-man-NOM be.3SG.M.PST happy-ACC-NUN
‘The man was happy.’
- b. *ka:n* ʔal-radʒul-u *saʕi:d-a-n* (2>1>3)
be.3SG.M.PST DEF-man-NOM happy-ACC-NUN
‘The man was happy.’
- c. *saʕi:d-a-n* *ka:n* ʔal-radʒul-u (3>2>1)
happy-ACC-NUN be.3SG.M.PST DEF-man-NOM
‘The man was happy.’
- (22) a. **ka:n* *saʕi:d-a-n* ʔal-radʒul-u (*2>3>1)
be.3SG.M.PST happy-ACC-NUN DEF-man-NOM
‘The man was happy.’
- b. * ʔal-radʒul-u *saʕi:d-a-n* *ka:n* (*1>3>2)
DEF-man-NOM happy-ACC-NUN be.3SG.M.PST
‘The man was happy.’
- (23) **saʕi:d-a-n* ʔal-radʒul-u *ka:n* (*3>1>2)
happy-ACC-NUN DEF-man-NOM be.3SG.M.PST
‘The man was happy.’

Let us first turn our attention to licit sentences. Sentence (21a) is straightforward. The subject moves to Spec,TP whereas the AP remains in situ as a complement of Pred⁰. Sen-

³⁴ Because the same restrictions appear when the predicate is an AP and a DP, we restrict the discussion here to non-verbal clauses with an AP predicate. Our analysis can be safely extended to DP predicates.

tence (21b) includes a movement of the subject to the low IP area whereas the AP remains in situ as a complement of Pred⁰. Following our analysis, there is no reason that makes this sentence illicit as the complement does not move; hence it does not interfere in the grammaticality of the sentence, which is the case. The subject being a topical or focused (or even without an informational value) would not affect the status of the AP. As for sentence (21c), it exhibits the movement of the AP to Focus Phrase in the left periphery. The subject also moves to the low IP area as a topic. Given the informational content of the AP in such cases, it can overcome the intervention effect caused by the topical subject.

As for illicit cases, let us first discuss the sentence where the AP intervenes between the past tense marker *ka:n* and the DP subject (22a). According to our analysis discussed in section 2, the AP is a focus element that is situated in the low IP area of the clause. The question that arises here is why this sentence is not permissible in Arabic grammar. We attribute this to the fact that AP/DP in such cases does not cause an intervention effect against the movement of the subject to Spec,TP. Although the AP is rich with respect to its featural content, it does not cause an intervention effect against the movement of the subject to Spec,TP. The subject is existentially interpreted in non-verbal clauses in Arabic. The subject bears [REF] a feature (referentiality feature) that allows it to break any intervention effect caused by an element that does not have this feature. One objection to be dealt with here is why the subject can not overcome the intervention effect caused by the focused PP. The answer to this question lies in the fact that locative PPs (examined in this paper) bear this feature as they are deictic in nature³⁵. Therefore, the subject and the PP both have some deictic feature which makes them subject to the intervention effect caused by them against each other. Accordingly, the subject moves to Spec,TP and refuses to remain in situ.

As for sentence (22b), we propose that the main reason for its ungrammaticality is ascribed to the assumption that the presence of an indefinite DP or AP between the topical subject (which is based-generated in the left periphery) and the non-expletive pro that fills Spec,PredP blocks their Φ -association. In section 2, we mentioned that when the subject starts the sentence followed by the PP, the former is a topic whereas the latter is a focus. Spec,PredP is filled with a pro whose Φ -content is determined by that of the subject. In other words, the pro that fills Spec,PredP has a set of Φ -features which are not valued but interpretable³⁶. The Φ -content of the pro is valued by that of the subject. However, when the adjective (or a DP-predicate) intervenes between them, the valuation of the pro's Φ -content is blocked as these two elements carry a set of Φ -features, so they trigger an intervention effect. Note here that they could not value the pro's Φ -content by themselves.

³⁵ See M. Jarrah, *A criterial freezing approach to subject extraction in Jordanian Arabic*, "The Canadian Journal of Linguistics/La revue Canadienne de linguistique", 62, 2017, 3, pp. 411-448; M. Jarrah, *Temporal/locative inversion in Arabic*, "Yearbook of the of the Poznań Linguistic Meeting", 3, 2017, 1, pp. 117-140.

³⁶ See D. Pesetsky – E. Torrego, *The syntax of valuation and the interpretability of features*, *Phrasal and Clausal Architecture: Syntactic derivation and interpretation*, S. Karimi – V. Samiian – W.K. Wilkins ed., John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam 2007, pp. 262-294, for the separation of interpretability and valuation of features.

AP has no person feature, so it is defective, whereas the DP predicate is not referential; hence it has no person feature as well³⁷.

As for the last case which is represented by sentence (22c) reproduced below for convenience, the main reason for it being ungrammatical is ascribed to the fact that the AP in such cases is a topical element.

- (24) *saʕi:d-a-n ʔal-radʕul-u ka:n (*3>1>2)
 happy-ACC-NUN DEF-man-NOM be.3SG.M.PST
 ‘The man was happy.’

APs can not be topical because they stand for the new information in non-verbal sentences. Likewise, indefinite DP can not be topical because they are no referential and mainly attribute some property to an element. Rizzi³⁸ argues that topics should be elements that are anchored in the previous discourse expressing old, given information. They can not be property-denoting elements³⁹.

This being the case, this paper brings evidence that various patterns of verbless sentences in SA grammar as well as the restrictions on the presence of some patterns are a direct result of the movement of some elements to the left periphery. This is better viewed as an argument that restrictions on word order patterns should be linked to the narrow-syntax operations rather than limiting their presence to intonation or other conditions that operate beyond syntax. Additionally, this paper brings evidence that the presence of functional projections in the sentence can be supported by empirical evidence that can be supplied from less-investigated languages. This evidence lends support to the notion that such functional projections which are projected in specific areas in the sentence structure are universal.

4. Conclusion

In this research, we have investigated the derivation of different word orders in non-verbal clauses in SA. We have shown that when the predicate is a PP, all possible word order permutations are allowed. On the other hand, when the predicate is an AP or a PP, some word orders are disallowed. Firstly, word orders where the AP or the DP predicate occupies the topical slot in the derivations (i.e., 3>1>2) are disallowed as these two elements can not express given information while the subject expresses new information. The notion that the adjectives and indefinite DPs are property-denoting elements blocks them from being topics. Other word orders (*2>3>1 and *1>3>2) are disallowed because the adjective does not cause an intervention effect against the movement of the subject to Spec or because the adjective causes an intervention effect against Φ -Agree between the subject and the

³⁷ See H. Borer, *Afro-Asiatic, Semitic: Hebrew*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Compounding*, R. Lieber – P. Štekauer eds., Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, pp. 386-399.

³⁸ L. Rizzi, *On the form of chains*.

³⁹ A. Moutaouakil, *Pragmatic Functions in a functional grammar of Arabic*.

non-expletive *pro* in Spec,PredP. As for sentences where the predicate is a PP, we have shown that all word orders are allowed here due to the fact that the PP can be assigned any information value. This research shows that the various word orders (dis)allowed in non-verbal clauses in SA can be elegantly captured using the cartographic approach to syntactic derivation and interpretation.

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