

Preface

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**Word Order, Agreement and Pronominalization in
Standard and Palestinian Arabic**

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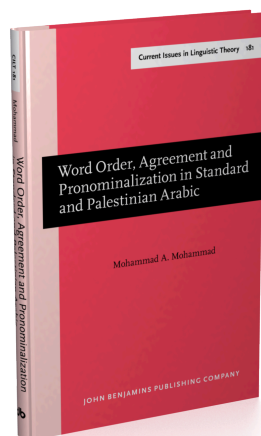
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Preface

The two related issues of word order, and subject-verb agreement have occupied center stage in the study of Arabic syntax since the time of Sibawayhi in the eighth century. This book is a contribution to both of these areas.

This book is grounded within the generative grammar framework in one of its most recent versions, namely Minimalism, as expounded in Chomsky (1995). In order to maximize the use of this book, theoretical discussion is kept to the necessary minimum.

Let me, then, start by explaining what I understand Minimalism to be.¹ In Minimalism everything must be justified: there can be no spurious assumptions or movements. I take this to mean that every syntactic tool must be justified either theory internally or empirically. For example, for some category 'A' to be a maximal projection, it must be shown that it either interacts with some other established projection or that its introduction is justified by the syntax of the specific language under discussion. The idea behind this is that if 'A' projects, say in Arabic, then, it is available in Universal Grammar.

To give a concrete example. Chomsky (1995, Chapter 4), faithful to the principles of Minimalism, proposes that Agr be eliminated from the inventory of syntactic categories. That is to say, from Chomsky's standpoint this category is neither empirically nor theoretically justified. Therefore, it must be eliminated from the syntax. In order to re-introduce AgrP as a maximal projection, then, one needs to show that without it, something will go unexplained. This is precisely what I attempt to do in Chapter Three, where I argue that either Agr or some other similar projection is needed in order to capture some facts of Arabic syntax that would, otherwise, remain problematic.

One issue that occupies a very prominent place in Minimalism is that of

1. For an excellent and accessible summary of Minimalism, see Marantz (1995).

movement. There are two types of movement: overt and covert. Overt movement takes place prior to Spell-Out. Covert movement takes place at LF. These two movements are further subdivided into head and maximal projection movements. Putting aside what actually moves at LF, these movements are kept distinct. They are kept so by a chain integrity requirement. A chain must be uniform in that each member must be of the same categorial type. Thus, a chain may not be mixed in that it has both heads and maximal projections as members.

At the heart of Minimalism is the concept of Full Interpretation. Full Interpretation means that for a sentence to be generated as fully grammatical and non-deviant it must contain nothing but interpretable elements. This is driven by the checking requirements which stipulate that all features must be checked either in the syntax or at LF, depending on whether they are strong or weak, respectively. Any number of unchecked features will cause the sentence to crash.

Checking is now the driving force behind all types of movement. No category moves without a reason. In Chomsky (1995, Chapter 2), Greed was introduced as an economy condition. Greed stipulates that movement is self-serving: a category 'A' moves into a position 'B' if it needs to have one of its features checked. Later (cf. Chomsky 1995, Chapter 5 and Lasnik 1993), Greed was weakened in the following fashion: if a category 'A' moves, then it must enter into a checking relation with another category. If 'A' satisfies all of its requirements without movement, then it should not move. If it moves, the derivation will crash.

Chomsky (1995) proposes that the starting point in a syntactic derivation is the lexicon. I follow him in adopting his proposal that items are inserted into a syntactic tree fully inflected. Conditions on checking will throw out any wrong choices. Take a concrete example, the lexical item *ʔaHmad-u* 'Ahmed-' is selected from the lexicon and is inserted, say, in object position. The sentence will crash since the nominative Case cannot be checked in that position. If *ʔaHmad-u* is inserted in subject position, the nominative Case will be checked and the derivation converges.

Of particular interest in this book is the assumption that there is no optional movement. All movement is obligatory. Movement is necessitated by two things: (i) a feature is specified as a strong feature; and (ii), as such, it must be checked. A moving element needs to move in order to (a) have its own features checked, and (b) check this strong feature. Note that this movement is still self-serving. Arabic is an illuminating example here. It allows VSO and SVO. Since no movement is optional, it follows that to derive SVO in Arabic there must be

some strong feature that requires the subject to move. The moving subject accomplishes the two things mentioned: (i) it checks its own features; and (ii) it checks that strong feature. I see this as self-serving and motivated by Greed in that if the subject did not move, it would not get its own feature(s) checked. As for VSO, the feature that causes the subject to move is either absent or is specified as weak. In this case, the subject may not move, since it can satisfy all its requirements without moving, and there is no self-interest to be served in moving.

The book is organized as follows. In Chapter One, a detailed description is given of word order options allowed or disallowed in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Palestinian Arabic (PA). It is shown that, perhaps surprisingly, the two varieties allow almost the same range of word orders.

In Chapter Two, the very important question of whether Arabic has a VP or not is addressed. I argue extensively that Arabic has a VP category. The evidence derives from examining superiority effects, ECP effects, binding, variable interpretations, etc. I establish that there is indeed strong evidence that suggests that the subject and the object are not symmetrically related. The subject is higher and must be in a position to asymmetrically c-command the object.

In Chapter Three, I discuss how the different word orders are derived. I extensively discuss one very important question, namely what is in SpecTP in VSO sentences? I argue that the position is occupied by an expletive pronoun.

In Chapter Four, I defend the Expletive Hypothesis which states that in VSO sentences the expletive may take part in checking some features that the verb has. I provide a typology of the expletive pronoun in Modern Standard Arabic, Palestinian Arabic, Lebanese Arabic, and Moroccan Arabic.

In Chapter Five, I examine in detail one particularly interesting problem involving pronominal coreference. The problem is that if the subject is the antecedent of a pronominal clitic, word order is free. But if a pronominal is cliticized onto the subject, then the antecedent must precede. I propose an account that derives these restrictions without recourse to linear order. This adds a further argument for the presence of a VP in Arabic.

This is a substantially revised version of my 1989 USC dissertation “The Sentential Structure of Arabic.” Many people have been instrumental in my linguistic growth. Joseph Aoun heads the list. As a teacher and a friend, his influence should be apparent on every page. To him, and to his family, Zayna, Karim, and Marwan, I owe the most. I am proud and fortunate to consider Elabbas Benmamoun, Mushira Eid, Ernest McCarus, and Jamal Ouhalla among

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To my family, Laura, George Abdellatif, and Byron Ahmed, I dedicate this book in appreciation.