The focus function and derivation of object displacement in Standard Arabic

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to provide a minimalist account of object displacement in terms of its trigger and its landing site in the syntactic tree structure of Standard Arabic (SA) clauses. The account utilizes Chomsky’s concept of edge feature (EF) within the Minimalist Program and Rizzi’s Split-CP analysis. In terms of its data scope, the paper is limited to a class of data identified as displaying the Verb – Object – Subject (VOS) order wherein the object is a full DP (not a pronominal clitic), and appears in a position preceding the subject. It will be argued that this order is the result of focus displacement of the object from its canonical position inside VP across the subject DP to the outer periphery of vP. The result of this operation is a marked order VOS driven by the vP edge feature (EF) to achieve the pragmatic function of focus.

1. Introduction

This paper investigates the syntactic derivation and representation of sentences in which the object has interchanged its surface order with the subject. An example is given in (1):

(1)  
(a) sarib-a al-haliib-a al-walad-u  
drank-3sgm the-milk-ACC the-boy-NOM  
“The boy drank the milk.”

(b) al-haliib-a sarib-a al-walad-u  
the-milk-ACC drank-3sgm the-boy-NOM  
“The boy drank the milk.”

The DP al-haliib-a in (1a) is fronted from its canonical position following the subject to surface in a position preceding the subject, between the verb and the subject. In (1b), however, the same DP is fronted to clause-initial position. By organizing the message differently, the speaker is conveying a different textual meaning which could be the predicted and appropriate choice in a given context. This way of packaging the information might be the choice if the conversation or discussion had already included a denial of the event and the speaker wants to emphasize that it was milk and not, for example, honey that the boy drank. Sample sentences of this type will be presented to illustrate the focus properties of object displacement in SA. There is a contrastive focus expressed in such samples, encoding information contrary to the presuppositions of the participants in the exchange.

The Split-CP hypothesis (Rizzi, 1997, 2004) and concepts of the Minimalist Program are used as a model for the analysis. The scope of data is limited to contexts in which the displaced object is a full lexical DP. In other words, excluded from this study is material in which object displacement obligatorily applies where the complement is reduced to a non-nominative pronominal clitic:

(2)  
(a) sar-a-hum quduum-u-ka  
pleased-3ms-them-ACC arrival-NOM-your  
“Your arrival pleased them.”

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Such construction is not the focus of the present study, and therefore will not be discussed in any details here other than noting that research on Arabic syntax (cf. Fassi Fehri, 1993; Mohammad, 2000) has treated object pronominal clitics as arguments.  

Creswell (2007) identified four kinds of research as qualitative, namely discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, political discourse analysis, narratology and phenomenology. There is no control, no manipulations of data or participants and no experimentation in the present study.

The samples under analysis are amenable to the relevant qualitative approach for exploring the syntactic features and functions of data presenting VOS word order and probing into their interpretation and into the nature of the position occupied by the object DP. The aim of the study is to identify the structural position hosting the displaced object DP and highlights the motivation for the displacement. Its research questions can be formulated as follows:

- Why does object displacement occur in the language?
- Where in the structure does the displaced object land?

While the bulk of existing literature on Arabic syntax focused on CLLD, the analysis of object displacement has remained limited and has not been fully explored. The few studies that do exist are conducted within the earlier approaches to transformational syntax with little consideration to the pragmatic and discourse function of the construction. Thus, the construction under investigation in the study represents an area that needs additional research, and this article attempts to address this gap in the existing literature adopting Rizzi’s Split-CP hypothesis.

Adopting a position maintained in Chomsky (2005), Soltan (2007) suggests that the position targeted by the clause internal moved DP is an additional specifier of vP. That is the moved DP remains internal to vP within the projection of v. As indicated, the present work, however, adopts a decompositional approach to functional categories with a highly articulated phrase structure, viz., Rizzi’s Split-CP hypothesis, and adopts the view that focus in SA is a separate projection independent of vP and that the clause in SA has two designated focus positions – one projected in the upper layer of the clause (clause initial) and the other in the lower part above vP. In other words, both positions are external to vP. This focus projection replaces the additional specifier of vP and can fulfill the focus-driven function of object displacement in the language.

2. Method and procedures

Most of the samples chosen involve object displacement and are deemed to be grammatical based on the judgement of the author as an Arabic native speaker from Iraq. All the sample discussed in this study have been checked for their grammaticality by several native speakers of Arabic from different countries. The judgement on the samples is strengthened by a full Professor of Arabic grammar from Iraq currently teaching at the University of Bahrain, a full Professor of Arabic grammar from Algeria, Assistant Professor of translation from Egypt and three other native speakers with MA degrees in applied linguistics from Jordan and Palestine currently teaching at the university of Nizwa in the Sultanate of Oman.

To minimize the biasness of the analysis, these native speakers were used as a kind of triangulation, viz., investigator triangulation as the judgements given by native speakers were compared. In this regard, Denzin and Lincoln (1998) follow that interpretivist paradigm to eliminate biases and subjective elements. O’Donoghue and Punch (2003) describe triangulation as a “method of cross-checking data from multiple sources to search for regularities in the research data”.

3. Model

The following set of theoretical constructs are adopted for achieving the objectives of this paper. First, the influential vP Shell analysis which splits the VP into two projections. Second, the Internal Subject Hypothesis of Koopman and Sportiche (1991) which generates the subject DP in the specifier of VP. This framework of assumptions including such functional projections as (split) CP, TP, vP have become standard in the literature on SA syntax (cf. Shlonsky, 2000; Jlassi, 2013; Alsager, 2017), and in fact applied as universal sentence structure with some parametric variation. Accordingly, the subject DP originates in the specifier of vP and the object DP as the complement of the verb as schematized in (3):

\[
\text{I also adopt the Split-CP analysis of the “left periphery” (Rizzi, 1997, 2004) where the region of the CP left periphery is divided into a number of distinct projections. At the highest level is the Force Phrase (FP) and at the lowest level is the Finite Phrase (FinP) with Topic Phrase (TopP) and Focus Phrase (FocP) being placed between FP and FinP (Rizzi, 1997:297).}
\]

(4) CP-Split Hypothesis proposed by Rizzi (1997)

The structure above encodes important information about the sentence, viz., the TP domain and discourse. The Top and Foc heads are projected only if needed, that is, Top expands to TopP only if the clause includes a topicalized element, and the Foc head would project a FocP only if the clause includes a focused element. The inclusion of Top and Foc would trigger the merger of a matching item in the left periphery. If the sentence does not include a topic or a focus phrase projection, then in this case the force and the finiteness phrases are ‘syncrised’ which means collapsed together as one projection (Haegeman, 2006).
Thus, adopting Rizzi’s Split CP, Chomsky’s attracting movement EF and extension of this EF to Foc, I claim that object displacement targets an independent focus position located right above vP, specifically the specifier of FocP. The EF of Foc raises the object to the specifier of FocP placing the object before the subject DP. The edge-feature-raised object may move further up to occupy the clause-initial [Spec, Foc]. Justification for the application of this framework includes its comprehensiveness, clarity and comprehensibility, explanatory power and aesthetic value.

4. Related studies

Working within the framework of Functional Grammar, Moutaouakil (1989) distinguishes between new focus and contrastive focus in SA. Focus, according to him, refers to an item bearing new information, and (1989) distinguishes between new focus and contrastive focus in SA.

While (b) is an appropriate answer to (a), (c) is inappropriate. Similarly, (b) is an acceptable answer to the question in (a) whereas (c) is unacceptable:

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Moutaouakil discusses three focus constructions in SA: Focus preposing, he argues that contrastive focus is expressed only at the outer boundary of the clause. The following examples illustrate:

The pre-verbal object Zajdan is a contrastive-focused item. The speaker in (b) asserts that the only person he or she greeted is Zajd and not qmr. Since the focus assigned to Zajd is contrastive, it is realized in outer layer of the clause.

On the other hand, topic occurs after or before focus in Lebanese Arabic as the following examples show. The topic is boldfaced whereas the focus is in upper case:

To accommodate data from both SA and Lebanese Arabic, Shlonsky (2000, p. 327) proposes the following schema:

This refinement of the Split CP with two Top nodes takes care of the fact that focused elements can either precede or follow the topic producing a relative order rather than a strict order between topic and focus. The asterisk indicates that topics are recursive in that more than one topic is allowed in the left periphery of a given sentence. Soltan (2007) presents an analysis of object displacement in SA in terms of the minimalist adopting Chomsky’s (2005) proposal that displaced DP targets a second specifier of vP. Presenting data from SA, Soltan discusses the phenomenon of “object shift” in the language and concludes that “shifted objects” are moved to the vP edge, extending the

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2 As pointed out by a Heliyon reviewer, the sentence in (c) is acceptable because Case marking helps to differentiate ambiguity in interpretation. The author finds the sentence acceptable as well.
EF to $v$ heading $v^*P$. Consider his example below used to illustrate the phenomenon which he calls object shift:

(11)

\begin{tabular}{ccc}
(11) & qaraʔa & zajd-un \\
read.3sgmas & zajd-NOM & the-book-ACC \\
\end{tabular}

"Zajd read the book." Soltan (2007, p. 117)

(b) qaraʔa & ʔal-kitaab-a & zajd-un \\
read.3sgmas & the-book-ACC & zajd-NOM \\

"Zajd read the book." Soltan (2007, p. 118)

According to Soltan, the object ʔal-kitaab-a “the book”, which is externally merged as the internal complement of the verb qaraʔa “read” in (a), is displaced in (b) to the $v^*P$ edge. The derivation of object shift proceeds in the manner depicted by Soltan (2007, p. 119):

This is consistent with Chomsky’s (2005) proposal that object displacement ends up in the outer specifier of $v^*P$ as a consequence of the edge feature on $v$. This correctly positions the object between the verb and the subject. The verb itself has raised to sentence-initial position under the $T$ node, and the subject remains in situ in the language. While this approach can still account for the derivation of the process, the fully articulated CP, viz., Rizzi’s Split-CP hypothesis adopted in this study, allows more varied positions than just an outer specifier of $v^*P$ and more functional heads such as Foc, and Top which are required by the empirical facts in SA.

5. The analysis of object displacement

Given the properties of object displacement discussed above (see also section 5.2), and building on the literature on the syntax of focus, I propose that the displaced object is a focused element targeting the specifier position of a focus phrase directly above $v^*P$. The displacement is motivated by the EF of Foc, the heads of Focus Phrase. Displacing the object from inside VP across the subject to the specifier of Foc in (13), with the arrow marking object displacement, results in OVS order:

In this way, as claimed within the adopted Split-CP, there is a one-to-one correspondence between the syntactic position and the focus interpretive effect. The focused object is realized in a designated functional projection, viz., [Spec, FocP], which is located in the left periphery of the clause.

$V$ movement (discussed in the next section) through the intermediate head, i.e., the light $v$ into the higher $T$ gives the VOS surface order of the sentence.

I would like to raise two points here. First, building on Soltan’s proposal of EF extension, the present analysis extends the EF feature and associates it with another functional head, namely Foc heading FocP. This is consistent with the Split-CP hypothesis adopted here which posits Focus Phrase as an independent projection. As indicated, triggered by the EF of Foc, the displaced object in SA moves from its original position to the specifier of FocP, not to the outer specifier of $v^P$ as in Soltan (2007). The second point concerns the term object shift (OS). This term is applied to Icelandic and Mainland Scandinavian languages (Holmberg, 1986), specifically to a process with different properties than the one found in SA. Object shift is non-focus driven like scrambling in German and Dutch while the displaced object in Arabic is focused. Another difference has to do with the fact that object displacement in SA is insensitive to the definiteness or specificity of the displaced DP as both definite and indefinite generic DPs can be displaced and surface in a pre-subject position (cf. 5.2 and 5.3). On the other hand, object shift, as Soltan states, “is typically associated with interpretive effects of definiteness and specificity. Indefinite NPs, therefore, cannot undergo OS” (p. 116). Thus, in view of these differences, the term object shift is inappropriate for the description of the process in SA. This is why the term object displacement is used in this study instead.

5.1. Verb to tense movement via $v$

Given that SA is a verb-raising language (Benmamoun, 2000; Soltan, 2007), the lexical verb moves from $V$ to the upper functional head $v$ and then to the higher functional head $T$. V-raising is triggered by the affixal nature of the consonantal root under the $V$ node and the vocalect inflectional affixes under the $T$ node. A configurational relation between these functional probes ($T$ and $v$) and the object and the subject DP’s (i.e., the goals) is established. This ensures the application of the Agree operation and thus the unvalued uninterpretable features of the probes and the goals are valued. The movement of the verb out of the VP into the $T$ position via the $v$ position is arrowed below:

In line with the internal subject hypothesis adopted here for SA (section 3 above), the subject is assumed to be in the specifier of $v^P$ as indicated and remains in situ and that no movement is required as its features are valued under Agree.\(^3\)

\(^3\) It is not my intention to present arguments in support of a base-generation analysis here. The structure displays properties typically associated with left-dislocation such as resumptives and co-reference dependency into islands. The issue is discussed and defended in Soltan (2007) who also notes that “Arab grammarians never treated the preverbal DP in SV orders as subject, calling [it] instead nubtada? (roughly topic) and the rest of [the] clause xabar (roughly comment)” (p. 50). I, therefore, adopt a base-generation analysis rather than displacement. Further, the no-movement proposal presented here is compatible with the claim that movement is a last resort mechanism and that it has to be forced to have a convergent syntactic derivation at the interface levels of PF and LF.
In the so-called SVO structure, however, the pre-verbal nominal is not a subject\(^4\) and does not occupy the specifier of \(vP\) but merges in the specifier of Top. The merger of the nominal to get topicalisation is attracted by the EF of Top. It is instructive to note that the merged topic is linked to a copy, namely the subject pronoun in the specifier of \(vP\). According to Radford (2009), “[a]n unvalued case feature on a pronoun goal is valued as null via agreement with a T-probe” (p. 197). Extending Radford’s null Case assignment proposal to Arabic, then, the null pronominal copy becomes an active goal and can be probed by T. The unvalued Case feature of the null subject and the unvalued features of T are assigned values in the course of the derivation under Agree.

For example, let us consider the following examples and their derivation in (15):

(15)

| (a) | katab-a | at-taqriir-a | zajd-un |
|-----|---------|-------------|---------|
| wrote-3sgm | the-report-ACC | zajd-NOM |
| “Zajid wrote the report” |

(b) at-taqriir-a katab-a zajd-un

the-report-ACC wrote-3sgm zajd-NOM

“Zajid wrote the report”

In sentence (15a), the displaced object \(at-taqriir\) “the report” in Spec\(_2\) may be attracted by the edge feature of a higher Foc (sentence 15b) and thus may end up in the specifier position (Spec\(_2\)) above TP in the manner shown by the arrows:

\[
\begin{array}{ccccccccc}
\text{ForeP} & \text{Foc'} & \text{Spec2} & \text{Spec1} & \text{Spec} & \text{Subj} & \text{VP} & \text{Obj} \\
\end{array}
\]

\(^4\) Two proposals exists in the literature on the status of this DP. According to one proposal, the subject proposal (Mohammad, 1989; Benmamoun, 2000; Aoun et al., 2010), the DP is a subject raised out of the internal subject position (Spec, \(vP\)) to its surface position in [Spec, TP]/[Spec, IP]. The second proposal is the topic proposal (Fassi Fehri, 1993; Soltan, 2007). According to the topic proposal, the preverbal DP \(\text{ḥāṭalab-a} “\text{students}”\) in the example below is a left-dislocated topic co-referential with the subject pronounal -\(ʔ\):

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
\text{ḥāṭalab-u} & \text{ʔuridu} & \text{ʔan} & \text{j-adrus-u} \\
\text{the-students-NOM} & \text{want(1)} & \text{that} & \text{3-study-MP.SUbj(unctive)} \\
\text{“The students, I want them to study.”} \\
\end{array}
\]

Soltan (2007) argues that the preverbal DP is base-generated a topic in co-reference with a pronominal subject as shown below:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
\text{ḥāṭalab-u} [\text{v, t}] & \text{katab-u} [\text{v, pr, t, d-dars-a}]
\end{array}
\]

Producing arguments put forward in support of the two views will take us too far afield. For the purpose of the present study, I have adopted the topic theory and thus treat the preverbal DP of the SVO sentence as a topic with the pronominal as being the actual subject in [Spec, \(vP\)].

The EF feature on Foc enables it to attract the object DP which it \(C\)-commands to move to become the specifier of Foc. According to Chomsky (2005), the displaced object does not head an A-chain since it has been raised by an EF. Therefore, it is eligible to undergo A’-movement from Spec\(_1\) to the position in which it ends up, namely Spec\(_2\) as diagrammed.

5.2. Displaced objects as focused elements

A number of Diagnostic tests have been identified in literature on focus in Arabic, distinguishing them from topics. Ouhalla (1997) notes the following about focused DP’s (F-phrases). They preserve the Case of the position in which they originate, they are not associated with a resumptive pronoun inside the clause, they do not show definiteness and specificity effects, i.e., definite and indefinite DP’s can be focused, they are linked to a gap within the sentence, they target the specifier position of Focus Phrase (FP), and they bear contrastive focus stress and “receive a contrastive focus interpretation” (ibid p. 17).

On the other hand, topicalized DP’s are always nominative, are associated with a resumptive pronoun, sensitive to definiteness and specificity, and they are base-generated (externally merged). An example is given below:

(17)

| (a) | at-taqriir-u | katab-a-hu | zajd-un |
|-----|-------------|------------|---------|
| the-report-NOM | wrote-3sgm-it | zajd-NOM |
| “Zajid wrote the report” |

The boldfaced pronoun is co-indexed with the nominative and definite DP \(at-taqriir-u “the report”\). The following sentence where the DP is indefinite is ungrammatical.

(18)

| (a) | taqriir-u-n | katab-a-hu | zajd-un |
|-----|-------------|------------|---------|
| report-NOM-indef | wrote-3sgm-it | zajd-NOM |
| “A report, Zajid wrote it” |

The obligatory association of definiteness with the topic DP follows from its pragmatic function as an entity already known to the interlocutors in the discourse. With respect to the above tests, displaced objects exhibit and behave like focused DP’s. They show the Case of the position prior to displacement, not linked to a resumptive, insensitive to definiteness, associated with a gap, result from movement (internally merged) and bear focal stress. This is illustrated in example (a) above and in the following example where the DP \(al-qaṣīdat-a “the poem”\) bears the accusative Case, linked to a gap and can be definite or indefinite:

(19)

| (a) | al-qaṣīdat-a | qara-t-a | nabiil-un |
|-----|-------------|---------|---------|
| the-poem-ACC | read-3sgm | nabiil-NOM |
| “Nabiil read the poem.” |

The (b) version where the DP is \(qaṣīdat-a-n “a report”\) indefinite and non-specific is also acceptable. A key to distinguishing the focused object from the topicalized object (cf.17) is the accusative Case marking. While the topicalized object takes on the nominative Case, the focused object retains its original accusative Case. The sentences in (19) answer the
question in (20), and thus al-qasiidat/qasiidatan is confirmed to be a focused constituent:

(20) maaðaa qaraʔ-a nabiil-un
what read-3sgm nabiil-NOM

“what did Nabiil read?”

The contrastive focus interpretation of the displaced object can be supported by the addition of negative continuations (Ouhalla, 1997):

(21) al-qasiidat-a (laa ar-risalat-a) qaraʔ-a nabiil-un
the-poem-ACC not the-letter-ACC read-3sgm nabiil-NOM

“Nabil read the poem, not the letter.”

(b) qaṣiïdat-a-n (laa risalat-a-n) qaraʔ-a nabiil-un
poem-ACC-indef not a letter read-3sgm nabiil-NOM

“Nabil read a poem, not a letter.”

In these cases, the DPs al-qasiidat and qaṣiïdatan are being explicitly contrasted with the bracketed DP’s. The two clause-initial DP’s have been displaced from their canonical positions as complements of the verb qaraʔ-a to land in [Spec, Foc], a syntactically more prominent position. Building on Ouhalla’s (1997) proposal that “[p]reposited f-phrases [focused DP’s] occupy the Spec position of a functional projection” (p.14), I conclude that displaced objects are focalized (f-phrases in Ouhalla’s terms) which have been moved from their base position inside VP to the specifier of the functional head Foc.

5.3. Definiteness effects

As indicated above, a key difference that distinguishes object displacement as a focused unit and sets it apart from topics is the fact that it is insensitive to definiteness or specificity effects. Displacement of both definite and indefinite DP’s results in grammatical sentences:

(22) karram-a al-mudiir-u al-muwwaDaHa-t-a
rewarded-3sgm the-manager-NOM the-staff-fem-ACC

“The manager rewarded the female staff.”

(b) karram-a al-muwwaDaHa-t-a al-mudiir-u
rewarded-3sgm the-staff-fem-ACC the-manager-NOM

“The manager rewarded the female staff.”

(c) karram-a muwwaDaHa-t-a-n al-mudiir-u
rewarded-3sgm staff-fem-ACC-indef the-manager-NOM

“The manager rewarded the female staff.”

As shown, definite and indefinite object alike can be displaced to precede the subject. The next section raises the question regarding the landing site of object displacement.

5.4. Two specifier of FocP as a target of object displacement

As can be seen in the data above, the object surfaces in a position between the verb in sentence-initial position and the subject which, given the internal subject hypothesis (cf. section 3), is merged in the specifier of vP and stays in situ. Given the data where the object comes to precede the subject, it is reasonable to hypothesize that object displacement targets a focus position directly above vP, viz., Spec1 in the tree structure above. If so, then such a tree structure depicting object displacement and verb-raising would derive the VOS order of the sentences above.

It should be noted that, after being displaced, the object intervenes between the verb and the subject. Embedded in the tree structure (16) is the claim that two [Spec, Foc] positions exists in the language, a claim corroborated by the following case:

(23) (a) limaaðaa qaraʔ-a al-kitab-a zajd-un
why read-3sgm the-book-ACC zajd-NOM

“Why did Zajd read the book?”

(b) li-man ʔactaa al-kitab-a zajd-un
to-whom gave-3sgm the-book-ACC zajd-NOM

“To whom did Zajd give the book?”

Under the present analysis, the boldfaced wh-phrases occupy the clause-initial specifier of Foc while the displaced object (italicized) occupies the clause-internal specifier of Foc. The displacement is motivated by the EF of Foc, analogous with the edge feature on v of Chomsky (2005). While the subject and the verb are presupposed information, the constituent is al-kitab-a being contrasted implicitly with another thing, and it is also marked with a prominent pitch accent. The above clauses display two positions of prominent pitch accent, one is assigned on the question word and the other falls on the displaced object.

The question arises as to the nature of the position into which the DP is moved to the front of the subject whether it is an A- or A’-position. That is, if object displacement proceeds as above, is this displacement an example of A-movement or A’-movement?

5.5. Object displacement: an instance of A’-movement

As noted earlier, object displacement is associated with interpretive factors and is driven by focus considerations which suggest that it is a type of A’-movement. Other processes such as “[p]assivize and raising, for example, do not typically generate semantic effects, while topicalization obviously does” (Soltan, 2007, p.119).

The position can serve as a landing site and can be occupied by adjuncts as well which is a typical characteristic of an A’-position:

(24) (a) saafar-a zajd-un[PP zayd-un] ciinda al-fadgra-i]
travelled-3sgm zajd-NOM at the-dawn-GEN

“Zajd travelled at dawn.”

(b) saafar-a [PP ciinda al-fadgra-i] zajd-un
travelled-3sgm at the-dawn-GEN zajd-NOM

“Zajd travelled at dawn.”

The bracketed PP is moved into the same focus position in front of the subject from its base position at the end of the sentence. Within the framework of Split-CP projections adopted here, the preposed focused PP, in parallel with the object DP, occupies the specifier position within FocP which is headed by the abstract functional Foc head. While A’-movement is considered focus-driven, A-movement, on the other hand, is considered Case-driven and thus typically applies to DPs. Wh-extraction provides further support in favour of treating object displacement as a type of A’-movement, assuming that both operations target the same position (Chomsky, 2005). If so, then in the following
example, the highlighted phrase ʔila ayna “to where” is fronted to the same post-verbal and pre-subject position of focused elements:

(25) saafer-a ʔila ayna zajd-un
    travelled-3sgm to where zajd-NOM
    “To where did Zajd travel.”

The PP maca man “with whom” can also be focus fronted as illustrated

(26) takallam-a maca man zajd-un
    spoke-3sgm with whom zajd-NOM
    “With whom did Zajd speak?”

To conclude, the evidence points to treating object displacement as an instance of A’-movement driven by focusing by which a constituent is placed into an A’-focus position at the outer periphery of vP. The position has been identified to be the specifier of FocP. Being in an A’-position, the focused phrase can be moved further up into another focus position at the beginning of the clause:

(27) (a) ʔila ayna saafer-a zajd-un
    to where travelled-3sgm zajd-NOM
    “To where did Zajd travel.”

(b) al-muwwal-bafa-t-a karram-a al-mudiir-u
    the-staff-fem-ACC appreciated-3sgm the-manager-NOM
    “The manager appreciated the services of the female staff.”

(c) [PP ʔinda al-fadgar-i] saafer-a zajd-un
    at the-dawn-GEN travelled-3sgm zajd-NOM
    “Zajd travelled at dawn.”

Not only adjuncts, but arguments can likewise be extracted (copied) out of the complement position in which they are initially merged and moved to the preverbal position and to the post-verbal position:

(28) (a) karram-a man al-mudiir-u
    rewarded-3sgm who al-mudiir-u
    “who did the manager reward?”

(b) man karram-a al-mudiir-u
    who rewarded-3sgm al-mudiir-u
    “who did the manager reward?”

The DP man “whom” can similarly be fronted from its base position as a complement of the verb qaabla “met”:

(29) qaabal-a man zajd-un
    met-3sgm who zajd-NOM
    “Who did Zajd meet?”

Under the present analysis, these wh-construction and dislocated objects are associated and follow directly from the clausal structure assigned to them within the adopted framework of assumptions, specifically the inclusion of a post-verbal and preverbal FocP’s with a Foc functional head carrying an EF. It is concluded that object displacement is a reflex of the EF or the Foc feature that requires the Foc head to project a specifier.

6. Conclusion

Building on Rizzi’s Split CP analysis and on Chomsky’s (2001, 2005) analysis, the present work investigated OS structures in SA, arguing particularly that object displacement is the machinery yielding the surface order. This machinery is triggered by the EF of Foc marking the displaced constituent of the sentence as focus. The feature attracts the object DP to the specifier of Foc. The analysis of OS surface order in terms of object displacement and in terms of positing two structural specifier positions not only derives the word order facts but also the interpretive focus associated with this syntactic process. The OS word order follows directly from the displacement of the object DP as an instance of A’-movement to the specifier of Foc identified to be an A’-position. The associated semantic effects are the immediate outcome of merging DP’s or PP’s at the periphery of FocP to satisfy the EF on Foc.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

A. Alazzawie: Conceived and designed the analysis; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

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Additional information

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