

SOME ASPECTS OF RELATIVIZATION IN EGYPTIAN COLLOQUIAL ARABIC

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The study surveys main structural properties of the Egyptian Arabic relative clauses and examines some critical border-lines of their grammaticalness.

1. Phenomena associated with the structural and semantic properties of relativization are one of the dominant topics in Arabic syntactic studies. The interest in the structure and functioning of relative clauses (RC's) is evidently due to the prevailing trend on the linguistic scene since about the seventies. Relativization has mostly been conceived as part of a more comprehensive linguistic field of *wh*-constructions, side by side with *wh*-question formation and topicalization. Most immediately, the interest in *wh*-constructions has been triggered by Ross' dissertation (1967) and its traces may be found in a number of methodologically important studies of general linguistic interest, and the Arabic syntactic studies are not quite free of its influence, either.¹

In accordance with the formally and notionally supported preferences, Arabic in all its varieties, may more conveniently and more insightfully be described in sentence-related than in discourse-related terms or, in Keenan's terminology (1972), Arabic is a subject-prominent rather than a topic-prominent language. Of course, this does not imply that Arabic, or any of its varieties, could not be analysed along the topic-comment axis or that every morphological type of the subject has to be explicitly expressed. As for the latter feature, Arabic unlike English, shows subject pronoun deletion in verbal sentences since all subject-related pronominal markers are reflected in the Arabic verb inflections.

1.1. The ambiguity called forth by the semantic property of what Downing terms modification (1978:379) results from the fact that the latter is present in

¹ General: LI, Charles N. and Sandra A. THOMPSON (1976); KUNO, Susumu (1953, 1976); Arabic-related: LEWKOWICZ, N. (1971); KILLEAN, Carolyn (1972); WAHBA, Wafaa A. (1984); EID, Mushira (1977); MOUTAOUAKIL, Ahmed (1985); etc.

only some RC's, namely those usually classified as adjectival or restrictive, as opposed to appositive or nonrestrictive RC's (for the terminology adopted, see *ibid.*). In order to distinguish between the two, it seems here to be quite sufficient to state that restrictive RC's (RRC's) narrow down the scope of reference of the head nominal, defined as antecedent in what follows, while their nonrestrictive counterparts (NRC's) merely convey additional information. Let us consider the following sentence:

(*sukkān il'utr ilmaṣri*) *biyirkabu sayyarāt* [*bitista'mil maddit iddizil*]²

“(the inhabitants of Egypt) ride in vehicles using diesel oil” (Mitchell, 178-9).

The RC, enclosed in square brackets, in its RRC-interpretation reduces the set of what is conveyed by the head noun to only such vehicles that are propelled by diesel engines, as against its NRC-reading that leaves the scope of reference open to all other kinds of vehicles including those using diesel oil.

Of course, the same type of ambiguity occurs also with nominalized RC's (reduced relative clauses: Wise 1975:90), as in:

biyimšu 'ala sikak [*marṣūfa bil'asfalt*] “they walk on roads made with asphalt” (Mitchell, 178-9), where *marṣūfa bi-* “made, paved with” corresponds, at the verbal level, to *'itraṣafit* (past) or *bititriṣif* (present).

RRC: only on roads made with asphalt, in contrast to:

NRC: inclusively of roads of the above type.

Apart from a basic assumption, there is no convincing evidence of the functioning and formal marking of the RRC/NRC distinction in Arabic. There are hardly any contrastive examples available in the literature, like those quoted by Downing (1978:379) for English, where the distinction between both types is formally supported by a number of specific suprasegmental features which are further marked by a distinctive comma-orthography:

RRC: *The children who have green tickets will be admitted free;*

NRC: *The children, who have green tickets, will be admitted free.*

The semantic contrast between both types of RC's will be perceived even more clearly in the following pair of sentences quoted by Keenan (1985:168-9):

RRC: *The Japanese who are industrious now outcompete W. Europe;*

NRC: *The Japanese, who are industrious, now outcompete W. Europe.*

It is clear that only NRC implies that the Japanese now outcompete Western Europe whereas RRC does not.

For ECA, the distinction between both types is described by Wise (1975:87) as being marked, with NRC, by pauses that delimit the embedded clause, and by a specific intonation pattern.

² In Romanizing the ECA data, drawn from various sources with widely differing writing techniques, an attempt has been made at unifying the formal presentation. Mitchell's (1960) way of writing has been taken as a guiding model (consistent notation of the word-initial glottal stop except when in close transition in a number of morphonological environments; marking epenthesis and vowel elision; etc.). For technical reasons, epenthetic vowels have been marked, somewhat misleadingly, by circumflexes.

In general, the RRC/NRC distinction need not necessarily have a consistent formal rendering and in a number of languages both types may be formally undistinguishable from each other (for Japanese, see S. Kuno 1973:235). To avoid undue complications, as the matter is of no immediate relevance to the present inquiry, all RC's examined in what follows, will be regarded as members of the RRC-subclass.

1.2. The RRC/NRC ambiguity is not the only one in this structural domain. The last quoted sentence, apart from its RC-classification that may be confirmed by its verbal paraphrase: *biyimšu ʿala sikak [itraṣāfit / bitiriṣif bil'asfalt]*, may evidently be related to a coordinated attributive clause deep-structure pattern: *biyimšu ʿala sikak wi hiyya (kānit) marṣūfa bil'asfalt*. Nevertheless, the latter ambiguity cannot occur in sentences with a definite head noun: *biyimšu ʿala-ssikak ilmarṣūfa bil'asfalt*, since here the verbal RC would obligatorily be introduced by *'illi*.

2. In contrast to verb-final languages like Japanese, Korean or Turkish, where RC's as well as all types of modifiers typically precedes the head nominal, in ECA, as a SVO language, RC's follow the head noun. The terminology used to describe this distinction differs between authors: Schwartz (1971:139-171) speaks about prospective and retrospective, while Downing (1978:375-418) talks about prenominal and postnominal RC's.

In spite of a number of distributional alternatives, a RC is always related to another clause through one of its terms which is coreferential with a term of the clause the RC is related to. At least one of these terms should always be overtly expressed.

Basic concepts:

*šuft irrāgil [illi-štara-lʿarabiyya]*³ “I saw the man who bought the car”:

'irrāgil: in relation to RC, head noun or antecedent (A);

'illi: relative word (R);

A-R: coreferential terms;

RC: attributive (adjectival) clause providing a statement about the head noun (A) of the clause it is related to.

Or, preliminarily, for a case of definiteness-sensitive (indefiniteness-motivated) deletion of R:

šufti rāgil [∅ ištara-lʿarabiyya] “I saw a man who bought the car”:

A: *rāgil*;

R: ∅;

or, the deletion of A:

∅ [illi-ybuṣṣīli-bʿēn] *'abuṣṣīlu bil-itnēn* “if someone treats me well, I'll treat him even better” (Badawi 1986:614), or:

hud ∅ [ill-inta ʿawzu] “take what you want” (Mitchell 150-1).

³ Coreferential terms in § 2 (Basic Concepts) are printed in bold characters.

3. Main types of the ECA RC's.

Symbols used:

A (+) : presence of A (head noun);

R (+) : presence of R ('illi);

A (∅) : deletion of A;

R (∅) : deletion of R;

R (+) . . . Pro : pronominal component of R;

R (∅) . . . Pro : pronominal substitute of R.

(1) A (+) ~ R (+):

(11) *huwwa-rrāgil illi-byiz^cal bisur^ca* “he’s the man who loses his temper quickly” (Mitchell 57); or: (*'idduktūr šaddī sinnu bilkammāša-lli-btilma^c* (the doctor) pulled his tooth with that shining pair of pliers” (Harrell 27.1); or: *da-ssu'āl illi mafrūd yitsi'il* “that is the question that should be asked” (Badawi 392); or: *‘ašān rummāna ḥatiggawwiz iggada^c ikkayhān iṣṣadnān illi kānit biḥibbu zamān wi liṣṣa biḥibbu lil'ān* “for Rummāna will marry that incompetent and worthless fellow who she has been since long in love with and who she loves up to now”

(12) *wi mīn da-lli ḥayidfa^chumlu?* “and who will pay him (these pounds)?” (Malina 165; Wahba 97-101); for a deleted A, here represented by a demonstrative, see § 3.(5) in what follows;

(13) *kull innās illi fiddunya 'arāyib* “all people in the world are relatives” (Malina 88; Wahba 337); or: *kabbari-kkubayāt illi 'aṭṭarabēza* “put bigger glasses out on the table” (Badawi 731);

(131) *'ana 'ārif ilmudarrisa-lli labsa 'iswid fiswid* “I know the teacher dressed all in black” (Wise 92); etc.

In Arabic, including ECA, a definiteness-controlled RC-pattern: A (definite) - 'illi, as against A (indefinite) : ∅; for the latter case see § 3.(3) below. The verb in the RC clause need not immediately follow R (12) and, of course, the verb, in RC, may be represented by a nominal predicate (13), (131).

The definiteness-controlled restructuring of (131) in indefinite terms, i.e. *'ana 'ārif mudarrisa labsa 'iswid fiswid* seems to allow an appositive reading, as that shown in 1.2 above.

(14) *bass ilḥagāt illi 'andak 'aḡla min ilḥagāt illi fi-lmaḥallāt ittanya* “but the goods in your shop are more expensive than those in other shops” (Mokhtar 206); or: *'ana ḥallaṣū kull ilḥagāt illi filmaṭbah* “I’ve finished everything in the kitchen (Mitchell 146-7).

The deletion of 'illi that introduces unrepresented copulative verbs and verbs of occurrence (Verben der Befindlichkeit) may lead to grammatically acceptable paraphrases outside the structural domain of RC's:

(141) *'ana ḥallaṣti kull ilḥagāt filmaṭbah* (the English translation, as given above, seems to hold, substantially, for the present paraphrase as well). Nevertheless, the (14) RC 'illi *filmaṭbah* might be perhaps more insightfully rendered in English by “(everything) that was (to do) in the kitchen”, as against the (141) paraphrase where the prepositional complex *filmaṭbah* operates as a verb-related circumstantial place-marker.

(2) A (+) ~ R (+) . . . Pro:

(21) *tīʿmil ḥisāb ilmaṣarīf illi ʃaraftāha* “reckon up (lit. make the account of) what you spent” (Mitchell 146-7); or: *ʃuffī ya sīdī-lkalām illi biyʿulūh filgarāyid?* (ibid. 58) “have you seen what they’re saying in the papers (my friend)?” (ibid. 278);

(22) *ʿilḥikāya-lli-smiʿtāha-dī / ʿilḥikāya-dī ʿilli-smiʿtāha* “the story that I heard” (Wise 96); or: *tīʃhad yaʿni ʿala ḥawādis itturmāy zayy ilḥadsa-lli ʃuftāha-dī* “that is, you will testify to the streetcar accidents as to an accident you have (really) seen” (Malina 165: Wahba 97-101); or: *ʿana ʿawiz iʃṣiniyya . . . wi-lḡiwēša-lli-hnāk-dī* “I want the tray . . . and the bracelet that is over there” (Mokhtar 207);

(23) *ʿilyomēn illi bitʿul ʿalēhum, dōl ʿagāza maraḍiyya* “the two days you’re talking of were sickleave” (Mitchell 126-7);

(24) *ʿādi-lqaryā-lli māṭ fiha ṣahbi* “here is the village in which my friend died”;

(25) *ʿādi-rragil ill-inta ʿawzu* (ibid. 278) “that’s the man you want” (ibid. 59); etc.

From the set of functions, signalled by the pronominal suffix, the subject-reference is missing while the object- (21-23; 25) and adverb-related (24) links are represented. The structural compactness of RC’s is illustrated on the alternating phrasal structures in (22).

(3) A (+) ~ R (∅): subject-related:

(31) *huwwa rāgil biyizʿal bisurʿa* “he is a man who loses his temper quickly” (Mitchell 57); or: *ʿawzīn ʃāla-tʃīl tultumīt nafar* “they want a hall which can accommodate three hundred people” (Badawi 496); or: *ʿana baʿraf rāgil biyiʿmil mīt ginēh filyōm* “I know a man that makes a hundred pounds a day” (Harrell 17.4);

(32) *ʿandāha qurḥa ʿayza ʿamaliyya* “she has an ulcer that needs operation” (Badawi 601-2); or: *ʿana ʿandi muškila filbēt ʃāḡlāni gidḍan* “I’ve a problem at home which is worrying me a lot” (Mitchell 126-7); etc.

As already hinted at (cf. §§ 3.(1.2) and 3.(131)), RC’s related to an indefinite head noun allow unwanted paraphrases (relativeness/appositiveness).

(4) A (+) ~ R (∅) . . . Pro:

Pro: object-related:

(41) *huwwa ʿarīf ḥāga ma yiʿdaršī-yʿulha* “he knows something (that) he can’t tell” (Harrell 17.4); etc.

(42) *fīh ḥagāt ḥaḍritak miḥabbīha ʿalayya?* “is there anything (lit.: any things) you conceal from me?” (Malina 180: Wahba 372-8); etc.

Pro: adverb-related:

(43) *kān ʿāyiz ʃaṇṭa-yḥuṭṭī fiha-hdūmu* “he wanted a suitcase (that) he could put his clothes in” (Harrell 17.4); etc.

Pro, in the predicate slot of a nominal RC, may also operate as a formal A-related identity-marker that makes up for the missing R and other A-related identity markers (e.g., inflectional elements in verbal RC’s).

(44) *kan marra rāgil ʿandu walad ʃuḡayyar* “there was once a man who had a small boy” (Mitchell 122-3); or: *biyaklu ʿakfī malūš ṭaʿmī ḥālīš* “they eat food which has no taste at all” (Wise 87); etc.

The interpretational ambiguity, typical of RC's related to an indefinite A, formally signalled by R(∅) in the RC structural pattern, is present in this subclass, as well (see (32) above).

(5) A(∅) ~ R(+): subject-related:

(51) *'istanna-šwayya lamm-amašši-lli 'uddāmak* “wait a minute while I deal with those in front of you” (Mitchell 132-3); or: *tirkabi-lli yi'gibik minhum (ḥumār)* “ride whichever you (fem.) please” (ibid. 152-3); or: *'illi 'awzīn yisafu lāzim yidfa'ū dilwa'ti* “those who want to leave, have to pay now” (Mokhtar 115); etc.

(52) *'ulli-lli ḥaṣal* “tell me what happened” (Badawi 722); or: *'āl li-mrātu 'allī ḥaṣal* “(he) told his wife (about) what happened” (Mitchell 150-1);

(53) *'iddīni waḥid milli 'andak* (ibid. 58) “give me one of yours” (ibid. 278); etc.

A(∅), in the examples quoted, may best be identified in the deep-structure matrices, like *humma-lli* (51), (*ēh*) *huwwa-lli* (52), and *min humma-lli; min dōl illi* (54); etc.

Relativization, especially in the present A(∅)~R(+) structural pattern, is frequently used to create a topic to be emphasized. The latter is mostly subject-oriented, as in:

(54) *hiyya-lli ḥatitgawwiz miš ḥaḍritak* “it's her who will marry, not you” (Malina 26: Wahba 356); or: *'ana-lli dāfi' filūs ilma'zūn* “I'll pay money to the official” (Malina 89: Wahba 331).

The same holds for interrogative sentences:

(55) *'ēh illi ḥaṣal?* “what happened? (lit. what is it that happened)” (Malina 89: Wahba 347); or: *wi mīn illi gayy* “who is coming?” (ibid. 89: 380); etc.

RC's of this structural pattern frequently appear in an anaphoric shape:

(56) *w-illi yiḥṣal yiḥṣal* “what is happening, is happening” (Malina 89: Wahba 335); or: *'illi yimši yimši* “who wants to go, let him go” (ibid. 89: 379); etc.

(6) A(∅) ~ R(+) . . . Pro: object-related:

(61) *'aftikir innak 'ārif ill-ana ḥa'ulūlak* (Mitchell 278) “I think you know what I'm going to say to you” (ibid. 59);

(63) *ḥud-ill-inta 'awzu* “take what you want” (Mitchell 150-1); or: *'illi 'ana 'awzu 'arūḥ ṣaylu* “whatever I want, I take” (Badawi 33); etc.

4. In right-branching languages (cf. §2), like Arabic, English or Slovak, there is no problem in serializing RC's. Long subordinate-clause sequences, like those created by Yngve (1960): *he cried because she hit him because he called her names because she wouldn't give him any candy*, could easily be represented in the structural domain of the RC's, as well. In ECA, however, in view of the fact that the R (*'illi*), as an inflectionless unit, cannot operate as an unambiguous A-related identity-marker, a number of interpretational problems cannot safely be avoided without resorting to additional means. Some of them, relying on pronominal markers, will be illustrated on the following pair of examples:

(41) *'irrāgil illi 'ābil ṣaḥbu-lli ṣatamu* “the man who met his friend that he insulted / who insulted him” obviously allows two interpretations:

(42) *'irrāgil_a illi 'ābil ṣaḥbu_b-lli ṣatamu_a*, as well as:

(43) *'irrāgil_a illi 'ābil ṣaḥbu_b-lli ṣatamu_b*,

In order to paraphrase away the latter type of ambiguity, the pronominal subject-related identity-marker is used:

(44) *'irragil illi 'abil ṣaḥbu-lli huwwa šatamu*, to obtain an unambiguous interpretation equaling that of (42).

4.1. In ECA, there is some evidence, not yet adequately attested, showing that even RC's which do not provide immediate statements about the head nominal might be recognized, by some authors at least, as grammatical. Let us consider the following clause:

(1) *'ilwalad illi kallimt ilmudarris illi šatamu* * "the boy who I talked to the teacher that he insulted" (Mushira Eid 1987: 172).

The RC quoted violates one of the very fundamental constraints imposed on relativization, notably what Kuno (1976: 420) calls thematic constraint on RC's, according to which a RC must be a statement about its head noun (A). As evident, neither of the two RC's, when taken separately, provides any meaningful statement about the head noun. To do it, the whole RC₁-RC₂ complex is necessary and this is apparently why this RC cannot be classed as grammatical, in English at the very least.

When accepting, for all that, the grammaticalness of the last sentence quoted, the problem of the A-related identity has to be solved in similar terms as those applied to RC's in 4. (42) – (43) above.⁴

4.2. When giving credit to Keenan (1985: 156), Egyptian Arabic admits relativization into a coordinated structure. The example quoted, however, is a faultily presented Standard Arabic RC-clause,⁵ here corrected and rewritten in the transcription code adopted for the present paper: *ar-raḡulu-llaḡī huwa wa-bnuhu ḡahabū 'ilā N. Y.* "the man that he and his son went to New York". With the risk of being misguided without a native speaker's control, we propose the following ECA reading: *'irragil illi huwwa wi-bnu rāḡu N. Y.* The structure can be accepted as grammatical with a high degree of probability since coordinate structures with a plural agreement, such as *'issawwā' wi-lkumsāri-btū' ilḡadsa* "the driver and the conductor (involved) in the accident" (Malina 44: Wahba 117), are of quite common occurrence.

4.3. The coordinate structure constraint, formulated by Ross (1967; quoted after Wise 1975: 98), which states that no element in conjunct in a coordinate structure may be questioned or relativized, does not seem to be operative in ECA, either. According to Wise (ibid.: 99), this is so because ECA, unlike English, uses place-marking pronouns instead of moving the pronoun to the beginning of the clause, as in: *šuft il'arabiyya-lli 'aḡūya bā'c ilḡuṣān wi-štarāha* * "I saw the car that my brother sold the horse and bought".⁶

⁴ The procedure is described by Mushira Eid (1987: 172). In RC's with inflectionally differentiated constituents a similar ambiguity cannot take place; cf.: *'ilwalad illi nadya 'agabitha-l'arabiyya-lli-štarāha* * "the boy that Nadia liked the car that (he) bought."

⁵ cf.: *al-rajul allathi hua wa ibna-hu thahabu ille New York.*

⁶ The English sentence is marked with an asterisk by the author of the present study.

5. Summary

5.1. A typical ECA RC is a statement about the head noun (A) outside the structural domain of the RC. Nevertheless, in some types of ECA sentences with serialized RC's, the latter constraint is only met by the whole RC complex collectively, and not individually, by any single RC within this complex. The grammaticality of such RC sequences is, all the same, recognized by some authors (cf. 4.1 above).

5.2. The head noun of an ECA RC can be either overt or covert. The RC may be introduced by a relative word (R) or may not. The R cannot be deleted in RC's related to a covert A. The relationship between both these coreferential terms, A and R, underlies the typology of RC's, proposed in this study.

5.3. The explicit expression of R depends on the definiteness state of A the RC is related to: the R is explicitly expressed only when related to a definite A while, in the opposite case, it is deleted.

5.4. In ECA RC's with an indefinite A, relative and appositive constructions cannot be formally distinguished from each other at the surface structure level (cf. § 1.2, as well as all other paragraphs dealing with structural patterns that contain A(∅) as one of their constituents).

5.5. Another type of ambiguity may affect the identity of A-constituents in serialized RC's. The ambiguity may be avoided by resorting to the subject-marking pronominal suffixes (§ 4.1).

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