

A Criterial Freezing approach to subject extraction in Some Arabic varieties

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Motivated by the cross-linguistical investigation of subject extraction, the current research explores the strategies some Arabic varieties, namely Jordanian Arabic, Iraqi Arabic, Kiweiti Arabic, and Najdi Arabic, make available for subject extraction and how they fit into the general approach of current syntactic theory. To this end, the study makes use of the so-called ‘Criterial Freezing’ approach (Rizzi 2005, 2006, 2014; Rizzi and Shlonsky 2006, 2007). The main argument advocated in this research is that SpecTP (or Spec of SubjP) is a criterial position in Arabic varieties. Hence, there is a need to fill it (by the subject) in overt syntax, forced by the subject criterion. In cases with subject extraction, D-linking of the wh-word (the notion whether the wh-word implies the existence of a set of contextually determined entities from which the speaker is asking for a choice) becomes relevant. If the wh-word is D-linked, the word *illi* is used as an expletive element to satisfy the strong EPP feature on T°. Consider the following example from Jordanian Arabic.

- i. miin z-zalameh *(illi) axaḏ l-mafatiih imbaarih?
who DEF-man EXP took.3SM DEF-keys yesterday
‘Which man took the keys yesterday?’

illi is base-generated in SpecTP, ensuring question convergence when the subject is extracted out of its thematic position. C-related particles (such as *akil*), topicalized direct object, and the expletive *fiih* are all taken as diagnostics for *illi* being in SpecTP. For instance, the necessity for *illi* no longer holds with the presence of the expletive *fiih* used in existential sentences. In such sentences, when the subject is extracted, *illi* is not used. However, one way to use *illi* in existential questions is to replace *fiih*, a reliable sign reinforcing the expletive status of *illi*, contra what has been widely suggested for this particle. Accordingly, Gad’s (2011) assumption that *illi* is a focus particle is not borne out as far as the Arabic varieties under discussion are concerned. In addition, the findings contradict the long-standing view that *illi* is an overt complementizer in questions (cf. Shlonsky 2002). Additionally, the study argues that SpecTP in Arabic varieties can be filled by the locative and temporal adjuncts instead of *illi*. Following Holmberg (2000) and Rizzi and Shlonsky (2006), I assume that such adjuncts in Arabic varieties might play a subject-like role. When there is a subject gap, adjuncts can move out of their base position, filling SpecTP. Furthermore, the study proposes that in questions where the subject wh-word is not D-linked (with verbs displaying the default form), SpecTP is filled by the non-referential expletive pro, hence there is no need for *illi* or a locative and temporal adjunct.

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