A SYNTACTIC CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIVE CLAUSES IN ARABIC AND ENGLISH IN THE GB WITH REFERENCE TO TRANSLATION

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1. Theoretical Framework


Some vital concepts to our argument are the following:

(i) Case assignment takes place at S-structure only:

"We assume that case assignment takes place at S-structure"
(Chomsky 1981: 94)

(ii) Adjacency is a condition for case assignment at the syntactic level only:

"We assume that case-marking takes place at the syntactic level only... Therefore, the notion of adjacency is that of S-structure". (Chomsky 1981: 94)

(iii) The basic word-order in Arabic is VOS. "In conclusion, the basic word-order in Modern Standard Arabic is VOS where the verb inflects for gender only as a language specific property, while it inflects for person, number and gender if the sentence starts with an NP in the nominative, in which case we have a movement into COMP". (Homeidi 1991: 26)

For a comprehensive analysis of this issue, see Homeidi (1991, 1994).

2. Arabic Clause Structure

We are not seeking a lengthy or comprehensive analysis of Arabic clause structure in this brief section. Our main objective is just to outline the basic structure of Arabic

Homeidi (1991: 23) concludes his analysis of word order in Modern Standard Arabic in the Government and Binding framework as follows:

The above argument proves quite clearly that we can take VOS to represent the basic word-order in modern Standard Arabic, and then by reversing the object and subject in postverbal position, we can derive the VSO order, while the opposite is not possible.

While in Homeidi (1991: 138), we find the following:

One major result of this paper is that the classic classification of Arabic sentences into Nominal and Verbal is not standing any more. Instead we have just one type of sentence with a base rule of the form:

(46) \( S \rightarrow VP \ NP \)

and all the other types of sentences are derived through movements within the government and binding theory.

Accordingly, a simple sentence as the following:

(2) katab-a \ al-risaalat-a \ al-?awlaad-u
wrote the letter-acc the boy-nom
the boys wrote the letter

should have the following DS and LF structure:

(3)

However, Arabic has many different word orders on the surface level which can all be derived from the basic structure in (3) through different types of movements either at the syntactic level or the phonetic level. For lack of space we are not going to deal with them here, but there are detailed in Homeidi (1991, 1994), and other relevant literature.

3. Relative Clauses in English

The structure of relative clauses in English has been the subject of much debate (see, amongst others, Keyser (1975), Truckenbrodt (1993), Jackendoff (1977), Hendrick (1982), and Cinque (1982), and Safir (1986)).

However, a typical example would be the following:

(4) A book which John read.

From a syntactic point of view (4) would have the following S-structure according to Haegeman’s (1993) framework.

(5)

Case assignment and \( \theta \)-roles marking are done within the GB framework quite properly. We notice that the trace of the relative pronoun in the embedded clause is co-indexed with which and the two form one chain with one \( \theta \)-role. (And probably through predication with the head NP a book.)
In fact, the equivalent of (4) in Arabic will give the following (putting word order differences aside):

(6) kitaab-un qara? hu Aḥmadu  
A book-nom read-past it-acc Ahmad-nom

What is striking is the absence of the relative pronoun which from the Arabic equivalent though we have a resumptive pronoun co-indexed with the preceding NP for reference. The S-structure of (6) might be the following:

(7)  

\[
\text{CP} \\
\text{spec} \\
\text{kitaabun,} \\
\text{C} \\
\text{I'} \\
\text{tense} \\
\text{past} \\
\text{a} \\
\text{qara?} \\
\text{hu}, \\
\text{Aḥmadu}
\]

So we notice that although the NP kitaabun is co-indexed with the resumptive pronoun hu, we do not have a relative clause structure. More than that (7) does not allow the insertion of a relative pronoun:

(8) *kitaabun ?al-lađii qara?-a-hu Aḥmadu.

In fact (8) is not allowed in Modern Standard Arabic. (8) can be grammaticalized if the head NP kitaabun is made definite by adding the definite article ?al ‘the’, then we get:

(9) ?al-kitaab-un ?al lađii qara?-a hu Aḥmadu  
The book-nom which/that read-past it-acc Ahmad

(9) would have the following S-structure:

What is noticeable is that Arabic does not allow the deletion of the relative pronoun in (10) i.e. (11) does not have a relative clause meaning although it is quite grammatical in Arabic:


However, (11) is a relative clause in English with the option of Zero relative pronoun:

(12) The book (zero relative pronoun) Ahmad read.

We have a crucial difference between Arabic and English in this respect. This difference can be formulated as follows:

(13) (i) Whereas the relative clause in English can start with an indefinite NP, in Arabic it can start with a definite NP only.

(ii) The chain of indices in Arabic is marked for θ-role only. i.e. the relative pronoun ?al-lađii, and the resumptive pronoun hu form a chain that is marked for θ-role only i.e. they all have one θ-role as patient of the verb qara?-a; whereas their cases are different:

*hu* : accusative.

*?al-lađii* : nominative.
Let us discuss the syntactic properties of each type briefly and see what the Arabic equivalents could be.

3.1. Restrictive Relative Clauses

This type of clauses can best be clarified by the following examples:

(17a) I met the man [who lives next door] in town.
(17b) The book [that you lent me] was interesting.
(17c) I enjoyed the meal [you made us]. (Radford 1988: 480)

All the bracketed clauses are called Restrictive because they restrict the class of men in (17a) to the one [who lives next door] and the books in (17b) to [the one you lent me] and the meals in (17c) to [the one you made].

The main properties of this type are characterized in (Radford 1988: 480) as follows:

(18) (i) Can be introduced by a wh-pronoun like who in (17a)
      (ii) Can be introduced by a complementizer like that in (17b)
      (iii) Contain no overt wh-pronoun or complementizer in (17c)
      (iv) Can sometimes be extraposed and separated from their antecedent (the expression they modify) like:

(19) Someone came to see me [who said he was from the bank].

Let us see whether the examples in (17) and the properties in (18) can be found in the Arabic equivalents of (17) (word-order differences aside):

(20) I met the man
     tu-nom qaabala-past ?al-radjula-acc
     [who lives next door] in town.

The S-structure of (20) is (21) which is identical to the one underlying (17a) represented in (22) if we drop word order differences between the two languages from our discussion.

However, the linguistic tradition in English distinguishes between three types of relative clauses:

(16) (i) Restrictive Relative Clauses
     (ii) Appositive Relative Clauses
     (iii) Free Relative Clauses
In fact Arabic and English are identical syntactically and semantically as far as (17a) is concerned. Can the same conclusion be drawn in (17b) and (17c)?

(23) the book [that you lent me]
was interesting.
kaana muntiiyan-acc

The only difference is that Arabic does not have a complementizer form different from the relative pronoun form. In both cases Arabic uses the same relative pronoun ?alla?ii meaning 'who/which'.

Now what about (17c), modified slightly for easier transliteration forms:
(24) I liked the book
   * tu-nom ʔa ʔḥḥab-past ʔal-kitaab-acc
   [(zero relative) you lent me].
   [(zero relative) ta-nom ʔaʕr-past nii-acc].

The Arabic equivalent of (24) is obviously ungrammatical. In fact Arabic Restrictive Relative Clauses do not drop their relative pronouns.

Let us move to the last property in (18), namely that restrictive relative clauses in English can be extraposed. We repeat (19) as (25) for convenience:

(25) some one came to see me
   *shaxsun maa-nom ʔataa li mushahada tii-oblqi
   [who said he was from the bank]
   [ʔallābī qaala inna-hu-acc min ʔa-la-masrafi-oblqi]

In fact the Arabic equivalent of (25) is highly ungrammatical. The reason is the presence of the relative pronoun ʔallābī. The sentence could be grammatical if the relative pronoun is dropped:


We have here a very interesting difference which deserves precise formulation:

(27) Arabic extraposed Restrictive Relative Clauses do not allow the presence of the relative pronoun.

In conclusion to this section, we can characterize the similarities and the differences between English Restrictive Relative Clauses and the Arabic ones as follows:

(28) (i) Syntactically, the structure of this type of relative clauses is identical in both languages, (regardless of word order differences).
(ii) Whereas English enjoys the merit of using a relative pronoun, a complementizer, or a zero relative pronoun, Arabic conforms to the relative pronoun form only.
(iii) Whereas both languages allow the extraposition of restrictive relative clauses, Arabic does not permit the insertion of the relative pronoun if the restrictive clause is extraposed.

The tutor of translation should take (28) into account.

3.2. Appositive Relative clauses

Appositive Relative Clauses in English are exemplified by the following:

(29a) John [who was at Cambridge with me] is a good friend of mine.
(29b) Yesterday I met your bank manager, who was in a filthy mood.

(29c) Mary has left home – which must be very upsetting for her parents. (Radford 1988: 481)

The semantic properties of Appositive Relative Clauses are briefly characterized in Radford (1988: 481) as follows:

They generally serve as 'parenthetical comments' or 'afterthoughts' set off in a separate intonation group from the rest of the sentence (this being marked by a comma, or hyphen, or brackets in writing); unlike Restrictives, they can be used to qualify unmodified proper nouns i.e. proper nouns not introduced by a determiner like the). They are always introduced by an overt wh-phrase (i.e. neither that-relatives, nor 'zero relatives' can be used appositively).

The above properties are crucial to the appositives; this is seen from the ungrammaticality of the following:

(30a) John – whom you saw in town – is a good friend of mine.
(30b) *John – that you saw in town – is a good friend of mine. (that complementizer).
(30c) *John – you saw in town – is a good friend of mine. (zero relative).

Appositives can not be extraposed; i.e. they can not be separated from their antecedent:

(31a) *John came to see me – who you met last week.
(31b) *Mary is living at home – who is very nice.

Syntactically, the structure of Appositives does not differ from that of Restrictives; i.e. the base rule is the same as in:

(32) CP -> spec C'
    C' -> C IP
    spec -> relative pronoun
    IP -> clause

Let us see whether Arabic has the same type of appositives with the same properties. For convenience, we repeat the sentences in (29):

(33) John (who was at Cambridge with me)
     joum-nom (?allābī kaana fii kaambridj-oblqi maʃfi-oblqi)
     is a good friend of mine.
     ʃadiqun-nom jayyidun-nom min ʔaʃdiqaʔi-oblqi.

The Arabic version of (33) does not have any unpredictable properties, syntactic or semantic with the exception of the deletion of the main verb in the main clause.
i.e. is. This is a language specific property; for more about this point see Homeidi (1991).

(34) Yesterday I met your bank manager, ?al-barrihata-acc tu-nom qabal-past ika-oblq maṣrif-oblq mudira-acc who was in a filthy mood ?allaḏii kaana fii sayyiʔ-n-oblq mizaajin-oblq

(35) Mary has left home- which must mary qad ẏaḍarat ?al- bayta-acc ?al-ʔamru-nom ?allaḏii yaṣibu be very upsetting for her parents. ?an yakauna qad ?aqlaqa ha waadiday

The Arabic equivalent of (35) shows a slight difference; whereas the relative pronoun does not modify any single word in the English clause, Arabic does not use a relative pronoun only but an NP in apposition of the whole sentence Mary has left home, followed by the proper relative pronoun ?allaḏii and then the appositive relative clause.

Semantically, English and Arabic are identical. Syntactically, they are different in the sense that Arabic needs an NP in apposition of the antecedent (the whole sentence) followed by the proper relative pronoun.

In fact Arabic appositive relative clauses can not be extraposed:


This brings us to the last type of English relative clauses.

3.3 Free Relative Clauses
Free Relative Clauses are those such as the italicised in the following:

(37a) What(ever) he says is generally true.

(37b) You can have whichever one you want.

(37c) I will go where(ever) you go.

(37d) Whatever happens, I’ll stand with you. (Radford 1988: 481)

Semantically, Free Relative clauses are characterized as follows:

...they are apparently antecedentless – i.e. the Wh-expression they contain does not appear to refer back to any other constituent in the sentence containing them. As in the case of Appositive relatives, they are always introduced by an overt-wh phrase (i.e. neither that relatives nor ‘zero relatives’ can function as free relative clauses). (Radford 1988: 481)

Syntactically, Free relatives do not differ from the other two types. They include a movement from the embedded IP into spec as can be seen from the S-structure of (37b), presented as (38).

(38)

What is interesting, however, is their semantic behaviour and the fact that they do not allow that complementizer or zero relative.

These two points should be kept in mind especially when translating. Let us see whether Arabic has the same characteristics. I will repeat (37) for convenience (word-order differences aside):

(39) What(ever) he says is generally true.

Maa-nom (pro-subj) hu-ace yaqullu ʕaadatan-ace ʕahiḥun-nom
In fact *maa* in the Arabic equivalent could be an antecedent to the whole sentence and does not refer to any single word in itself or the object of the verb as might be thought. Moreover, it can not be deleted, i.e. (40) is ungrammatical:

(40) *yaqul-hu* ḥadātina ḥabhängun
    says-he-it generally true

It seems to me that Arabic and English are identical in this respect.

(41) I will go wherever you go
    ʕaa sa ḥabhäng, hayīthumaa ta ḥabhäng

Arabic and English are identical in this respect also. Deletion of *hayīthumaa* will render the sentence ungrammatical:

(42) *sa-ʕaḥḥaabu* taḥḥaabu
    go you will I go
    *I'll go you go

The structure of (41) is the following, the tree should be read from right to left:

(43)

The last sentence I would like to discuss is the relative clause that expresses possession, i.e. as in (word-order differences aside):

(44a) I saw the girl whose father is dead.
    tu-nom shahad-past ?al-fataata-acc ?allati ha-oblq ?abuu mayyitun-nom

(44b) I saw the girl whose
    tu-nom shahad-past ?al-fataata-acc ?allatii ha-oblq
    house is on sale
    manzilu-nom li-lbwyīli-oblq

We notice that the equivalent of *whose* in Arabic takes the form of the proper relative pronoun at the start of the relative clause and a resumptive possessive pronoun that appears on the inflectional ending of the NP that immediately precedes the relative pronoun.

4. Conclusions

It seems that Arabic and English relative clauses share many identical semantic and syntactic properties. In both languages, we have a movement of a constituent from the embedded clause into spec of the higher clause; the use of a relative pronoun, a zero relative or that complementizer in English and only a relative pronoun in Arabic. These similar properties should be known to the translator who translates between the two languages.

This paper has clarified some points of difference between the two languages which should be known to the translator trainee as well as to the syntactician who is interested in a contrastive analysis. These points can be summarized as follows:

(45) (i) Whereas English has three distinct relative forms (i.e. relative pronoun, that complementizer or zero relative), Arabic has only one, in the sense it uses the proper form of the relative pronoun (i.e. Arabic does not have a form equivalent to that complementizer or zero relative).

(ii) Whereas English drops the relative pronoun or that complementizer optionally, Arabic does not allow that.

(iii) Whereas both languages allow the extraposition of restrictive relative clauses, Arabic drops the relative pronoun obligatorily in these structures.

(iv) Arabic adds, in its equivalents of some kinds of appositive relative clauses, an NP that functions as an antecedent of the whole clause followed by the proper relative pronoun (example (36)).

(v) The translation of *Whose* takes the form of a relative pronoun + a possessive pronoun that appears on the inflectional ending of the NP that immediately precedes the relative pronoun.
We believe that these points should be taken into account in any syntactic contrastive analysis between the two languages as well as when translating between the two languages.

REFERENCES

Keyser, S. J. 1975. “A partial history of the relative clause in English”. In Grimshaw, J. (ed.).