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CONSTITUENT QUESTIONS IN PALESTINIAN ARABIC*

1. TWO STRATEGIES FOR WH-QUESTION FORMATION

Like several other dialects of Arabic, Palestinian employs two strategies for the formation of wh-interrogatives. I argue that the first is familiar from well-studied languages such as English and involves cyclic movement of a wh-operator to Comp. As such, it presents no novel features and I put it aside after a brief discussion.

The bulk of the paper is devoted to a study of the second strategy. This strategy is more intriguing in that it appears to lack some of the hallmarks of syntactic wh-movement. I argue, however, that it is not an LF-movement strategy and indeed does involve movement of a wh-element in overt syntax, albeit not from the D-structure position of its corresponding variable.

In essence, I argue that this strategy of constituent interrogation should be analyzed at D-structure as a copular construction of which the subject is the wh-phrase and the predicate, a free relative clause. I attempt to substantiate the claim that the free relative is a nominal predicate, a definite description and hence the clause in which it appears as a predicate is a statement of identity. Between D-structure and S-structure, the wh-operator - the subject of predication - is moved to Comp, as diagrammed in (1).
2. CLASS I INTERROGATIVES

In the first strategy of constituent question formation, illustrated in (2a-d), the wh-word appears in clause-initial position and a gap marks the position of the variable bound by the wh-expression.

(2) a. miin, l-ʔasad ʔakal e_
who the-lion ate yesterday
‘Who did the lion eat yesterday?’

b. [ʔanii bint]l-ʔasad ʔakal e_
which girl the-lion ate yesterday
‘Which girl did the lion eat yesterday?’

c. šuuʔi ʔinti katabti e_
what you(F) wrote yesterday
‘What did you write yesterday?’

d. [la-miin]l-ʔinti baʕaθti maktuub e_
to-whom you(F) sent letter yesterday
‘To whom did you send a letter yesterday?’

Indirect questions can also be formed by means of this strategy, as in (3).

(3) ma-ʕirift -ʃ [la-miin]l-ʔinti baʕaθti maktuub e_
NEG (I) knew NEG to-whom you(F) sent letter yesterday
‘I didn’t know to whom you sent a letter yesterday?’
Moreover, this strategy is unbounded, in that a wh-expression can bind a
variable located an unlimited number of clauses down, as demonstrated by (4).

(4) [la-miin], Mona qaalat ?innu Mary fakkarat ?innu Faatme baθat
to-whom Mona said that Mary thought that Faatme sent
maktuub e₁ mbaarih?
letter yesterday
‘To whom did Mona say that Mary thought that Faatme sent a letter
yesterday?’

Finally, Class I interrogatives obey Subjacency, as indicated by the
ungrammaticality of (5), which illustrates a violation of the Complex NP Constraint.

(5) *[?anii bint]₁ šufti l-?asad ?illi ?akal e₁?
which girl (you) saw the-lion that ate
‘Which girl did you see the lion that ate?’

The most straightforward way of accounting for these facts is to assume that
syntactic wh-movement is at work in Palestinian, fronting a wh-element to Comp in
a successive cyclic fashion.

3. CLASS II INTERROGATIVES - DESCRIPTION

The second strategy employed in the formation of constituent questions in
Palestinian differs in a number of respects from the one described above. First, the
fronted wh-element is followed by the complementizer (?illi. Thus, compare the
examples in (2a-c) with those in (6a-c).

(6) a. miin ;illi l-?asad ?akal -ha₁ mbaarih?
who that the-lion ate -her yesterday
‘Who did the lion eat yesterday?’

b. [?anii bint]₁ ;illi l-?asad ?akal -ha₁ mbaarih?
which girl that the-lion ate -her yesterday
‘Which girl did the lion eat yesterday?’

c. šuu ;illi ?inti katabt-i mbaarih?
what that you(F) wrote -it yesterday
‘What did you write yesterday?’

A second difference between (2a-c) and (6a-c) can be immediately discerned. In
the former sentences, the wh-word is associated with an empty category, in the
latter, with a resumptive pronoun. Indeed, an empty category is unacceptable in (6ac), as shown by comparing (6a) with (7).  

(7) *miìnî ?iíllî l-?asad ?akal eî mbaarîh?  
who that the-lion ate yesterday  
‘Who did the lion eat yesterday?’  

Third, questioning into an island is fully acceptable in this brand of questions. Contrast the ungrammatical (5) with the fully acceptable (8) below.  

(8) *?anîi bîn防治i ?iíllî òuñîftî l-?asad òiíllî ?akal -haî?  
which girl that (you) saw the-lion that ate -her  
‘Which girl did you see the lion that ate?’  

Fourth, Class II interrogatives are restricted to nominal wh-expressions, as noted originally for Egyptian Arabic by Wahba (1984). Adverbial phrases and PPs can only be questioned by means of a Class I interrogative, that is, by the movement strategy described in §2. Consider the fact that the Class II equivalent to (2d) above, where the wh-expression is a (pied-piped) PP, is ungrammatical, as shown in (9).  

(9) *la-miìnî ?iíllî ‘iíintî ñaêaôi tî maktuub?  
to-whom that you sent letter  
‘To whom did you send a letter?’  

This difference between the two strategies of question formation is further exemplified by the contrasts between the (a) and (b) sentences in (10)-(12), in which the wh-expressions are adjuncts or adverbials.  

(10) a. winta katabtî l-maktuub?  
when (you) wrote the-letter  
‘When did you write the letter?’  

b. *winta ?iíllî katabtî l-maktuub?  
when that (you) wrote the-letter  
‘When did you write the letter?’  

(11) a. kiíff ñâhastî շ-șayyara?  
how (you) examined the-car  
‘How did you examine the car?’  

b. *kiíff ?iíllî ñâhastî շ-șayyara?  
how that (you) examined the-car  
‘How did you examine the car?’
(12) a. ween kataṭbi l-makṭuub?
   where (you) wrote the-letter
   ‘Where did you write the letter?’

b. *ween ?iẓli kataṭbi l-makṭuub?
   where that (you) wrote the-letter
   ‘Where did you write the letter?’

Note, finally, that Class II interrogatives may appear as embedded questions and can express an unbounded dependency. These properties are illustrated by (13) and (14) and are shared by the two strategies of question formation in Palestinian.

   NEG (I) knew NEG which letter that Mona sent -it to-Mary
   ‘I didn't know which letter Mona sent it to Mary.’

(14) [ʔaay makṭuub]i ?iẓli Mona qaalaat ?iʔnu Mary fakkarat ?iʔnu Faatme
   which letter that Mona said that Mary thought that Faatme
   ba'θat -o la-Mḥemmadd?
   sent -it to-Mḥemmadd
   ‘Which letter did Mona say that Mary thought that Faatme sent it to Mḥemmadd?’

The syntactic properties of the two strategies of question formation in Palestinian Arabic are recapitulated in (15) below.

(15) Unbounded dependency
    Class I
    Class II
    Class I
    Class II
    Yes
    Yes
    Yes
    Yes
    Trace
    Resumptive pronoun
    Yes
    No
    Yes
    No, only with nominal ones

3.1. The interpretation of Class II interrogatives

Although the two interrogation strategies have the same truth values, they differ in presupposition. This is brought out clearly in the contrast in (16a, b) below: (16b) presupposes that someone actually solved the problem; (16a) implies no such presupposition.