Topicalisation as Distinct from Left-Dislocation: Evidence from Modern Literary Arabic

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□ ABSTRACT □

Various syntactic and semantic notions are used in the literature by different linguists to mean different things. This has resulted in the vagueness of these terms to such an extent that one linguist's 'topicalisation', for example, is another's 'focusing', and yet a third's 'thematisation'. The same notions, which have been designed for describing European languages originally, have also been used blindly in describing the facts of Arabic grammar. The result is ,of course, quite obvious: the same confusion has persisted in the description of Arabic.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: (a) it attempts to offer a clear-cut distinction in the use of these terms, and (b) it tries to dray a clear distinction between two well-known processes, namely 'Topicalisation' and 'Left-Dislocation'. Empirical evidence is provided from Modern Literary Arabic (MLA).

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□ الملخّص □

يشوب المصطلح اللغوي المستخدم في التعبير عن عمليات التقديم والترجيــع أو التــأخير الكثيـــر مـــن الغموض والإبهام، ويعزى ذلك إلى أن العديد من اللغويين يستخدمون هذه المصطلحات للدلالة علـــى معـــان مختلفة ولوصف ظواهر متنوعة.

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى أمرين أساسيين: إذ تحاول إزالة اللبس الذي يعتري هـــذه المصــطلحات بتقـــديم وصف دقيق لها من جهة، كما تحاول أن تميز بين عمليتين نحويتين معـــروفتين، تتعلـــق الأولـــى بتراكيـــب الموضعة فيما تتناول الثانية تراكيب التفكيك إلى اليسار من جهة أخرى، وتقدم الدراسة أمثلة وشواهد من اللغة العربية الفصيحة لهذا الغرض.

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1. Introduction;

To start uith, such notions as thematisation, extraposition, left-dislocation, preposing or fronting, and topicalisation are vague and far from being clearly delineated. Structurally, however, these notions are clear. For example, theme is defined as whatever comes first (cf. Halliday,1967 & 1968); extraposition as the movement of an embedded clause or a gerund or an infinitive to the end of the sentence (cf. Brown & Miller,1960). But the real communicative motivation may not be clear. Thus, one could say that this vagueness in terminology stems from the fact that different linguists use these terms to mean different things and to describe different phenomena. Thus, left-dislocation or displacement of elements to the right is labelled by some linguists as extraposition. But, the appearance of elements to the left of their usual place - i.e. in sentence-initial position - is given different labels: topicalisation or focusing; or left-dislocation or clotting; or fronting. Sometimes, one linguist's topicalisation is another's focusing, and yet a third's thematlsation. The discrepancy in the use of these terms derives, I believe, from the fact that those linguists have dealt with different languages under the pressure of language specific features. For example, Chomsky (1977) speaks of topicalisation and left-dislocation, and Ross (1967) of topicalisation or focusing or clefting. Dik (1978), however, proposes to incorporate a standard use of such terms within a 'functional' theory of grammar. He draws a distinction between the two pragmatic functions 'theme' and 'topic'. He defines Topic as the given entity that the following predication is about, Theme, on the other hand, "specifies the universe of discourse with respect to which the subsequent predication is presented as relevant"(Dik 1978:92). The same distinction is also made in Brown & Miller (1980:376-381) between topic and theme. Thus, one can speak of the topic of a sentence, book or paragraph. Theme is the first constituent in the sentence. This is suitable for the European use of these terms.

In Arabic, however, the term topic will be used both as a functional term and as a structural term. It is functional in the sense that it specifies an already known entity (to speaker and addressee) and that it is followed by some relevant predication. It is a structural term in the sense that it denotes a particular node of S" (utilising the X-bar notation proposed in Jackendoff 1977). The right-branching node is S", hence the connection between the two meanings of topic is made clear.

The discrepancy in the use of terms, then, is due to various definitions given by linguists and the various analyses proposed. Thus, for Chomsky and Ross, 'topicalisation', 'clefting', and 'left-dislocation' are terms that denote syntactic processes. 'Topic' and 'Focus' are used to denote certain nodes in certain structures (Chomsky 1977). Topic, focus, and theme, on the other hand, are functional terms referring to pragmatic functions that certain elements may stand in (Dik 1978, Brown & Miller 1980).

Dislocation or displacement that individual languages exhibit is normally accommodated within the transformational model. This model has witnessed a mighty suing from the early treatment by a special transformational rule to the more recent base-generated account of Chomsky's (1977) treatment of topicaliaation and left-dislocation in English^ Structures such as (1) and (2) below are used to exemplify these two processes:

1. This book, I really like
2. As for this book. I think you should read it,

In both sentences, the underlined NP's mill be base-generated under the node 'Topic' (see next page). The difference between the two structures is seen in that the first involves a 'uh-movement' from a position following the verb 'like' to a Comp

position adjacent to the topic, while in the other the topic and the rest of the sentence are related by a rule of 'predication' Chomsky (ibid) goes on to argue that sentences like (2) involve no transformational analysis -i.e. a uh-movement - since no transformation can create the structure "as for this book" or even more complicated phrases that can show) up in this position (like (4) below). He then postulates the base rule Rl in addition to Bresnan'Q R2:

3. Rl: S" → Topic S'
   R2:   S' → Comp S

Chomsky also assumes a semantic rule of predication to handle what he calls left-dislocation in English:

4, <u>As far as John is concerned.</u> I will never believe
    the claims that have been made about <u>him</u>.

where <u>him</u> is understood to refer to John. violating the Complex ' Noun Phrase Constraint, by having <u>John</u> outside the adnominal clause "the claims that have been made about him"; the wh-Island Constraint where 'John. is outside the clause containing an overt uh-complementiser 'or wh-phrase in Comp'; and Subjacency by moving a constituent across more than one bounding node in any single rule application (bounding nodes: S & NP), as in moving 'John' across the NP "the claims...." and the S "I will..." in (4) above. To preserve the constraints, Chomsky assumes that pronouns are base-generated and permitted to refer freely. In relative clauses, the rule of interpretation requires that a relative be taken as an open sentence satisfied by the entity referred to by the IMP in which it appears. Left-dislocation is assumed to be handled by a similar rule; the proposition might be about the item focused in the left-dislocated phrase.

As for topicalisation, Chomsky assumes the same analysis, except that in the topic S' structures, S' is a wh-clause. Thus, a sentence such as (1) above will derive from (la);

1. a.
[S" [Topic this book] [S'[Comp] [δ I really like <u>what]]]</u>

Applying uh-movement, we drive (1b):

1. b.
[S" [Topic this book] [S' [Comp what][S I really like -]]]

Sentence (1b) will undergo uh-deletian to yield (ic):

1. c.
[S"[Topic this book][S'[Comp][S I really like-]]]

Chomsky's argument In connection with topic structures is used to motivate his basic analysis of wh-movement. Thus, topic structures are subject to constraints or conditions on movement rules like the Coordinate Structure Constraint or the wh-Island Constraint, hence the ill-formedness of such sentences as (5) and (6) below:

5. * This book, I really like that newspaper and
6. * This book, he asked me whether I had read
                (Cf, Radford 1961:220-221}

Chomsky goes on to argue that in addition to Comparative and Topic structures, other types of structure involve an underlying wh-relative pronoun that undergoes wh-movementi and then wh-deletion (cf. <u>On wh-Movement</u>).

11. Arabic Data:

An interesting similarity is found between left-dislocation and topicalisation in Arabic and English with respect to the occurrence of an anaphoric pronoun. Yet, the two structures show other differences in Arabic, ample enough to warrant a separate syntactic derivation for each. Below are two sets of sentences: Set 1 representing left-dislocation, and Set 11 representing topic-comment structures.

Set 1:

7. a. daraba   Zayd-un ^{C}Amr-an

        hit   Zayd-nom Amr-acc

    b. ^{C}Amran   daraba   Zaydun

        "Zayd hit Amr"

8. a. jā$^?$a   Zayd-un   al-bārihata

        came   Zayd-nom   def-yesterday

    b. al-bārihata   jā$^?$a   Zaydun

        "Zayd came yesterday"

9. a. najaha   al-tālib-u   fī al-imtihān-i

        passed   def-student-nom   in def-exam-gen

    b. fī al-imtihāni   najaha al-tālibu

        "The student passed the exam"

10. a. sāfaha   khālid-un ^{C}Aliyy-an   mubtasim-an

        shook hands with   Khalid-nom Ali-acc smiling-acc

    b. mubtasiman   sāfaha   Khālidun ^{C}Aliyyan

        "Khalid shook hands with Ali smiling"

Set 11:

11.   · al-bayt-u   dammara-hu   al-fayadān-u

        def-house-nom destroyrd-it def-flood-nom

        "The house, the flood destroyed"

12.   al-madrasat-u   qabal-tu   sadīq-a   al-^{C}umr-i   fī-hā

        "The school, I met my life-friend in"

13. Khālid-un tuwuffiya wālid-u-hu ams-i

    Khalid-nom died   father-nom-his yesterday-gen

    "Khalid, his father died yesterday"

14. al-kitāb-u urĪdu-ka an tashtariya-hu

    def-book-nom I-want-you to buy-it

    "The book, I want you to buy"

15. al-awlād-u najaḥ-ū fĪ imtiḥānāt-i-him

    def-boys-nom passed-they in exams-gen-their

    "The boys, they passed their exams"

In the two sets above, there are constituents positioned to the left of the verb*
This similarity may induce a unitary treatment, whereby a movement rule could be
postulated (cf, Safa 1989 & Al-Wicr 1987). But the two structures are different: first,
sentences of the first set are transformationally related to their counterparts by left-
dislocation or fronting of focused elements through a transformational rule that moves
constituents to the left of the verb. Sentences of the second set are analysed as
complex structures consisting of two constituents: a topicalised NP and a sentential
comments In other words, initial NP's are generated in that position at deep structure,
as the following diagram shows:

16.
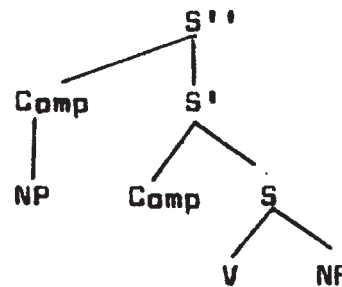
Second, left-dislocated constituents in the first set are of different categories; in the
second set they are all NP's. These imp's are characterised by always being in the
nominative case, though their pronominals are in different cases. This is to say that
these NP's would be inflected with different case endings had they occurred in their
normal position following the verb. The difference in case marking poses problems
for an analysis with a single movement rule. The question that arises here is: how)
should we account for the fact that some constituents retain their cases while others
are assigned new ones ? In other words, if 'displaced' elements were treated by one
rule of extraction, he extracted elements would be expected to retain their syntactic
and semantic relations to the sentences from which they were extracted. This would
be reflected on the surface in the retention of the original cases they are inflected with.
This is exactly the case with sentences of the first set (7b-1Db). On the other hand, the
NP's of the second set exhibit the same case, which argues against the proposal that
they have been 'extracted' or 'fronted', Moreover, a unitary treatment of both structures

will still raise a further problem regarding the discrepancy in the case markings: Why is it that only NP's can appear either in the nominative or accusative case, while participial complements retain their case markings? In other words, there is no explanation for the fact that while NP's are capable of changing their cases, participial complements cannot:

17. mubtasim-un sāfaha Khālid-un ᶜAliyy-an

    smiling-nom shook hands with Khalid-nom Ali-acc

A third distinction between the two structures can be found in the presence of a returning pronoun 'damriac ca'id in Arabic, (underlined) in the comment part of sentences of the second set, and its absence in sentences of the first set» This is limited, of course, to those constituents - NP's that have pro-forms'.
A fourth distinction between the two constructions is that topic NP's - i.e. imp's in the nominative case and with a returning pronoun - cannot be indefinite, whereas NP's that retain their case markings and exhibit no returning pronoun may have different degrees of, or even no, definiteness:

18. jarīdat-an qaraʔa Samīr-un

    newspaper-acc read Samir-nom

    "Samir read a newspaper"

where jaridatan is indefinite and in the accusative case, and such sentences are complete. But the related sentence

19. jarīdat-un qaraʔa-hā Samīr-un

    newspaper-nom

with the left-dislocated NP in the nominative, the returning pronoun -ha is 'ungrammatical'. Notice that the sentence is not so much incorrect as incomplete. The only proper interpretation for this is that (19) involves a noun followed by an 'adjectival' relative clause –i. e. "a newspaper that Samir read". Only the following is a complete
sentence:

20. al-jarīdat-u qaraʔa-hā Samīr-un

    def-newspaper-nom read-it Samir-nom

    "The newspaper, Samir read it"

The necessity for the definiteness of topic-NP. follows from the pragmatic consideration that topic NP's have in the message: they are the 'given' entities about which something is said; 'given' in the sense that they are 'already mentioned' and 'definite' in the sense that they are 'known to the speaker and hearer'.
In addition to the above-mentioned structural differences between left-dislocated structures and topicalisation structures, there are also positional differences between the two.

Topics or imp's that are in the nominative case and have a returning pronoun precede left-dislocated elements in their order to the left of the verb. Consider the to Holding examples:

21. Muhammad-un fī al-bayt-i qābal-tu-<u>hu</u>

    Muhammad-nom in def-house-gen met-I-<u>him</u>

    "Muhammad, I met him in the house"

22. Khālid-un mubtasim-an qābala-t Hind-un ʾakhā-<u>hu</u>

    Khalid-nom smiling-acc met-fem Hind-nom brother-acc-<u>him</u>

    "Khalid, Hind met his brother smiling"

23. Zayd-un karīm-an dhannat-<u>hu</u> Hind-un

    Zayd-nom generous-acc thought-him Hind-nom

    "Zayd, Hind thought him generous"

On the other hand, the following sentences are doubtful. In fact, this is another area of dispute between the two traditional schools of Arabic grammar, the Basran and the Kufan:

24. ? mubtasiman Khālidun qābalat Hindun ʾakhāhu

25. ? karīman Zaydun dhannat-hu Hindun

Sentences like (24) and (25) are analysed by Arab grammarians as being of the topic-comment type. The topic is an IMP about which something is being said. The NP's Hhalidun and Zaydun are the topics, with the rest of the sentences being the comment. What is striking about these sentences is that part of the sentential comment has been moved to a position to the left of the topic, whether this is allowed is questionable by the two schools.

The Kufi's rule out such sentences as ungrammatical. within their Regent-Operative theory, no operative of the comment can precede the topic. The Basri's, on the other hand, allow the fronting of the operative of the comment, and their examples invariably involve prepositional phrases or adverbial phrases.

Topicalisation, then, has to be treated separately from left-dislocation. This has been established so far on structural and positional grounds. Further support for this view seems to derive from pragmatic considerations as well.

It is worth noting that there need be no smooth one-to-one correspondence between structural categories and functional units. This independence of each from the other, put forward by Dik (1978), can be seen in that a focused element need not be moved or left-dislocated. It can be focused while in its original position, given that its pragmatic function will not change. Left-dislocation, on the other hand, highlights a certain element and brings it more into focus, thus making it the most salient element in the sentence.

We have mentioned above that topic NP's that are in the nominative case and have a returning pronoun in the comment represent the given or definite entity about which a following statement is to be made« Proceeding to give a statement about the

topic makes the topic occupy a central position in the may ue envisage the message; it is what we want to talk about, followed by what we want to say about it. Like Halliday's (1967) theme, it is a constituent followed by a sequence of constituents that normally make a complete sentence. Consider the following illustrative example:

26. al-hurriyyat-u tukāfihu min ʾajli-hā al-shuᶜūb-u

    def-freedom-nom struggle for sake-it def-peoples-nom

    "Freedom, peoples struggle for"

In the above example, ue are not talking about the peoples; rather, we are talking about 'freedom', followed by what we want to attribute to it, namely "peoples struggle for it". Put differently, al-hurriyyatu in the above structure is the theme, the starting point of the message and occupies the initial position in t'.ɔ structure. Informationally, it is the topic of the message, and indeed it could be the topic of subsequent sentences.

On the other hand, left-dislocated elements that retain their cases and leave no pronoun constitute salient elements in the sentence and serve a different pragmatic function.

They provide new information or serve a contrastive function, while topics constitute given or old information which accounts for the definiteness of the topics.

Moreover, topic NP's are 'spatially' separate from the following comment. This is to say that questions are asked about the comment. For example, in the following sentences,

27. al-kitab-u ʾayna waḍaᶜa-hū ᶜAliyy-un ?

    def-book-nom where put-it Ali-nom

    "The book, where did Ali put ?"

28. al-qasīdat-u man nadhama ʾabyāta-hā ?

    def-poem-nom who composed lines-its

    "The poem, who composed its lines ?"

the topics al-kitabu and al-qasldatu fall outside the scope of the questions that follow them. However, the topics may fall within the scope of the questions, and the following sentence could be a statement. Consider
the following example, with ᶜAlivyun said with a rising tone:

29. ᶜAliyy-un, lam ʾushāhid-hu ʾamsi

    Ali-nom   not I-see-him   yesterday

    "Ali, I did not see him yesterday"

Such a sentence is used as a response to a question about Ali. We can imagine a situation where the hearer responds to the speaker's inquiry about Ali. thus repeating or echoing back one word of the speaker's question or statement, in this case Ali.

To sum up, it can be said that sentences involving left-dislocated constituents are transformatianally related to their counterparts in which these left-dislocated elements appear after the verb. In other words, a trans-formational rule of left-dislocation or fronting will account for the appearance of one or more constituents to the left of the verb. In sentences beginning with topics, on the other hand, the topic NP's are generated in the base, under a base-generated node 'Topic', followed by a sequence of elements that comprise the comment.

III. Summary & Conclusion:

Two main points emerge from the previous discussion. The first point is that sentences beginning with NP's should be analysed in a may different from sentences with initial imp's as a result of a movement process, In other words, some of these sentences beginning with imp's are the result of a movement process in verb-initial structures; others have their initial imp's generated in the base and have consequently not undergone any change in their linear topic-comment structure.

The second point is that this distinction between topic- comment structures and left-dislocation is based on three criteria: structural, positional, and functional.

(a) Structural Criteria:

Structures resulting from the application of left-dislocation of constituents do not show any returning pronouns to the right of the verb that are coreferential with the IMP to the left of the verb.

Topic-Comment structures, on the other hand, exhibit returning pronouns in the comment part of the sentence that are coreferential with the topic. Moreover, NP's preposed from a post-verbal position to a sentence-initial position retain their case markings, while topic-NP's are in the nominative case irrespective of the cases they might have if these NP's had appeared after the verb. Put differently, these imp's do not have to agree with the case of their returning pronouns.

(b) Positional Criteria:

Left-dislocated imp's occur in a position different from that which topic-NP's occupy - i.e. to the left of the verb* This suggests that left-dislocated NP's typically occur to the left of the verb and the right of the topic-NP's in sentences that contain both of them, This shows clearly that linearity in order between proposed NP's and topic imp's is strict, and the reverse does not hold. This is made clearer in the order that wh-phrases assume in relation to topics. Sentence-initial wh-words appear to the right, not to the left, of the topic imp's in sentences that contain both elements.

(e) Functional Criteria:

Topics, 'being different from left-dislocated or fronted NP's, constitute the information intended as given by the speaker, and about which the speaker proceeds to say something. By contrast, proposed imp's that are moved from their places after the verb to a pre-verbal position are the salient 'focused' elements that usually provide the 'new' information or serve a contrastive function. Thus, the two types of NP's serve different functions, and accordingly topic NP's have to be definite. Sentences beginning with indefinite topics are grammatically incomplete and thus unacceptable.

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