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Focus and Exceptional Case Marking in Causative Constructions in Standard Arabic

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the syntactic behavior of causative constructions in Arabic, focusing on the unresolved issue of thematic role and case assignment due to the bi-clausal structure of these constructions. The central research question revolves around the structural position of the causee in Arabic causatives. While prior studies have broadly described causatives in Arabic, they have not sufficiently addressed the syntactic mechanisms underlying the positioning and licensing of the causee within a minimalist framework. This paper offers a novel analysis, grounded in native speaker judgments and syntactic diagnostics, revealing that the causee occupies a contrastive focus position. The findings show that while the thematic role of the causee is assigned by the embedded verb, its case is exceptionally marked by the matrix verb. The causee occupies a contrastive focus position that can host clitic-left dislocated (CLLD) DPs. The dislocated DP resumes a clitic rather than leaving a gap. However, unlike similar positions in matrix clauses, this position does not permit DP stacking. These results indicate that focus positions in Arabic are more structurally diverse than previously thought, with important implications for our understanding of information structure and case assignment in bi-clausal constructions.

Keywords: Causative Constructions, Focus, Case, Exceptional Case Marking.

INTRODUCTION

Causative constructions represent a fundamental syntactic and semantic phenomenon across languages, enabling speakers to express the notion that one participant (the causer) brings about a change in the state or action of another participant (the causee). In Standard Arabic, causative constructions are particularly intriguing due to their morphosyntactic complexity and the distinctive roles played by the causer and the causee within various structural configurations. These constructions often exhibit biclausal properties, wherein the matrix verb introduces an embedded subordinate clause that denotes the caused action or event. The interplay between the matrix causative verb and the embedded caused verb gives rise to questions about thematic role mapping, argument realization, and syntactic dependencies.

One of the most compelling aspects of causative constructions in Standard Arabic is the positioning and syntactic behavior of the causee in periphrastic constructions. This latter differs largely from its counterpart in Romance languages, which does not allow any DPs to intervene between the two verbs. The causee can be expressed either as a direct object or within an oblique phrase following the VP. In Standard Arabic, the causee is located in a position that precedes the embedded lexical verb, while being bound by an accusative case assigning entity. The preverbal position in traditionally known as a nominative case assigning position.

This paper adopts a generative syntactic approach, grounded in minimalist syntax. Initially, we need to establish whether Arabic causatives are best understood as mono- or biclausal structure. This could be explored through an analysis of the embedded verb's argument configuration and the functional heads available to the embedded structure.

Unlike other works within the same research scope: i.e. Ouhalla (1994) that focuses on verb movement and complex predicate and Aoun's (2010) article that does not provide a technical analysis of causatives in Standard Arabic. This paper does not focus on verb movement as the lexical verb in Standard Arabic does not adjoin to the CAUSE verb nor does it posit a monoclausal analysis. It, however, focuses on the causee's syntactic behavior to inform our understanding of argument structure and thematic role assignment.

Crucially, the analysis presented here is empirically grounded. Drawing on a corpus of authentic Standard Arabic data from literary texts and native speaker judgments, the study identifies and categorizes different types of causative constructions. It systematically investigates patterns in subject and object placement, cliticization, passivization, focus and WH-movement aiming to elucidate the underlying syntactic and semantic regularities of causation in Arabic and contribute to a deeper understanding of how causative meaning is encoded in Standard Arabic.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative analytical approach to examine the structure, function, and syntactic patterns of causative constructions in Arabic. The analysis is based on linguistic data drawn from constructed examples and native speaker judgement, which were verified against major Arabic grammar. The study focuses on identifying and evaluating the phrase structure, argument structure, and mechanisms of case assignment in sentences that feature causative verbs. Particular attention is given to the position of the causee, with the goal of determining its syntactic role and licensing conditions within bi-clausal constructions. Patterns of movement, thematic role assignment, and the interaction between matrix and embedded clauses are analyzed to uncover underlying structural principles.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Causative constructions reconfigure the verb's argument structure by adding a causer, usually the agent of the marix verb. This latter causes the subject of the underlying verb, referred to as the embedded verb, to perform the event. Functionally, this construction requires the addition of a CAUSE head. This latter is assumed to be hosted in the v head for the sake of this analysis. In Standard Arabic, the CAUSE head is realized morphologically or lexically, depending on the root of the verb. The morphological causative form is realized through one of two morphological processes: the gemination of the second radical or the concatenation of the preformative glottal stop. On the other hand, the periphrastic causative form is constructed by adding the verb ʒaʕala as the matrix verb.

The morphological or the lexical CAUSE introducing morpheme augments the valence of the predicate by one to the basic structure. Causative constructions basically introduce a causer into the argument structure of a given verb phrase. This latter functions as the subject of the derived clause, which becomes the matrix clause. In this case, the causee, that is the basic external argument, loses its initial nominative case and is demoted to the object position of the matrix clause. This demotion, however, does not fully strip this argument from its initial external argument properties. The causee continues to bind the embedded predicate and the embedded verb retains its phi-feature agreement with it. This biclausal structure is the main characteristic of the periphrastic causatives.

This paper will focus on the periphrastic causatives. Sentence (1) is an example of the periphrastic causative constructions in Standard Arabic. In this construction, the causee ʔaħmada is assumed to be argument of the embedded clause. As described above, it is the external argument of the embedded verb. The S-structure of the construction places this argument in a position that precedes the embedded verb. The preverbal position, namely SVO order in Standard Arabic, is a nominative case position. However, this argument bears an accusative case, which is puzzling. This fact can be illustrated by sentence (2) below.

(1) ʒaʕala xālid-u   ʔaħmad-a   ja-bkī
    make   Khalid-Nom Ahmed-Acc 3ms-cry
    'Khalid made Ahmed cry'

(2) al-walad-u   ʔakala   t-tufāħat-a
    Def-boy-Nom ate.3ms Def-apple-Acc
    'the boy ate the apple '

In an initial analysis, the preverbal causee seems to be getting an accusative case from the matrix v head. This assumption raises an important question. Since the causee is getting its case from the CAUSE verb in the matrix clause, is it sitting in the complement domain of the matrix v head? How is case being assigned? Why is the causee not allowed to in an VSO order with the embedded verb, hence the ungrammaticality of sentence (2)?

(3) *ʒaʕala xālid-u   ja-bkī   ʔaħmad-a

    make   Khalid-Nom 3ms-cry Ahmed-Acc

    'Khalid made Ahmed cry'

This issue requires an investigation into the internal structure of the embedded clause. Consider sentence (4). Notice that the embedded verb lā yākuluna carries negation in addition to φ-feature agreement. The presence of sentential negation and the agreement in φ-features are solid evidence of the existence of T and Neg projections. Algryani, (2015) argues that the NegP selects a TP complement. In Standard Arabic, negative heads enter in an Agree relation with the tense head (Alqassas, 2021). We posit the structure in tree (5) for the sentence in (4).

(4) wa	mā ʒaʕal=hum	ʒasad-an	lā yākul-una	a-Taʕām-a
And	Neg=make-1p=3p.Acc	Indef-body-Acc	Neg=eat-3p	Indef-food-Acc

"And We did not give them such bodies as could survive without food"

(Qur'an, 21:8)

Notice that the structure below is showing the embedded clause only, as opposed to the whole sentence. The external argument starts out as the specifier of the vP, then raises to the specifier of the TP to get case. When negation is present, the subject DP may move to the specifier of NegP in the case of an SVO order. In the case of causative constructions, the subject DP will raise further to get accusative case. The position where it will eventually land is still unclear.

Figure 1. the internal structure of the embedded clause in causative constructions
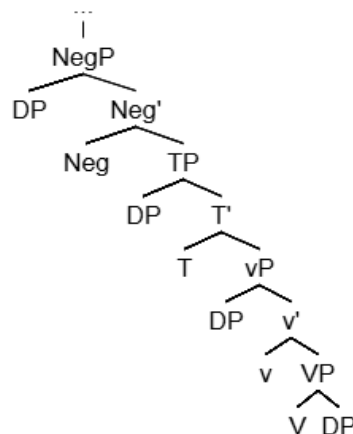
Interestingly, even a transitive embedded verb does not seem to assign its accusative case to the causee, as sentence (6) shows.

(6) ʒaʕala xalid-u   ʔaħmad-a   ja-qraʔu l-kitāb-a

    make   Khalid-Nom   Ahmed-Acc   3ms-read Def-book-Acc

    'Khalid made Ahmed read the book'

The causee in sentence (6) is the thematic external argument of the embedded verb, however, this latter assigns its accusative case to the internal DP.

Mohammad, (2000) advances an argument that may explain the source of the accusative case assigned to the causee. According to his analysis, heads are endowed with cases. More specifically, the C head carries a structural accusative case feature that gets discharged on to the preverbal DP. Miyamoto, (2002) endorses this claim by proposing that the C head has EPP featues and an accusative case. Mohammad does not mention the specific C head to which this observation applies. It seems to apply to both matrix heads and embedded heads. Example (7) is taken from Mohammad (2000) with some modifications.

(7) ħasiba   ʕaliyy-un ʔanna az-zaʕimat-a   nāmat   fī baghdād-a

    thought.3ms Ali-Nom Comp Def-leader-Acc slept.3fs in Baghdad-Gen

    'Ali thought that the (female) leader slept in Baghdad'

The complementizer in the embedded clause selects a DP, resulting in an SVO order in the embedded clause. The preverbal DP az-zaʕimat-a is not assigned a nominative case unlike its counterpart DP in sentence (2) above. This is not confined to embedded clauses only. We notice a similar result in preverbal DP preceded by overt complementizers in monocausal structures.

(8) ʔinna l-walad-a   ʔakala   t-tufāħat-a

    Comp Def-boy-Acc ate.3ms Def-apple-Acc

    'indeed, the boy ate the apple '

In this case, the causee may be assumed to be base generated in the specifier of the lower vP, where it gets assigned its theta-role. Then, it raises to the specifier of the embedded TP, where it gets assigned the nominative case under a Spec-Head configuration. It then undergoes movement to the specifier of the CP, where a covert complementizer assigns another case, namely, the accusative case. The highest case gets overtly realized. The tree in (9) illustrates this configuration.

Figure 2. internal structure of the causative construction embedded clause with a case assigning C head
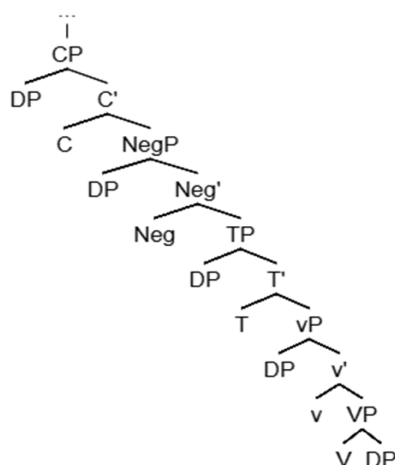
Notice that the causee is basically in a preverbal position with the embedded verb, realizing an SVO order with it. Aoun (2010) discusses a proposal for subjects in the preverbal position. His account explains that the subject that occurs in the VSO order is the only genuine subject. In the case of the SVO order, the genuine subject is a null pronominal that merges within the thematic domain, the VP, in order to receive its thematic role. This pronominal is bound by a DP that is not within the A-domain of the clause. The observations made by Aoun suggest that the subject in the SVO order is a topic or a clitic-left dislocated DP element located in the A'-domain rather than the A-domain of the clause, but it does not necessarily mean that it is receiving case from the C head.

Further evidence that militates against the case assigning complementizer in causative constructions comes from the passivisation of the matrix verb and cliticization of the embedded DP.

When the matrix verb is passivized, an interesting outcome arises, as illustrated by sentences (10a, b):

(10) ʒuʕila   ʔahmed-u   ja-bki
     made.Pass Ahmed-Nom   cry
     'Ahmed was made to cry'

b ʒuʕila   ʔahmed-u   ja-qraʔu   l-kitāb-a
    made.Pass Ahmed-Nom   3ms-read   Def-book-Acc
    'Ahmed was made to read the book'

When passivized, the matrix v head loses its ability to assign accusative case, following Burzio's generalization. Subsequently, the causee in sentences (10 a, b) appears with a nominative case marking. The causee is demoted to a non-core argument in the matrix clause, but it surfaces with its initial function as an external argument of the embedded clause.

Additionally, when the causee is pronominalized, it adjoins, as an accusative clitic, to the matrix verb instead of the embedded one.

(11) ʒaʕala=hu   xālid-u   ja-bkī
     made=3ms   Khalid-Nom   cry.3ms
     'Khalid made him cry'

(12) ʒaʕala=hu   xālid-u   ja-qraʔu   l-kitāb-a
     made=3ms   khalid-Nom   3ms-read   Def-book-Acc

'Khalid made him read the book'

Believe-type verbs show similar behavior with the embedded preverbal NP. The sentences (13 a,b) are taken from Ouhalla, (1994):

(13) a. dhannan-tu   ʔanna   l-walad-a   ja-drusu

           believe-1s   COMP   DEF-boy-ACC   3MS-study

           'I believed that the boy was studying'

    b. dhannan-tu l-walad-a   ja-drusu

        believe-1s   Def-boy-Acc   3ms-study

        'I believed the boy to be studying'

In (13a), the embedded DP seems to be assigned accusative case by the complementizer ʔanna. However, sentence (13b) does not show an overt complementizer. Ouhalla observes that the source of the accusative case is unclear given the absence of the complementizer (1994: 64,).

The preverbal causee position is a focus position. Sentences (14) and (15) provide the marked and unmarked structures of a ditransitive causative construction, respectively. The embedded verb in (15) has the clitic hu attached to it whereas the embedded verb in (14) does not.

(14) ʒaʕala xālid-u   l-ʒazzār-a   ya-qtaʕu   llaħm-a

      made   Khalid-Nom Def-butcher-Acc IMP.3s-cut Def-meat-Acc

      'Khalid made the butcher cut the meat'

(15) ʒaʕal xālid-u   llaħm-a$_i$ ya-qtaʕu=hu$_i$ l-ʒazzār-u

      made   Khalid-Nom Def-meat-Acc   3s-cut=Res.3ms Def-butcher-Nom

      'Khalid made the butcher cut the meat'

Notice that when the external argument is in the preverbal position, it is not resumed by a pronoun, which aligns with the observation of Costa & Duarte, (2002) and Aoun (2010) that preverbal subjects are not clitic left dislocated DPs (CLLD henceforth). However, when the internal argument of the embedded verb is fronted, it triggers a resumptive pronoun, which adjoins to the embedded verb. This observation suggests that Rizzi, (2004) left periphery cartography proposal in (16) does not hold for the embedded clauses of causative constructions. Abdelhady, (2025) argues for a coherent left-periphery structure but notices differences in embedded clauses. Embedded clauses of causative constructions do not allow the fronting of multiple DPs. Sentence (17a) allows the fronting of the causee. On the contrary, when the direct object or the indirect object are fronted, the sentence becomes ungrammatical. Consider sentences (17b, c). The grammaticality of these sentences cannot be salvage using the resumptive strategy.

(16) ForceP > TopP > FP > TopP > FinP

(17) a.	ʒaʕala	xālid-u	ʔahmed-a	ju-ʕtī	l-walad-a	l-kitāb-a
	make	Khalid-Nom	Ahmed-Acc	3MS-give	DEF-boy-Acc	DEF-book-Acc

'Khalid made Ahmed give the boy the book'

b. *	ʒaʕala	xālid-u	ʔahmed-a	l-walad-a	ju-ʕtī	l-kitāb-a
	make	Khalid-Nom	Ahmed-Acc	Def-boy-Acc	3MS-give	DEF-book-Acc

'Khalid made Ahmed, the boy, give the book'

c. *	ʒaʕala	xālid-u	ʔahmed-a	L-kitāb-a$_j$	ju-ʕtī=hi$_j$	li-l-walad-i
	make	Khalid-Nom	Ahmed-Acc	Def-book-Acc	3ms-give=Res	Prep Def-boy-Gen

'Khalid made Ahmed give the book to the boy'

The ungrammaticality of (17b, c) suggests that the left periphery of the embedded clause contains only one position that precedes the embedded TP. A similar observation has been made by Muriungi, (2017), and Haegeman et al., (2015). This position can be either a FocP or a TopP, given that the first usually hosts fronted focus phrases while the latter hosts CLLD NPs.

This is not attested in matrix clauses where CLLDed phrases precede focus phrases. The following example is taken from Bakir, (1980):

(18)	fātimat-u$_i$	l-wardat-a	ʔaʕTā=ha$_i$	sālim-un
	Fatima-Nom	Def-flower-Acc	gave.3ms=Res	Salim-Nom

'Fatima, the rose Salim gave her.'

Notice that when the indirect object Fatima is CLLDed, it loses its accusative case and appears in the nominative case. However, the focused direct object carries its accusative case to its fronted position. This raises questions about the viability of the accusative case assigning complementizer posited by Mohammad (2000).

Another important observation is that the FP position does not host complementizers, hence sentence (19) is ungrammatical.

(19) *	ʒaʕala	xālid-u	ʔanna	ʔahmed-a	ja-bkī
	make	Khalid-NOM	COMP	Ahmed-ACC	3MS-cry

'Khalid made that Ahmed cries'

As a result, the projection above the TP, in the embedded clause, is a functional projection, noted FP in the tree below. The following structure may be suggested.

Figure 3. internal structure of the causative construction embedded clause projecting an FP
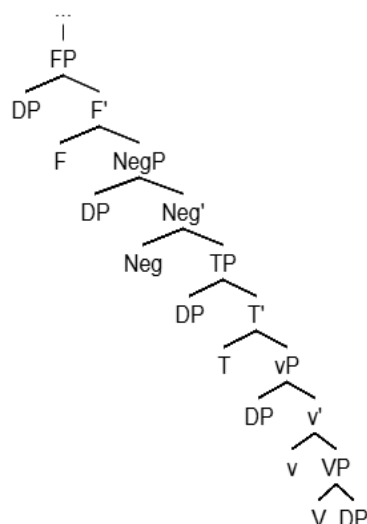
In what follows, the analysis will focus on the source of the accusative case in section 2.   I will argue against a structural case assigning complementizer in the causative constructions. The focal point of section 3 will be on the distribution of focus and section 4 will contrast it with CLLD in the embedded clause of the causative construction.

ECM in causative constructions

Causative constructions pose a challenge to determining the internal structure of the embedded clause. Studies in Romance languages used to suggest a biclausal analysis, but there has been a growing tendency to adopt an embedded truncated clause analysis (Burzio, 1986). The lack of a genuine external argument in the embedded clause faire-par constructions makes for a "reduced" or "defective" structure, further supporting the normalization of an embedded predicate Toops, (2013) and (Folli & Harley, 2020), whereas faire-infinitif constructions allow a vP projection. The largest clause in terms of projections is the ECM complement. According to Sheehan & Cyrino, (2024) and Sheehan, (2020), in Romance languages, the ECM complement contains a Voice projection, but it does not extend to a TP. ECM constructions in French allow a preverbal causee like Standard Arabic.

In Standard Arabic, however, the ECM complement contains a TP, as sentence (4) above shows agreement and negation, which strongly suggest the presence of a TP. The fact that the embedded predicate can be passivized as shown in sentences in (22a, b), implies a VoiceP projection. The T head selects a VoiceP as its complement, suggesting the following hierarchy.

(21) TP > VoiceP > vP > VP

(22) a. ʒaʕala xālid-u l-kitāb-a ju-qraʔu

      made Khalid- Def-book- 3ms.Pass-read
             Nom Acc

      'Khalid made the book be read'

  b. ʒuʕila l-kitāb-u ju-qraʔu

     made.Pass Def-book-Acc 3ms.Pass-read

   'The book was made to be read'

When passivized, the embedded verb of sentence (15a) loses its accusative case. The internal argument DP, having been stripped of its case, moves to the closest case-assigning head. In sentence (15a) it looks like it moved to the specifier of the FP to get case and satisfy the Case Filter. The case is assigned by the v head in the matrix clause through the exceptional case marking mechanism. The case is assigned across clause boundary. An interesting outcome is yielded by sentence (15b). When the matrix verb is also passive, losing its accusative case, the now subject of the embedded verb does not move up the tree to the specifier of the higher TP to get case. It remains in the specifier of the embedded TP for case and EPP reasons. The DP lkitāba is not in a VS order with the matrix verb. Consider sentence (23). The nominative subject is now in a VS order with the embedded verb and it is still receiving nominative case.

(23). ʒuʕila ju-qraʔu l-kitāb-u

    made.Pass 3ms.Pass-read Def-book-Acc

       'The book was made to be read'

This comes as further evidence, in addition to the φ-features and negation projection, that the ECM complement in Standard Arabic is a full-fledged TP headed by a functional projection FP that assigns topicalization and focus features.

According to Pesetsky (1989), ECM refers to a situation where a verb in a matrix clause assigns accusative case to the subject of an embedded infinitival clause. Alnajadat, (2020) proposes that in Standard Arabic, ECM is licensed through feature checking. The uninterpreted features of the v head probes the goal external argument DP of the embedded clause. The valuation of the uninterpretable features of the matrix v head is carried out without raising the embedded DP to the matrix clause through an Agree relation (Den Dikken, 2018).

Figure 4: tree representation of head and DP movement in causative constructions
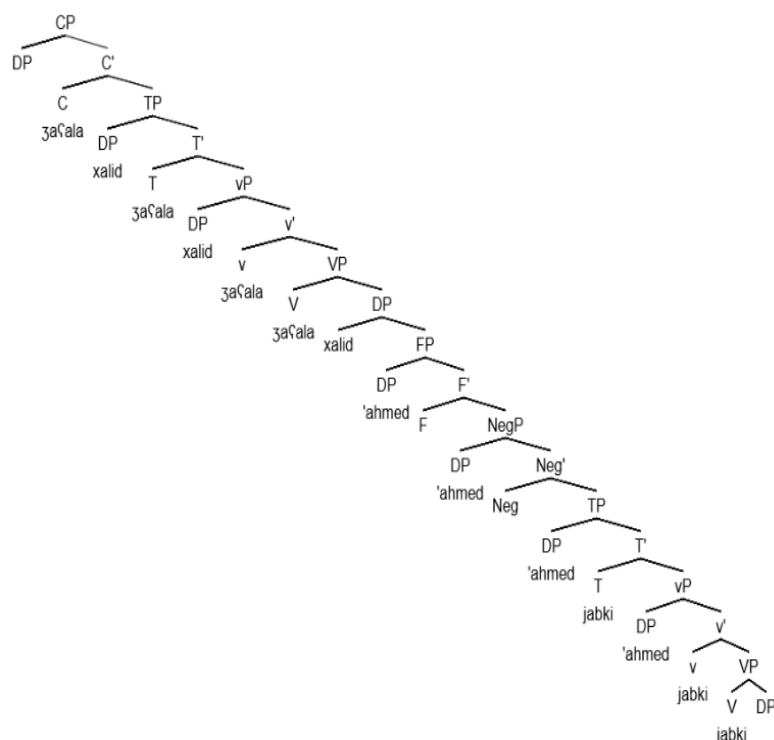
The tree in (24) represents the movement of the DP causee. It starts out in the specifier of the lower vP to get its thematic role, then raises to the specifier of the TP to satisfy the EPP, followed by Spec NegP, if needed, to end up in the specifier of its final position, FP, to be close enough to get case from the higher v head. The subject of the main clause follows a similar trajectory, but it lands in the specifier of the TP as its final position. The embedded verb remains in the T head, while the matrix verb raises to the C head in order to realize a VSO order. Recall that in the previous section, we established that the nominal subject in an SVO order is sitting in an A'-domain, which is the specifier of the CP layer. This can be further proven if we consider the minimal pair in sentences (25a, b):

(25) a. māðā   ja-qraʔu   l-walad-u?
        what   3ms-read   Def-boy-Nom?
        'what does the boy read?'

(25) b.* māðā   l-walad-u   ja-qraʔu?
         what   Def-boy-Nom   3ms-read?
         'what does the boy read?'

Notice that the SVO order is blocked in the presence of a wh-word. This is proof that the verb of the matrix clause is in the C head. Middleton, (2021) and Fakih, (2007) argue that wh movement is only possible when the clause has VSO order. This suggests that in wh questions, because the wh phrase moves, the SVO is blocked, or not allowed. It does not seem to be the case with verbs

of the embedded clause. They allow SVO order even in the presence of a complementizer. Consider sentence (26):

(26) qāla   ʔanna l-walad-a   ja-qraʔu
     Said.3ms Comp   Def-boy-Acc   3ms-read
     'he said that the boy reads'

Focus in causative constructions

Standard Arabic displays two types of focus, in-situ focus and fronted focused phrases. Alazzawie & Abdelaal (2022) argue that SA has a focus position immediately above vP, which is the landing site for fronted focus (movement) of both full DPs and clitics, contrasting with focused elements that remain in situ under certain conditions. This supports the view that Standard Arabic has both fronted focus (through movement) and in situ focus (Alshammari, 2022). According to Moutaouakil, (1989), this difference correlates with 'pragmatic function'. The former serves to introduce new information, whereas the latter instantiates 'contrastive focus'. Sentence (27a) could be an answer to 'What did Ahmed drink?' (the focused phrase is capitalized).

27 a. shariba   ʔahmed-u   ŠAY-AN

     drink.3ms Ahmed-Nom tea-Indef.Acc

     'Ahmed drank tea'

On the other hand, sentence (27b) could be a corrective statement to 'Ahmed drank coffee'.

  b. ŠAY-AN   shariba   ʔahmed-u

     tea-Indef.Acc drink.3ms Ahmed-Nom

     'Tea, Ahmed drank

The in-situ and fronted focus phrases analyses seem to be parallel to that of the wh-questions. In-situ wh-questions are not allowed in Standard Arabic, except in the case of multiple wh-questions. They allow for both in-situ and wh-fronting. Consider sentence (28).

(28) man ju-ḥibbu man?

     who 3ms-love who

     'who loves who?'

As opposed to wh-questions, Standard Arabic allows in-situ and overt focus phrase movement. At first glance, the parallelism between the analyses of the wh-movement and the focus-movement may indicate that the position the fronted focus phrase moves to is Spec CP. This is in line with the reasoning that argues that both wh-phrases and focus phrases move to the same specifier position within the clause structure (Van Urk, 2015). Alazzawie, (2019) explicitly builds on Rizzi's

Cartographic framework, adopting TopP and FocP in the CP-layer. Brody, (1990) introduces a functional Focus category (FP) that can host focused constituents, and in many languages, wh phrases move overtly into Spec FP. This is directly similar to Rizzi's idea that wh- and focus elements compete for the same specifier position. This assumption, however, does not hold for embedded clauses in Standard Arabic. Alazzawie & Abdelaal, (2022) argue that focused phrases move to a position lower than the complementizer. Ouhalla observes that the fronted focus phrase follows a complementizer in embedded clauses. Sentence (29) is taken from Ouhalla, (1999):

(29) dhanan-tu ʔanna KITAB-AN   qaraʔa-t   zaynab-u

     believe-1S that   book-Indef.Acc Read-3fs Zaynab-Nom

     'I believe that it was a BOOK that Zaynab read'

In line with this observation, Tsimpli, (1995) proposes the existence of a functional phrase, referred to as FP in this paper, that this type of phrases target. This position, however, is not limited to fronted focus phrases only, but it does host other categories like modality and CLLD DPs.

It was pointed out that Standard Arabic allows both 'contrastive focus' and 'new information focus'. To reiterate, contrastive focus has been associated with fronted focus phrases, whereas new information focus is the in-situ type. Given that the causee in causative constructions is a moved DP to the specifier of the undetermined FP established to host focused phrases (among others), the assumption would be that the causee is in a contrasted position serving the task of corrective information. The negative continuation of sentences (1), (4) and (15b) endorse this assumption. Sentences (30), (31), and (32) have different corrections. Therefore, we may conclude that the causee is in sitting in the specifier position of FP. This position is a contrastive focus position.

(30) ʒaʕala xālid-u   ʔaħmad-a   ja-bki   lā   fatimat-a
     make   Khalid-Nom Ahmed-Acc 3ms-cry Neg   Fatima-Acc
     'Khalid made Ahmed, not Fatima, cry'

(31) ʒaʕala xālid-u   ʔaħmad-a   ja-qraʔu l-kitāb-a   lā   fatimat-a
     make   Khalid-Nom Ahmed-Acc 3ms-read Def-book-Acc Neg   Fatima-Acc
     'Khalid made Ahmed, not Fatima, read the book'

(32) ʒuʕila   l-kitāb-u   ju-qraʔu   lā   l-qissat-u
     made.Pass Def-book-Acc 3ms.Pass-read Neg Def-story-Acc
     'The book was made to be read, not the story'

CONCLUSION

The causee is a dislocated DP that has been fronted for purposes of focus. This DP starts out as the external argument of the embedded clause, which has been established as a full TP. The embedded v head selects the DP causee to assign the agent theta role. This DP is then probed by the T head to value its uninterpretable features, namely, case and EPP. The same DP undergoes an additional movement to the focus hosting the functional projection, where it acquires a second case assignment from the matrix clause. This is consistent with the cliticization of the causee to the matrix verb and passivization of the latter, leaving the causee with nominative case only. This phenomenon is referred to as exceptional case marking. The ECM construction involves a DP getting its theta-role from a head in one clause and receiving its case from a head in another clause. The DP sits in the specifier of an intervening position, FP, projecting between the higher vP and the embedded TP. Therefore, the case assignment happens across clause boundary.

The FP is not an exclusive host position for fronted focus phrases. It may also host CLLD DPs that resume a clitic as opposed to leaving a gap. However, this position does not allow the stacking of both DPs, unlike its counterpart position in the matrix clause. The causee is situated in a contrastive focus position. These findings refine our understanding of how Arabic encodes focus and case across clause boundaries and may inform analyses of other Semitic languages.

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