

A minimalist analysis of first conjunct agreement in Standard Arabic

Standard Arabic (SA) exhibits the familiar agreement asymmetry between verbs and their conjoined subjects depending on word order: SV orders show full agreement between the preverbal conjoined DP and verb in all ϕ -features (1a), while VS orders show agreement only with the first conjunct within the postverbal conjoined DP, either in all ϕ -features if the first conjunct is a pronominal (1a), or only in gender if the first conjunct is a lexical DP (1c). Full agreement between the verb and a postverbal conjoined DP is strictly ungrammatical (2a), and so is first conjunct agreement (FCA) in SV structures (2b). In their discussion of FCA in Moroccan and Lebanese Arabic, Aoun, Benmamoun, and Sportiche (1994, ABS, henceforward), argue that FCA does not exist; rather, the “surface” FCA pattern, they claim, is the result of applying coordination reduction to a clausal conjunction structure, such that the sentence in (3a), for example, is derived from the underlying structure (3b). In this paper, I show that this analysis cannot be maintained for SA (nor Welsh or Czech for that matter) since postverbal conjoined subjects pass all of ABS’s tests of semantic plurality such as *together*-adverbials, reciprocals, and being subject of intransitive *meet* (4a-c), hence indicating that phrasal, rather than clausal, coordination is involved. I conclude then that “genuine” FCA does indeed exist; hence, an alternative analysis is still needed.

To provide an analysis of FCA, I first present an analysis of the word order alternation characteristic of SA in general, arguing that SV structures are not derived via movement, but through base-generating the preverbal DP in its surface position, with the v^*P -internal subject position occupied by a null subject *pro* (5). VS orders, by contrast, are the result of Merging a lexical DP in Spec v^*P (6). That this analysis is correct is empirically supported by several facts. First, the traditionally assumed topic-comment semantics of SV orders suggests that such structures are akin to *clitic left-dislocation constructions* (CLLD), explaining, for example, why nonspecific NPs cannot occur in preverbal position in the language (7). Second, preverbal DPs block *wh*-extraction, thereby suggesting that the preverbal position has A'-properties (8). Third, postverbal DPs always appear in nominative case (9a), whereas preverbal DPs carry nominative case (9b) only in the absence of a potential Case assigner in the structure, e.g., an overt C of the *ġanna*-type (9c) or an ECM verb of the *want*-type (9d). Given this base-generation analysis, we now have a ready answer for why full agreement always obtains in SV structures: Agreement in such structures is between T and the null subject *pro* in Spec v^*P , necessarily required to be full so *pro* can be identified at the interface. If this is correct, then agreement has to proceed “downward”, exactly the case if Chomsky’s *Agree* operation, rather than Spec-head agreement, is indeed the mechanism for formal feature licensing in natural language.

On the other hand, to account for FCA in VS structures, I will adopt Munn’s (1999) proposal to treat the conjunction and its complement DP as an adjunct of the first conjunct (10), as well as Chomsky’s (2001b) proposal to late-Merge adjuncts of arguments, as opposed to complements, noncyclically in the course of the derivation with significant consequences for interpretation (cf. Condition C effects in (11)). In this paper, I would like to argue that late-Merge of adjuncts can also have consequences for formal feature licensing in a minimalist grammar. Specifically, for the case at hand, if the [$_{\text{ConjP}}$ Conj DP] adjunct can be introduced after *Agree* takes place between T and the “to-be-first-conjunct” argument in the v^*P -internal subject position, FCA obtains. To make sure that late adjunction is not “too late,” I propose the condition in (12), to be motivated for the purposes of semantic interpretation, while constraining late adjunction such that FCA does not arise in SV structures for example. Furthermore, if Chomsky (2001a) is right in his assumption that “Move is dependent on *Agree*,” it follows that languages in which T has an obligatory EPP feature will never allow FCA given that movement of the first conjunct to SpecTP will always violate the *coordinate structure constraint*. In such languages the only possible derivation is one in which the conjoined subject is Merged “as a whole” prior to the introduction of T in the structure. This explains why FCA is exclusively confined to contexts in which the subject has to appear postverbally. The analysis, however, makes an interesting prediction: In English-type languages, should the EPP property of T be satisfied by Merge (say, of an expletive) rather than by Move of the Agreeing element, FCA will then be rendered possible, a prediction borne out by FCA structures such as (13) in English.

Should the analysis proposed above prove correct, it provides empirical evidence for an *Agree*-based theory of formal feature licensing as well as for a late-Merge approach to adjunction.

- (1) (a) Zayd-un wa Hind-un ʒaʔaa
 Zayd-NOM and Hind-NOM came-3dumas “du=dual”
- (b) ʒiʔ-tu ʔana wa Hind-un
 came-1sg I and Hind-NOM
- (c) ʒaʔa-t Hind-un wa Zayd-un
 came-3sgfem Hind-NOM and Zayd-NOM
- (2) (a) *ʒaʔ-aa Zayd-un wa Hind-un
 came-3dumas Zayd-NOM and Hind-NOM
- (b) *Zayd-un wa Hind-un ʒaʔa/ʒaʔa-t
 Zayd-NOM and Hind-NOM came-3sgmas/came-3sgfem
- (3) (a) neem Kariim w Marwan (Lebanese Arabic)
 slept.3sg Kareem and Marwan
- (b) neem Kariim w neem Marwan
 slept.3sg Kareem and slept.3sg Marwan
- (4) (a) ʒaʔa-t Hind-un wa ʃamr-un maʃan
 came-3sgfem Hind-NOM and Amr-NOM together
- (b) tuħibbu Hind-un wa ʔaxaw-aa-ha baʃD-a-hum əl-baʃD
 love.sgfem Hind-NOM and brothers-NOM-her some-ACC-them the-some
 “Hind and her two brothers love each other.”
- (c) ʔiltaqa-t Hind-un wa ʔaxaw-aa-ha f-əl-hafl-i
 met.3sgfem Hind-NOM and brothers-NOM-her at-the-party-DAT
 “Hind and her two brothers met at the party.”
- (5) SV: [TP DP T+[v*+V] [_{v*P} pro t_{v*} [_{VP} t_V YP]]]
- (6) VS: [TP T+[v*+V] [_{v*P} DP t_{v*} [_{VP} t_V YP]]]
- (7) *walad-un kasara l-bab-a
 boy-NOM broke 3sgmas the-door-ACC
 cf. kasara walad-un əl-bab-a “A boy broke the door.”
- (8) *man Zayd-un Daraba
 who Zayd-NOM hit 3sgmas
 cf. man Daraba Zayd-un “Who did Zayd hit?”
- (9) (a) qaraʔa l-ʔawlad-u d-dars-a
 read 3sgmas the-boys-NOM the-lesson-ACC
- (b) ʔal-ʔawlad-u qaraʔ-u d-dars-a
 the-boys-NOM read 3plmas the-lesson-ACC
- (c) ʔinna l-ʔawlad-a qaraʔ-u d-dars-a
 C the-boys-ACC read 3plmas the-lesson-ACC
 “(I affirm that) The boys read the lesson.”
- (d) ʔarad-a Zayd-un əl-ʔawlad-a ʔan ya-rħal-uu
 wanted-3sgmas Zayd-NOM the-boys-ACC C leave/IMPERF-3plmas
 “Zayd wanted the boys to leave.”
- (10) [_{DP} DP [_{ConjP} Conj DP]]
- (11) Which picture [_{COMPLEMENT of Bill}] [_{ADJUNCT} that John liked] did he buy?
- (12) Adjunction to an argument takes place in the position of first Merge of the argument for thematic interpretation.
- (13) There is a man and a woman in the room.
- Selected references with partial bibliographical entries*
- Aoun, Benmamoun, and Sportiche. 1994. “Agreement, Word Order, and Conjunction.” *LI*, 25, 195-220.
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