

On the syntax of in-situ and ex-situ wh-questions in Egyptian Arabic

Usama Soltan (Middlebury College)

A wh-phrase in Egyptian Arabic (EA) questions may surface either *in-situ* in its argument position (1a), or *ex-situ* in a clause-initial position associated with a resumptive pronoun (1b). In addition, wh-questions may be optionally introduced by the Q(uestion)-particle *huwwa*, as shown in both examples in (1).

In this paper, I provide a syntactic analysis of EA wh-questions, arguing that neither type of the wh-questions in (1) is derived via movement (contra Wahba 1984, but in line with Cheng 1997); rather, wh-phrases are base-generated in their surface positions, with wh-scope licensed instead by an empty Operator *Op*. I also argue that *huwwa* is not an instance of *Op*; rather, *huwwa* heads its own projection in the CP domain and induces a presuppositional reading, along the lines suggested for Vietnamese by Bruening and Tran 2006. The proposed analysis then extends naturally to account for EA yes-no questions as well as for instances of wh-questions with medial wh-phrases taking matrix scope.

That EA wh-questions (whether in-situ or ex-situ) do not involve movement (whether overt or covert) is supported by the fact that they are island-insensitive, as shown by the grammaticality of (i) wh-questions in which the in-situ wh-phrase occurs inside an island, or (ii) where the ex-situ wh-phrase is associated with a resumptive pronoun that is itself inside an island. Examples of both cases are given in (2), (3), and (4), for the complex NP island, the adjunct island, and the coordinate structure island, respectively. Further evidence comes from absence of intervention effects of the kind reported by Beck (1996) for covert movement. For example, EA in-situ and ex-situ wh-phrases are compatible with the occurrence of universal quantifiers, as in (5).

As an alternative analysis to account for the matrix scope of an in-situ wh-phrase, I argue that scope is licensed by a base-generated Q-operator in C (via unselective binding *a la* Pesetsky 1987), which may bind either a wh-phrase in argument position (giving rise to the in-situ strategy, as in the representation in (6) for (1a)), or a wh-phrase in the focused position of a cleft structure (giving rise to the ex-situ strategy, as in the representation in (7) for (1b)).

In support of the clefting analysis of wh-ex-situ, I provide a set of structural parallels between cleft constructions and wh-ex-situ questions in EA regarding (i) the complementizer *ʔilli* introducing a headless relative clause, (ii) the optional presence of a pronominal copula, and (iii) the possible appearance of the wh-phrase in final position in a pseudocleft construction.

Two empirical consequences of the given analysis are that it extends naturally to account for yes-no questions in EA, which may appear with an initial *huwwa* (8a), as well as to wh-questions where medial wh-phrases take matrix scope (8b).

- 1a (huwwa) ?inta ?aabil-t **miin**?
 Q-particle you met-2sg who
 “Who did you meet?”
- 1b (huwwa) **miin** ?illi ?inta ?aabil-tu-h?
 Q-particle who C you met-2sg-him
 “Who is it that you met?”
- 2a ?inta sim?it ?ishaa?ah ?in Huda itgawwizit miin?
 you heard rumor that Huda married who
 “*Who did you hear the rumor that Huda got married to?”
- 2b miin ?illi ?inta sim?it ?ishaa?ah ?in Huda itgawwizit-uh?
 who that you heard rumor that Huda married-him
 “*Who is it that you heard the rumor that Huda got married to?”
- 3a ?ahmad xarag ba?d-ma ?inta ?aabil-t miin?
 Ahmad left after you met-2sg who
 “*Who did Ahmad leave after you met?”
- 3b miin ?illi ?ahmad xarag ba?d-ma ?inta ?aabil-tu-h?
 who C Ahmad left after you met-2sg-him
 “*Who is that that Ahmad left after you met?”
- 4a ?inta ?uft ?ahmad wi miin fi ?el-haflah?
 you saw Ahmad and who at the-party
 “*Who did you see Ahmad and at the party?”
- 4b miin ?illi ?inta ?uft-uh huwwa wi ?ahmad fi ?el-haflah?
 who that you saw-him he and Ahmad at the-party
 “*Who is it that you saw Ahmad and him at the party?”
- 5a kul walad ?i?staraa ?eih?
 every boy bought what
 “What did every boy buy?”
- 5b ?eih ?illi kul walad ?i?staraa-h?
 what that every boy bought-it
 “What is it that every boy bought?”
- (6) [CP Op_i [TP ?inta ?aabil-t miin_i]]
- (7) [CP Op_i [FocP miin_i [CopulaP Copula [CP ?illi [TP ?inta ?aabil-t-uh_i]]]]]
- 8a (huwwa) ?ahmad waSal? 8b tiftikir miin ?illi Huda ?aabil-it-uh?
 Q-particle Ahmad arrived think.2sgmas who C Huda met-3sg-him
 “Did Ahmad arrive?” “Who do you think that Huda met?”

References

- Beck, S. 1996. Quantified structures as barriers for LF movement. *Natural Language Semantics*, 4, 1–56.
- Bruening, B. and T. Tran. 2006. “Wh-questions in Vietnamese.” *Journal of East Asian Linguistics*, 15, 319–341.
- Cheng, L. 1997. *On the Typology of Wh-Questions*. Garland, New York.
- Pesetsky, D. 1987. “Wh-in-Situ: Movement and Unselective Binding.” In *The Representation of (In)definiteness*, Eric J. Reuland and Alice G. B. ter Meulen (eds.). MIT Press: Cambridge, Mass.
- Wahba, W. 1984. *Wh-Constructions in Egyptian Arabic*. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.