Subject licensing in non-verbal clauses in Arabic

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Abstract

This paper investigates the licensing of subjects in Standard Arabic participial clauses. Unlike verbal clauses, whose subject may appear post-verbally, the subject of participial clauses must precede the participle, having properties of topics of verbal clauses. I claim that this is because the canonical subject position, [Spec, vP], is not available for subjects of participles, due to lack of Nom Case. It is shown that neither tense nor a copula is sufficient to license structural Nom Case on a subject in [Spec, vP]. I conclude that the licensing of Nom Case on post-verbal subjects is dependent on V-to-T raising; that is, Nom Case is licensed by the T-V complex. The present account has implications for the nature of pre-verbal subjects in Arabic as well as for the categorial status of copular elements like *kāna*.

Keywords

1 Introduction[1]

This paper provides an explanation for an asymmetry between sentences with verbal and participial predicates in the licensing of subjects in Standard Arabic (SA). While verbal predicates allow a canonical Nom-marked subject, participial predicates do not; their apparent subject is in fact a base-generated topic. I provide a Case-theoretic explanation for this phenomenon.

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[1] I use the following abbreviations: ACC: accusative, COMP: complementizer, ec: empty category, F: feminine, FUT: future, GEN: genitive, IND: indicative, IPFV: imperfective, M: masculine, NEG: negative, NOM: nominative, PL: plural, PASS: passive, PRS: present, PST: past, Q: question particle, SG: singular, SBJV: subjunctive, 1: 1st person, 2: 2nd person, 3: 3rd person.