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DITRANSITIVE SENTENCES IN STANDARD

Arabic: A Treatment in Relational Grammar

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I. Introduction :

This paper discusses ditransitive sentences in Standard Arabic (SA)¹. Such constructions are known as dative movement in Transformational Grammar (cf. Chomsky 1962) and as double object constructions in Arabic grammar (cf. Abbas 1982)². In investigating such constructions, Arabic grammarians did not look beyond case marking to determine the grammatical relation that each element assumes in the sentence; for example, they claim that ditransitive sentences in SA contain two objects (Abbas 1982).

The paper shows that SA ditransitive sentences involve the advancement of an indirect object (IO) to direct object (DO). Contrary to the prediction of the chomeur law (see below), the initial DO maintains its grammatical relation (GR), thus violating the Stratal Uniqueness Law (SUL). Two syntactic arguments will be given to substantiate this claim. An alternative analysis will be

proposed and rejected.

The present paper values the importance of looking into the grammatical function (of elements) as a basis for determining grammatical relations. Therefore, it is natural to take Relational Grammar (RG), which is developed by Perlmutter and Postal (1974), as a frame of reference in the discussion of such constructions. The discussion is organised as follows : Section II introduces ditransitive sentences, as treated in RG. In section III SA ditransitive sentences are dealt with. Section IV is concerned with SA ditransitive vs. the chomeur law and SUL. Section V deals with an alternative analysis of SA ditransitive sentences.

II. Ditransitive Sentences in RG :

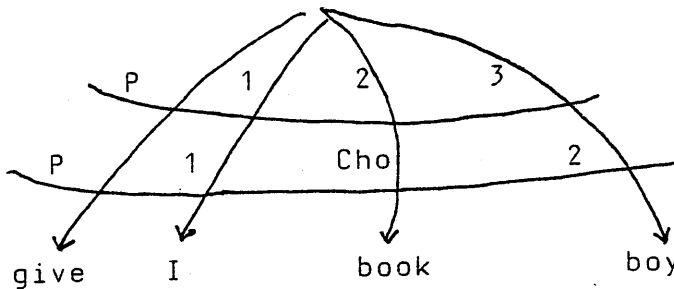
RG accounts for several syntactic constructions : ascensions, inversions, advancements and clause union³. In this section we are only concerned with the treatment of the advancement of an indirect object to direct object constructions.

In such constructions, a nominal that is an IO will assume the position of a Do. The

nominal bearing the initial DO relation will be placed en chomage, that is, it will be a chomeur (section IV). Thus in (1) of which the stratal diagram is (2) :

- (1) I gave the boy the book.
(cf. I gave the book to the boy)

(2)



the nominal **the boy**, which bears the initial IO 3-relation, advances to DO 2 in the second level. The nominal **the book**, which is a DO 2 in the first level, is placed en chomage in the second one.

ID-to-DO advancement has been reported in several languages [Arabic (Salih 1985) ; Chinese (Lin 1986) ; Greek (Joseph 1982); Indonesia (Zanail p.c.) ; Kashmiri (Taha 1986) ; Kinyarwanda (Kimenyi 1980) ; Kunuz Nubian

(Abdel Hafis 1988).

III. Diransitive Sentences in SA :

The basic word order of an SA ditransitive sentence is either V + Subject + DO or V + Subject + IO + DO , provided that the *to* is preceded by the particle *li*⁴ :

(3)a.. a?a:d at-ta:lib-u ak-kita:b-a li l-
returned the-student-Nom the-book-Acc to the
bint-i
girl-Obl

'The student returned the book to the girl'

b. a?a:d at-ta:lib-u li l-bint-i ak-kita:b-a
Lit. 'The student returned to the girl the
book'

In (3) the DO is **ak-kita:b** and the IO is **bint-i**.

For this group of verbs (e.g. a?a:d 'returned') the relative order of DO and IO is interchangeable, so that there could be either V + Subject + DO + IO or V + Subject + IO + DO, as we have seen in (3). This class of verbs, which can be called class I, requires the obligatory presence of *li* before the IO :

(4) a. dafa?a al-valad-u a0-Osman-a li t-
paid the-boy-Nom the-price-Acc to the

ta : jir-i

merchant-Obl

b. dafa?a al-walad-u li t-ta:jir-i aθ-θaman-a

c.* dafa?a al-walad-u at-ta:jir-a aθ-θaman-a

The ungrammaticality of (4c) shows that *li* is obligatory for the verbs of class I. Other verbs of this class are given in (5) :

(5)

qaddam	'present'
arsala	' send '
kataba	' write '
qara?a	' read '
saraha	'explain '
?istara	' boy '
ba : ?	' sell '

There is another group of verbs which we will name class II which only requires the optional use of *li* before what is traditionally called an Io as in :

(6)

- a. a?ta al-walad-u ak-kita:b-a li l-bint-i
give the boy-Nom the-book-Acc to the-girl-Obl
'The boy gave the book to the girl.'

- b. a?ta al-walad-u al-bint-a ak-kita:b-a-Acc
'The boy gave the girl the book.'

Class II verbs include the verbs which are listed in (7) :

(7)

sa?ala	'ask'
ahda	'present'
manana	'endow'
a?ta	'gave'

With respect to clauses such as (6b) the important question that should be asked is whether the two nominals with the accusative case marker are really direct objects. Is it enough to rely on case marking or do we have to resort to other types of evidence that would prove the status or the status change, if there is any, of DO or IO. For this purpose, I propose two syntactic tests for the status of a DO or the status of 2-hood in the light of RG theory. First, only a DO can be passivized in SA :

(9)

- a. daraba al-walad-u al-bint-a
hit the-boy-Nom the-girl-Acc
'The boy hit the girl.'

- b. duriba-t al-bint-u
be hit-F. the-girl-Nom
'The girl was hit.'

In (9b) the nominal **al-bint-u**, which is a DO in (9a), advances to subject, as evidenced by the nominative case marker.

Indirect objects can not advance to subject in SA :

(10)

- a. manaha aṭ-ṭabi:b-u hadiyat-an li l-
gave the doctor-Nom present-Acc to the-
nurse-Obl
'The doctor gave a present to the nurse.'
- b. *muniha-t al-mumarrīḍat-u hadiyat-an li
'The nurse was a given a present to.'

Thus if the two nominals (with accusative case marker) of a class II verb are DOs in (6b), repeated here, then they should be able to passivize (i.e. advance to subject). That they do can be seen in (11b-c) :

(11)

- a. aʔta al-walad-u al-bint-a ak-kita:b-a
gave the-boy-Nom the-girl-Acc the-book-Acc

'The boy gave the girl the book.'

b.u?tiya-t al-bint-u ak-kita:b-a
be given-F. the-girl-Nom the-book-Acc
'The girl was the book.'

c.u?tiya as-kita:b-u al-bint-a
be given the-book-Nom the girl-Acc
'The book was given the girl.'

Clauses (11b-c) show that the nominals **al-bint-a** and **ak-kita:b-a** can advance to subject in a passive sentence. Since only a DO can undergo passivization, these nominals must be DOs in (11a).

The second evidence that proves that class II verbs have two DOs is relativization. A DO can be relativized by leaving a pronominal suffix on the verb stem as in (12c) :

(12)

a. ḍaraba al-walad-u al-bint-u
hit the-boy-Nom the-girl-Acc
'The boy hit the girl.'

b. al-walad alazi ḍaraba al-bint-a
the-boy that hit the-girl-Acc
'The boy that hit the girl.'

c. al-bint-u allati ḍarab-ha al-walad-u
the girl-Nom that hit-her the-boy-Nom
'The girl that the boy hit'

Clauses such as (12b-c) illustrate the relativization of a subject and a DO, respectively. When an IO is relativized, no pronominal suffix is left on the verb stem :

(13)

- a. manaha al-mudaria-u al-hadiyat-a li
gave the-teacher-Nom the-present-Acc to
l-walad-i
'the teacher gave the present to the boy'
- b. *al-walad-u allazi manaha-hu al-mudaris-u
the-boy-Nom that gave-him the-teacher-Nom
al-hadiyat-a li
'the boy who the teacher gave the present
to!
- c. al-walad-u allazi-manaha al-mudaris-u al-
the-boy-Nom that gave the teacher-Nom the
hadiyat-a la-hu
present-Acc to-him
'the boy who the teacher gave the present
to (him)'

Given the facts discussed above, if the nominals al-bint-a and ak-kita:b-a in (60) are indeed DOs, they should behave so with regard to relativization : they are to relativize (i. e. be the head of a relative clause) by having

a pronominal suffix attached to the verb stem :

(14)

a. al-bint-u allati a?ta:-ha al-walad-u
the-girl-Nom that gave-her the-boy-Nom
ak-kita:b-a
the-book-Acc
'the girl that the boy gave the book'

b. ak-kita:b-u allazi a?ta:hu al-walad-u
the-book-Nom that gave-her the-boy-Nom
al-bint-a
the-girl-Acc
'the book that the boy gave the girl'

In (14b) the relativized nominal has left a pronominal suffix on the verb stem, indicating that it is no longer an IO (cf. 13b-c).

Thus passivization and relativization provide evidence for the property of class II verbs : they have two DOs. This fact violates two RG laws, the chomeur law and SUL. This is discussed in the following section.

IV SA Ditransitive Sentences vs. the chomeur Law and SUL

One of the basic laws in RG is the

Chomeur Law, formulated by Perlmutter and Postal as follows :

(15)

the chomeur law

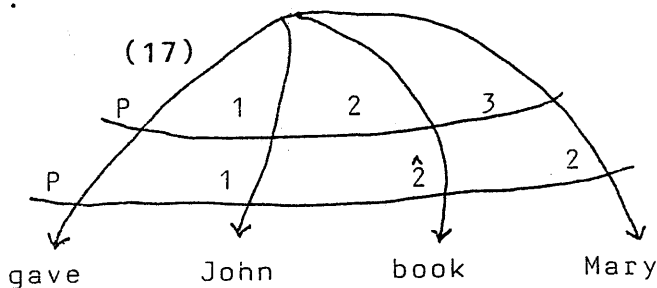
A nominal will be a chomeur if, and only if, its grammatical relation is taken over by another nominal.

Here are sentences illustrating the phenomena:

(16)

- a. John gave the book to Mary.
- b. John gave Mary the book.

Sentence (16a) involves one stratum in which John heads a 1-arc (subject), **the book**, a 2-arc (DO) and **Mary** a 3-arc (IO). Compared to (16a), (16b) has two strata (levels) that can be illustrated with the relational network (RN) represented in the stratal diagram (17) :



In (17) **Mary** heads an initial 3- but a final 2-arc (DO), **the book**, an initial 2 (DO) but a final cho-arc, which means that it ceases to possess the properties of a 2 (DO); for example, it can no longer advance to subject in a passive :

(18) * The book was given Mary.

Now returning to SA examples of class II verbs, we can see what is at stake. It has been pointed out that in sentences such as (6b), which contain a class II verb, there are two nominals that behave as DOs with regard to two syntactic facts : passivization and relativization. The chomeur law is, of course, violated in (6b) since the nominal **the book**, the initial 2 (DO), does not turn into a chomeur, as expected ; it goes on to maintain its grammatical relation. The sentence ends up with DOs, thus violating another RG law -- SUL. This law (cf. Perlmutter 1983) claims that no stratum can contain more than one subject, one DO or one IO.

To recapitulate, the two RG laws (the chomeur law and the SUL) are violated by SA data. In the following discussion we will tackle the possibility of positing an alternative analysis that would save either law.

V. An Alternative Analysis :

Claims for the inadequacy of the chomeur law and / or the SUL are not new (cf. Kimenyi 1980 ; Gary and Keenan 1977). Kimenyi, for example, argues that Kinyarwanda (a Bantu language) ditransitive sentences involve two DOs that behave the same way with respect to such syntactic functions as passivization and relativization, thus violating the chomeur law and the SUL.

Faced with such problems, Perlmutter and Postal (1983) proposed an alternative analysis that would account for the Kinyarwanda facts in such a way that the SUL would be saved: It has been claimed that in Kinyarwanda the IO directly advances to subject (in passives) without going through the intermediate stage of being a DO.

The same proposal would fail to apply to SA ditransitive sentences (11b-c) and (14a-b); for example, we can not say that the nominal **al-bint-u** 'the girl' in (11b) directly advances from the IO status to the subject status. If this were the case, we would end up with (18) instead of (11b) :

(18)* u?tiya-t al-bint-u ak-kita:b-a li
be given-F. the-girl-Nom the-book-Acc to
'The girl was given the book to.'

Thus it is clear that the nominals *al-bint-a* and *ak-kita:b-a* in clauses like (11a) are DOs and there is nothing we can do to save the RG laws (the chomeur law and the SUL).

VI. Conclusion :

This paper has argued that SA ditransitive clauses involve the advancement of an indirect object to the status of a direct object, as indicated by two syntactic functions, passivization and relativization. The advancement phenomena in SA was shown to violate two basic laws in RG, the chomeur law and the SUL.

NOTES

- 1- The data used in this paper were mostly elicited from scholars in Arabic (cf. Abbas (1982)). I am grateful to a number of my colleagues for their comments and judgments on the well-formedness or ill-formedness of the sentences used here : Dr Osman, Dr Sayed Ali and Dr Aboul-Futouh.
- 2- Salih (1985) argues that SA ditransitive sentences conform to RG laws : they involve the presence of one Do only, the initial DO being placed en chomage.
- 3- For a detailed discussion of such constructions, see Perlmutter 1983 and Perlmutter and Rosen 1984.
- 4- The following abbreviations are used in the paper :

Acc	Accusative
Cho	Chomeur
DO	direct object
F	Feminine
GR	Grammatical Relation
ID	indirect object
Nom	nominative

RG	Relational Grammar
SA	Standard Arabic
1	subject
2	DO
3	IO

R E F E R E N C E

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