Wh-Constructions in San'ani Arabic

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1. Introduction[1]

This talk will apply the research of well-known Arabic wh-constructions to a lesser-studied Arabic dialect: San'ani Arabic (SA) spoken in Yemen.

1.1 The Problem

- Arabic syntactic research generally focuses on more widely studied dialects - Egyptian, Levantine, Maghrebi - see Shlonsky (2002), Aoun, Benmamoun, and Choueiri (2010), Wahba (1984), Brustad (2000), among many others
- Wh-Constructions of the more popular Arabic dialects have been described and categorized into 3 basic "strategies"
- The syntax of SA, however, is generally understudied (Watson 1993, an exception)
- Lesser studied dialects can provide rich language data crucial in understanding the full diversity of the Arabic language.

1.2 The Plan

- Describe the strategies for question formation that have been found in other Arabic dialects (Section 2)
- Present a study and the resulting grammaticality scale data from native SA speakers (Section 3-4)
- Investigate a distinctive repair strategy utilized be several consultants (Section 5)
- Discuss the data and position it within the wider scope of Arabic dialects (Section 6-7)

2. The Three Strategies

The gap strategy, the resumptive strategy, and in-situ are the three constructions found across Arabic varieties.

2.1 The Gap Strategy

- The wh-element is extracted from its position in the sentence and moved to the beginning of the sentence:

    (1)   Gap Strategy in Lebanese Arabic
            'ayya   mmasil   šeft   ∅   b-l-mat'am
            which   actor   saw.2ms   in-the-restaurant
            Which actor did you see in the restaurant?   (Aoun et al 2010: 128)

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[1] Thanks to Hector Campos and Ruth Kramer for their invaluble support throughout this project.

- Adopting Rizzi's structure of the left periphery (1997), we assume the wh-element moves to [Spec, FOCP] and leaves a trace:

  (2)   Structure of the Gap Strategy
          a. [FORCEP [FOCP wh-element$_i$ [TP ..... trace$_i$]]]]
          b. [FORCEP [FOCP ['ayya mmasil]$_i$ [TP šeft t$_i$ b-l- mat'am]]]]

- Because the gap strategy involves movement, we expect this construction to be sensitive to islands (Aoun et al (2010), citing Ross (1967)).

2.2 The Resumptive Strategy

- The wh-element is also in the left periphery.
- However, unlike the gap strategy, the wh-element is related to a resumptive pronominal element that cliticizes to the verb:

  (3)   Resumptive Strategy in Modern Standard Arabic
          man   zaraat   -hu   na:dia
          who   visit.PAST.3fs -obj.2ms   Nadia
          'Who did Nadia visit?   (Aoun et al 2010: 132)

- Crucially, this model does not involve movement.
- The wh-element is generated in [Spec, TOPP]:

  (4)   Structure of the Resumptive Strategy
          a. [FORCEP [TOPP wh-element$_i$ [FINP [TP ..... clitic$_i$]]]]
          b. [FORCEP [TOPP man$_i$ [FINP [TP zaraat-hu$_i$ na:dia]]]]

- This construction is consistent with Rizzi's analysis of the left periphery (1997), which proposed that TOP elements can be related to resumptive clitics, while FOC elements cannot.
- Because there is no movement, the resumptive strategy is not sensitive to islands across clause boundaries, as seen in Lebanese and MSA (Aoun et al 2010: 147).

2.3. In-Situ

- The wh-element remains in its variable position lower in the sentence.

  (5)   In-Situ in Egyptian Arabic
          ša:fit   miin?
          see.PAST.3fs   who
          "Who did she see?   (Jelinek 2002: 100)

- The syntax of this construction mirrors the syntax of a declarative sentence.

2.4 Putting it all together

- Each dialect of Arabic variably utilizes or rejects these three constructions. Below is a chart summarizing the strategies of question formation in MSA, Lebanese, Palestinian, and Egyptian.

(6)

	Gap	Resumptive	In-situ
Modern Standard	XX (default)	X	*
Lebanese	XX	X	X
Palestinian	XX (default)	*	*
Egyptian	X	*	XX (default)
San'ani	?	?	?

XX = widely grammatical

X = grammatical with restrictions

* = ungrammatical

(chart constructed from Aoun et all, Rubin, and Shlonsky)

- The goal of this project is to complete the San'ani row of the chart.

3. THE STUDY

3.1 The Questions
- 16 potential San'ani Arabic questions utilizing the wh-elements "who" or "which NP" in the object position
    - 6 simple constituent questions testing for gap, resumptive, and in-situ constructions
    - 4 questions testing for wh-islands using "whether"
    - 4 questions testing wh-constructions with relative clauses
    - 2 questions testing wh-constructions with adjunct clauses
- Questions were modifications of sentences found in San'ani Arabic grammars (Watson 1993, 1996 and Qafisheh 1992)
- Consultants asked to evaluate each on a grammaticality scale of 1-5
- Consultants also asked to give feedback and correct sentences as they saw fit

3.2 The Consultants
- 2 male, 2 female
- Ages 20-41
- All native speakers of San'ani Arabic and have lived in San'a for most of their lives
- All high school graduates, and either still in college or graduated from college

4. THE RESULTS

4.1 Constituent Questions
- <u>Expectation:</u> Gap strategy found in SA grammars (Watson 1993, 1996 and Qafisheh 1992) and most (all?) varieties of Arabic. No prediction for resumptive or in-situ.
- **Gap strategy** was highly preferred, with an average rating of 4.75
- **Resumptive** averaged 1.8
    - "better to say without the [resumptive pronoun] at the end"
    - "it's right, but we use the [gap strategy] more"
- **In-situ** averaged 2.1
    - 3 instances of repairs to the gap strategy
    - "you won't hear someone asking you like this"

4.2 Wh-island "Whether"
- Expectation: Extraction across a wh-island is expected to be ungrammatical (Ross 1967). The resumptive strategy should not be affected.
- Both strategies generally ungrammatical
- **Gap strategy** was slightly prefered at 1.5
- **Resumptive** averaged 1.1
    - 1 instance repaired to gap strategy

4.3 Relative Clauses
- Expectation: Extraction across a relative clause is expected to be ungrammatical (Ross 1967). If the resumptive strategy is available in SA, this constraint will have no effect on grammaticality.
- **Gap strategy** slightly preferred at 2
- **Resumptive** averaged 1.6

4.4 Adjunct Clauses
- Expectation: Strong island effects expected for the gap strategy. Again, no effect is predicted with the resumptive strategy.
- On the whole ungrammatical, with both strategies averaging 1.25

4.5 Summary
- Gap strategy is highly preferable in simple constituent questions.
- Extraction across wh-islands, relative clauses, and adjunct clauses via the gap strategy is generally ungrammatical, although this method is (very slightly) preferred over a no-movement resumptive strategy.

5. ONE MORE CONSTRUCTON

In 4 instances, a consultant repaired either the wh-island or the relative clause with a question utilizing the "Class II Resumptive Strategy," as discussed by Shlonsky (2002) and Aoun et al (2010).

- Class II construction is evidenced by the use of a complementizer and a resumptive pronominal being located in the lower CP (Shlonsky 2002: 142)
- The Class II construction was not included in the original study because it expresses a slightly marked meaning - the construction requires a presupposition (Shlonsky 2002: 141)
- The presupposition was inadvertently given in order to give the consultants a context for each sentence.

(7)   Consultant Repair from a Resumptive Wh-island Question into Class II Resumptive
man al-bint illi   kul an -nas   'a:rafi:n   inna   muhammad   'atazowaju   -ha
who the-girl that all   the -people know.3pl whether Mohammad marry.PAST.3ms -obj.3fs
"Who do the people know whether Mohammad married (her)?"

5.1 The Structure for Class II

- Shlonsky (2002) analyzes as a null copular sentence taking null-headed free relative clause as its definite predicate:

(8)   Structure of the Class II Resumptive Strategy
       a. [FORCEP [FocP wh-element_i [TP t_i [DP pro [CP OP_j complementizer [TP ... clitic_j]]]]]] (Shlonsky 2002: 152)
       b.[FORCEP [FocP [man al-bint]_i [TP t_i [DP pro [CP OP_j illi [TP kul an-nas 'a:rafi:n inna muhammad 'atazowaju-ha_j]]]]]]

- The wh-element originates as the subject of the higher clause, and moves to the highest CP to fulfill the Wh-Criterion.
    o Movement to [Spec, FOCP], similar to the movement in the gap strategy
- The lower CP is a free relative clause, with an OP in [Spec, CP] coreferenced with a resumptive element in a lower position.
- Crucially, the overt wh-element and the resumptive clitic are not directly related (Aoun et al, 2010: 152).
- Dialects that do not have the basic resumptive strategy can still have the Class II resumptive strategy (eg. Egyptian, Palestinian). (Aoun et al 2010: 152)

5.2 Making the null pronominal element overt

- In 2 instances, consultants utilized an overt pronominal element in their Class II construction:

(9)   Consultant Repair from a Wh-island Question Resumptive Utilizing Overt Pronominal
       man al-bint hi: illi   kul an -nas   a:rafi:n inna   muhammad 'atazowaju   -ha
       who the-girl she that   all the-people know.3pl whether Mohammad marry.PAST.3ms-obj.3fs
       "Who do all the people know whether Mohammad married (her)?

(10)   Consultant Repair from a Relative Clause Resumptive Utilizing Overt Pronominal
       man al-bint hi: alladi: basart   ar-rajja:l 'atzawwaj   -ha   ams
       who the-girl she that   see.PAST.2ms the-man   marry.PAST.3ms -obj.3fs yesterday
       "Who did you see the man who married (her) yesterday?
       b. [FORCEP [FocP [man al-bint]_i [TP t_i [DP hi: [CP OP_j alladi: [TP basart ar-rajja:l 'atzawwaj-ha_j]]]]]]

- This further supports Shlonsky's analysis of the Class II structure.

6. DISCUSSION

- The gap strategy is clearly the default construction in SA.
- In-situ is unavailable, due to its low scores, high number of repairs, and strong negative feedback from consultants.
- The resumptive strategy also received low scores.
    o However, fewer repairs and less negative feedback. Instead, consultants said "it's better when..." or "it's right, but..."
- 2 hypotheses for why the negative resumptive feedback was weaker:
    i.   The resumptive construction is available within SA, but with many more restrictions than the gap strategy.
    ii. The resumptive construction is unavailable within SA, but the SA consultants were bringing in knowledge of another Arabic variety, namely MSA, to their analyses.
- (i.) is unlikely, due to the strong ungrammaticality judgments of the questions testing for island sensitivity.
    o If the resumptive strategy were available in SA, then it arguably would score higher than the gap strategy, in the context of clear island constraint violations.

- o   Instead, the gap strategy scored as well or better than the resumptive strategy, despite island violations in the former.
- (ii.) is more likely, given the diglossic nature of the Arabic language and the nature of the study (inherently "test-like") - despite explicit instructions for the consultants to use "language that you use at home, NOT school".
- The availability of the Class II resumption, clearly evident in SA, is not related to the availability of the basic resumptive strategy.
- I therefore argue for hypothesis (ii), and thus that the basic resumptive strategy is not available in SA.

7. CONCLUSION

Wh-constructions in SA can thus be summarized in the following chart:

(11)

	Gap	Resumptive	Class II Resumptive	In-situ
San'ani	XX (default)	*	X	*

- SA seems to pattern most similar to Palestinian Arabic.

Areas for Further Research

- Further research to conclude that the weak negative feedback to the resumptive strategy is indeed influenced from MSA, and not evidence for a resumptive strategy inherent in SA
- Additional studies testing other wh-elements, including adverbials, in addition to testing extraction of wh-elements from non-object positions
- Additional studies may discover particular contexts in which the basic resumptive or the in-situ constructions are available in SA, further specifying the paradigm of wh-constructions in SA

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