

The Syntax of Complementizers in Algerian Arabic: A Descriptive Study

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Abstract—The syntax of the Arabic language has not been too much dealt with in the literature of syntactic studies. The issue within this lack of interest is that most studies are done in the fields of vocabulary, language teaching, second language acquisition, and so forth. Algerian Arabic, as a dialectal descendent of Standard Arabic, is one of the language varieties that is rarely documented in syntax. Therefore, the present study aims at discussing the syntactic issue of complementizers in Algerian Arabic. A considerable descriptive account is devoted to the syntactic consideration of complementizers in Algerian Arabic in CP (Complement Phrase) and DP (Derivative Phrase) layers with some examples, illustrations, and explanations according to the researcher's own analysis and knowledge of the language variety. The current descriptive research ended up by the idea that the syntactic rules of Algerian Arabic complementizers are distinct from those of Standard Arabic in place and function. Besides, the different types of complementizers, determined by the predicate, shape not only sentence structure but also have certain effects on its components as case assignment and agreement.

Keywords—Algerian Arabic, Case Assignment, Clauses, Complementizers, Predicate, Syntactic Structure.

I. INTRODUCTION

Algerian Arabic is one of the dialectal varieties descendent from Classical Arabic. It is widely spoken in the country of Algeria which is situated in the Maghreb of northern Africa. This variety consists of, due to some historical and cultural reasons, a mixture of dialects. Interestingly, one can find linguistic forms originating from Berber, Turkish language, Moroccan Arabic, Spanish, and many other linguistic backgrounds that have large come to the area. The diversity that exists in the Algerian Arabic language made it richer in terms of lexicon and therefore grammatical structure.

In his Introduction of Explanations in the Syntactic Category of Algerian Arabic, Souag (2006) claims that many languages' syntax is not well examined nor was it traced across time. Algerian Arabic is one of the linguistic varieties that, although it has more than forty million speakers, perceives less scholarly attention with regard to syntax. A large number of works in the literature have focused on lexis and code switching; but syntax has been given little attention. Algerian Arabic presents an excellent opportunity to understand and examine the development as well as the nature of certain syntactic phenomena and compare them with findings in other languages, dialects or varieties. For this reason, we have selected this topic to discuss within this paper. This study tries to provide a descriptive account with regard to complementizers found in Algerian Arabic.

Besides, it attempts to follow some generalizations and categorizations put forward by other linguists interested in the syntactic structure and function of complementizers in the Arabic language globally.

Especially with reference to the CP and DP layers, finite and infinite clauses, the present descriptive study tries to figure out which case does the Algerian Arabic complementizer assign.

II. TYPES OF ALGERIAN COMPLEMENTIZERS

In Algerian Arabic, there are two types of complementizers: those which introduce finite clauses and those which initiate non-finite clauses. By non-finite clauses, it is meant that the control clause cannot be interpreted on its own; or more precisely that the control clause it attached in meaning with the matrix clause.

(1) tbanli belli lweld rah yelʃab.

t- ban - l-i belli l-weld rah ye-lʃab

It-(fem) appear (3pers.sing.pres) to-me that the-boy is
3pers.sing.pres- v. play

'It seems that the boy is playing'.

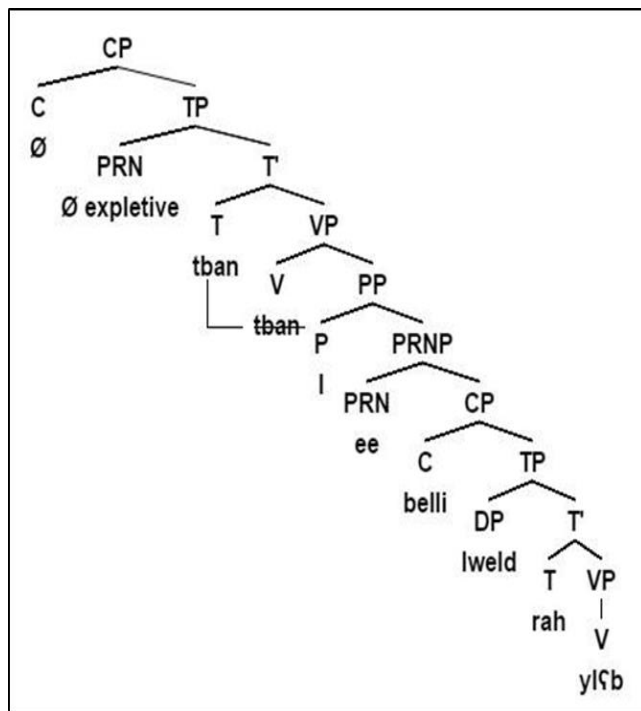


Figure 1. The syntactic tree of example (1) (2) hawelt baf neqra

hawel-t baf ne-qra
 Try (1pers.sing.past) I to I (1pers.sing.past) study
 'I tried to study'.

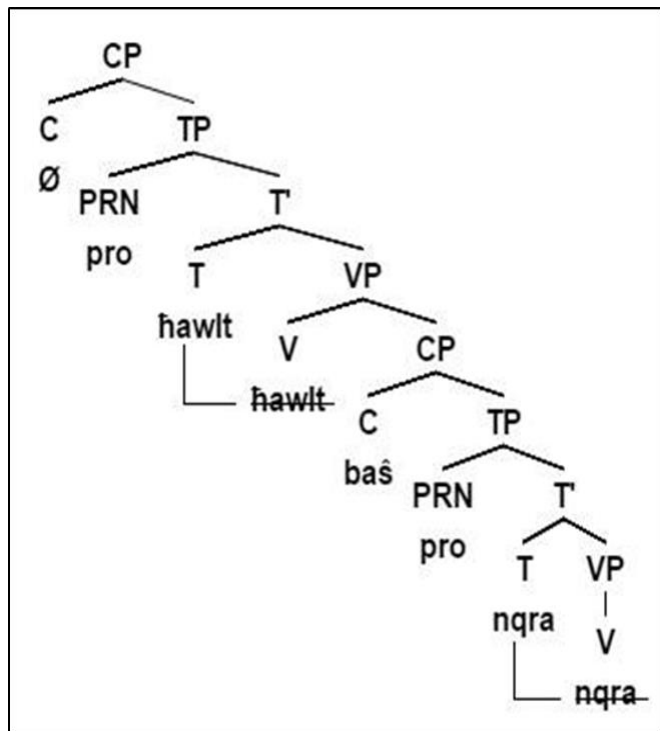


Figure 2. The syntactic tree of example 2

What is noticeable is that most Algerian Arabic complementizers occur either overtly or covertly in the middle of the structure but rarely at the beginning like what we see in modern Standard Arabic. Yet, there are some complementizers that can be overtly spelled out as they introduce the sentence. Here are some examples.

- (3) a. jek xaser xaser
 that loser-2pers.sing.masc
 'You will lose' (literal meaning 'no need to try').
- b. Mallah el-wahed rah tšab šli-ha
 That the-one be-1pers.sing.masc tire-3pers.sing.past for-it-fem
 'We worked on it a lot'.
- c. Kelli l- dżaw rah shbab lyoum
 That the-climat be-3pers.sing.masc.pres good-sing.masc today
 'The weather is nice today'.

III. CATEGORIES OF ALGERIAN ARABIC COMPLEMENTIZERS

Relevant There are three categories of complementizers, in Algerian Arabic. They depend on the type of clause they occur in: declarative particles, conditional interrogative particles, and relative particles. First, declarative complementizers are: "en" 'that', "belli" 'that', "baf" 'for'. Second, conditional interrogative complementizers are: "jla" 'if', "kelli" 'as if'. Finally, relative particles are: "lli" or "elli" 'that'.

3.1 The Complementizer Choice is determined by the Predicate

Complementizers "en" and "jla" are selected for by a higher predicate with regard to certain implications on where these complementizers are in the clause structure. Consider examples where different types of clauses with verbs "saqsit" and "xassak" or "lazmek" 'you need'.

- (4) a. Xass-ak enn-ak (nta) te-tlab smah
 Need-youACC that-youACC (you sng.masc) ask-2pers.sing.masc.pres apology
 'You need to apologize'
- b. *xass-ak jla te-tlab smah
 Need-youACC if ask-2pers.sing.masc.pres apology
 'You need to apologize'
- (5) a. Saqsi-t-ha jla te-qbel bi-ja
 Ask-1pers.sing.past-ACC if accept-3pers.sing.fem.pres of-me
 'I asked her if she will marry me'
- b. *saqsi-t-ha en-ha te9bel bija
 Ask-1pers.sing.past-ACC that accept-3pers.sing.fem.pres of-me
 '*I asked her that she will marry me

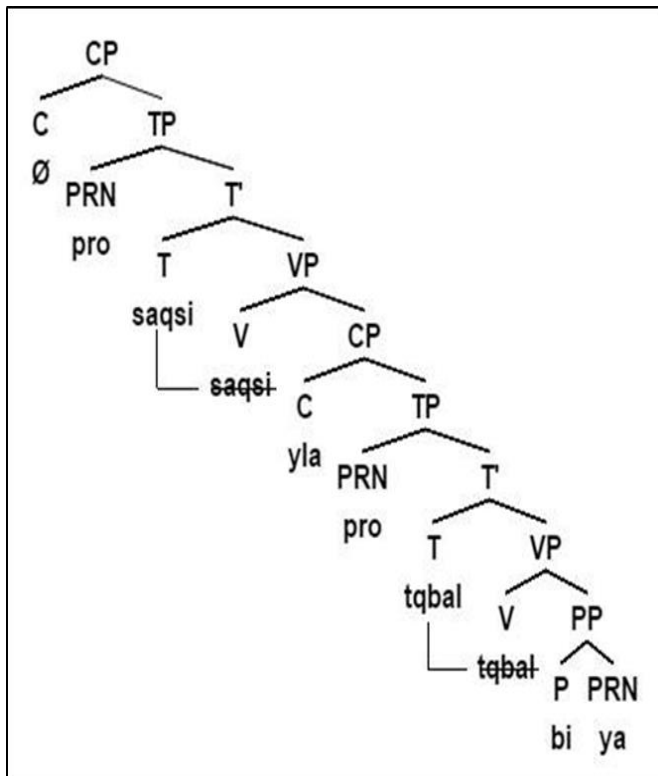


Figure 3. The syntactic tree of example (5)

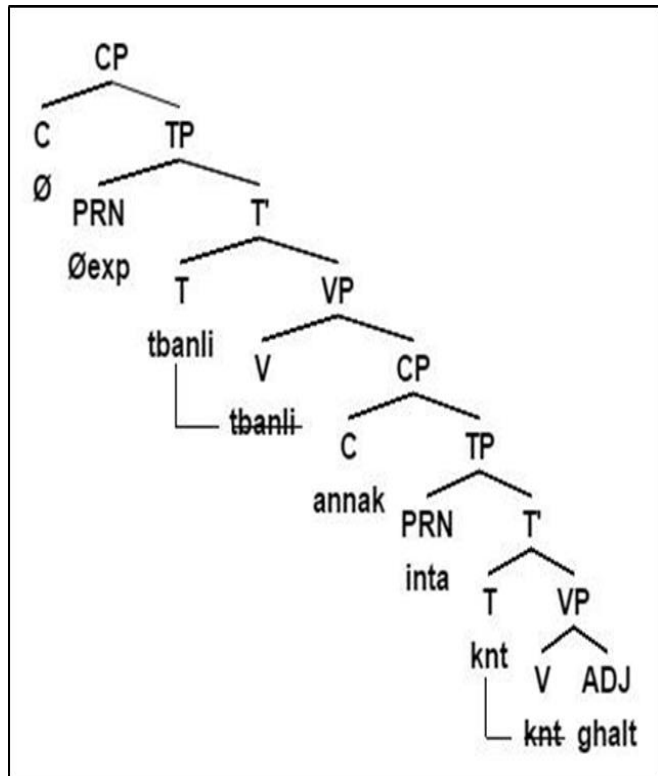


Figure 4. The syntactic tree of example (6)

The predicate "xass" selects for a declarative statement headed by the complementizer "en", but cannot select for an interrogative complementizers "jla". On the other hand, the second predicate/verb "saqsi" does not select for the complementizer "en" (which is declarative in nature). Instead, it selects for an interrogative clause as its complement is headed by the complementizer "jla".

3.2 The Complementizer "en" and Agreement in Algerian Arabic

As far as complementizer agreement with the following noun, Algerian complementizers do not show a great appearance of agreement except for a slight agreement of the "en" complementizer.

- (6) a. Tbanli enn-ak (enta) lyalet
Seem-to-me-3FSG that-1MSG the-mistaken
'It seems to me that you are mistaken'
- b. Tbanli en-ou (howa) lyalet
Seem-to-me-3MSG that-1MSG the-mistaken
'It seems to me that he is mistaken'
- c. Tbanli en-ha (hiya) lyalta
Seem-to-me-3FSG that-1FSG the-mistaken (fem.sing)
'It seems to me that she is mistaken'
- d. Tbanli en-hom (Houma) lyaltin
Seem-to-me-3FSG that-3PL the-mistaken (plur)
'It seems to me that they are mistaken.'

The complementizer "en" can occur especially after verbs of modality such as "jxass" in the sense of "wadzeb ʕlih" which expresses a must in dialectal Algerian Arabic. For example: wadzeb ʕlik enn-ak tzourou 'it's your duty to visit him'.

In this sentence, the complementizer "jla" can be replaced either by a silent spell out and it becomes null, or replaced by the declarative complementizer "bash". This gives us a structure as the following: wadzeb ʕlik baʕ tzourou 'it's your duty to visit him'.

The complementizer "en" shows up in an embedded clause with pro subject (with slight agreement). Little pro is understood because of the rich morphology of the language especially of the component that follows the complementizer.

3.3 The "belli" Complementizer and Case Assignment

Another declarative complementizer is "belli" 'that'. Unlike standard Arabic complementizer "inna" which can be attached to clitics (as in Tsai, 1995) and which is assigned accusative case, Algerian Arabic complementizer "belli" cannot be attached to clitics. The embedded subject cannot be realized as a clitic on the complementizer as it is considered as ungrammatical. Let us examine the following examples:

- (7) a. *ʕlabal-i belli-h jay
Know-me 1pers.sing.masc.pres that-ACC-masc come-3pers.sing.masc.pres

'I know that he comes'

b. *ʕlabal-i belli-ha jaya
 Know-me-1pers.sing.masc.pres that-ACC-fem come-3pers.sing.fem.pres

'I know that she comes'

The complementizer "belli" can be expressed overtly as well as it can be null. The latter can be found in verbless sentences. The meaning of the complementizer is deduced and can be intuitively understood.

(8) a. T-ban-li el-bent blaset-ha f dar
 Seem-to-me-pres the-girl place-herACC at home
'It seems to me that the place of the girl is home'

b. t-ban-li belli l-bent blaset-ha f dar
 seem-to-me-pres that the-girl place-herACC at home
'It seems to me that the place of the girl is home'

It can be claimed that the embedded accusative NP (Noun Phrase) is in the subject position. The subject of the embedded clause which is placed after the null or the overt complementizer "belli" is assigned accusative case.

IV. CONDITIONAL INTERROGATIVE COMPLEMENTIZERS

This type of complementizers initiates non-finite clauses by having the meaning of a condition or interrogative. Algerian Arabic complementizers include "jla" 'if', and "ki" 'when+that'. Let us consider the following examples:

4.1 The Interrogative Complementizer "jla"

(9) a. Seqsi-ha jla qrat el-ktab
 Ask-2pers.sing.masc.imper-herACC if read-3pers.sing.fem.past the-book
'Ask her if she read the book'

b. Seqsi-ha jla l-mra qrat el-ktab.
 Ask-2pers.sing.masc.imper-herACC if the-woman read-3pers.sing.fem.past the-book

'Ask her if the woman read the book'

We notice that the conditional-interrogative complementizer "jla" can be followed either by a null little pro which can be intuitively deduced by the high inflected morphology of the language (in the first example, the subject of the embedded clause is related to the accusative pronoun/morpheme attached to the verb of the matrix clause); as it can be followed by an overt subject of the embedded clause. More to the point, the interrogative complementizer "jla" can only be given a spell out but never null (this causes ungrammaticality of the structure and therefore ambiguity).

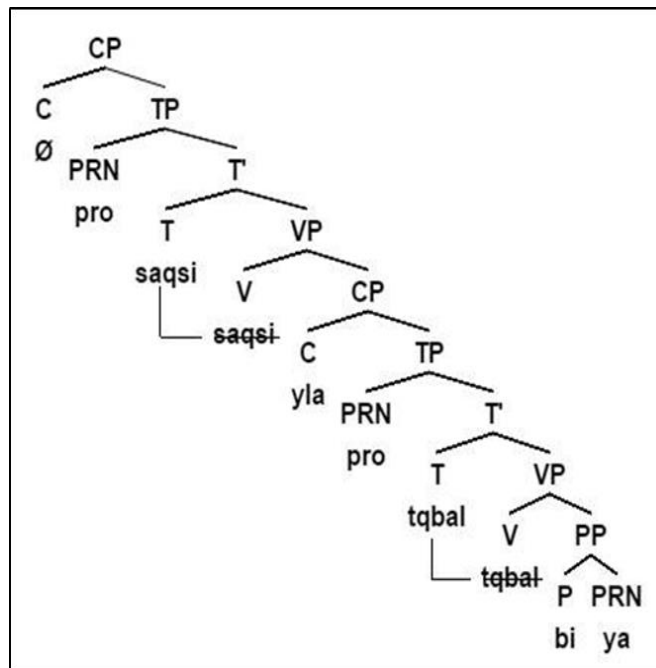


Figure 5: The syntactic tree of example (6) refined

4.2 The Complementizer "jla": Relation with Topic and Focus

What is obvious in Algerian Arabic is that "yla" is that type of complementizer that introduces embedded declaratives.

(10) a. Saqsi-t jla farb-ou lqahwa
 Ask-1pers.sing.masc.past if drink-3pers.plur.past the-coffe
'I asked if they drank coffee'

b. *saqsi-t farb-ou l-qahwa jla houma
 Ask-1pers.sing.masc.past drink-3pers.plur.past the-coffe if they

c. *saqsi-t farb-ou jla houma l-qahwa
 Ask-1pers.sing.masc.past drink-3pers.plur.past if they the-coffee

"jla" can precede a focused element, but cannot be preceded by a focused element. The focused element does not have to be the whole VP (Verb Phrase); it can just be the verb (as in Omari and Branigan, 2014). Hence, in "saqsit jla frab Ali lqahwa-", the focused verb should follow but not precede the complementizer "jla". As far as topicalization is concerned, the complementizer "jla" can be preceded but not followed by a topic. Let us examine this fact by the following examples:

(11) a. Saqsi-t l-weld jla l-bent darbat-ou
 Ask-1pers.sing.masc.past the-boy if the-girl kick-3pers.sing.fem.past-ACC
'I asked the boy if the girl kicked him'

b. *saqsi-t jla l-weld l-bent darbat-ou
 Ask-1pers.sing.masc.past if the-boy the-girl kick-3pers.sing.fem.past-ACC
 *I asked if the boy the girl kicked him.

The second sentence results to ungrammaticality. Therefore, the topic [Iweld] can only come before but not after the interrogative complementizer "jla".

4.3 The Conditional/ Consequential Complementizer "ki"

Another complementizer (in Algerian Arabic) is "ki" 'that'. It can be considered to be either conditional or consequential. Let us consider the following example:

(12) Ne-ħmed rab-i ki xerj-et salamat
 Thank-1pers.sing.masc.pres God-my that go-it-
 3pers.sing.fem.past safe
 'I thank God that everything is alright' (lit. Meaning)
 The complementizer "ki" introduces the embedded clause [xerjet salamt] which appears to be a result of the first matrix clause and therefore consequential. [xerjet] refers to a situation or an accident/ expletive.

4.4 The Complementizer "lli" and Predicate Selection

After discussing declarative and conditional particles of the complementizer phrase/ projection; it lasts the third category of complementizers which relative particles. A prominent relative complementizer is "lli". Let us compare the following examples which contain the complementizer "lli".

(13) a. Mliħ lli Ahmed ħaf-ha
 Good that Ahmed see-3pers.sing.masc.past-herACC
 'It is good that Ahmed saw her'.
 b. *t-ban-li lli Ahmed drab l-weld
 Seem3pers.sing.fem.past-to-me that Ahmed kick-
 3pers.sing.masc.past the-boy
 'It seems to me that Ahmed kicked the boy'.

The complementizer "lli" cannot be selected for by most verbal predicates. However, this complementizer does appear to be able to be selected by adjectival predicates (as shown in the first grammatical example). This conclusion has been arrived at by Aldwayan et. al (2010) in which it is claimed that complementizers can be selected by adjectival predicates rather than verbal predicates.

V. CONCLUSION

Like the majority of the dialects of the Arabic language, Algerian Arabic has a number of its own complementizers. The latter syntactic component has its own specificities with regard to the language or more accurately to the dialect. We have seen distinct types and categorizations of Algerian Arabic complementizers ranging from those which occur in finite and non-finite clauses coming to their own properties and characteristics where they can be null or spell out, where they assign case or not, and when they show agreement or not. This syntactic characterization is based on the researcher's own dialect, intuition and data which may differ

respectively from one area to another but not to a great extent from our generalizations.

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