Arabic Syntax
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About Arabic

- 206,000,000 L1 speakers of all Arabic varieties (ethnologue)
- We will discuss Modern Standard Arabic (Fusah)

- Some places that it's spoken: Middle East, North Africa. Also in Algeria, Bahrain, Chad, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian West Bank and Gaza, Qatar, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen. (ethnologue)
- Script reads right to left
Overview

• Word Order VSO or not VSO…
• Hierarchy of Projections
• Basic Sentences
• Negation
• Interrogatives
• ECM & Pro (not!)
VSO, or is it????

• Case Marking allows virtually any word order

• VSO and SVO most common

• Most agree that Arabic is VSO
• MSA (Fusah) mostly VSO
• Egyptian mostly SVO

zayd-un qabala amr-an (SVO)
Zayd met Amr
qabala zayd-un 'amr-an
met Zayd Amr
Hierarchy of the DP

DP>(Poss)>nP>NP

with other postnominal modifiers such as (Numbers) and (Quantifiers) possible as well
Hierarchy Continued

FP > CP > AP > TP > (NEG) > vP > VP

New Categories

FP- is a functional projection (not CP) where an auxiliary can go

AP- Aspect phrase
Verbless Sentence

• In cases where the sentence is equational (ie. x is y) Arabic does not use a verb
• 'ana taalib (I am a student)
• Word order is always SO
6 Ways to Say Zayd met Amar (there are more)

• qabala zayd-un 'amr-an
• qabala amr-an zayd-un
• zayd-un qabala amr-an
• zayd-un amr-an qabala
• amr-an qabala zayd-un
• amr-an zayd-un qabala

With case marking all word orders are grammatical in MSA
Negation

A. laa ya-qra-u Zayd-un al-kitaab-a
   NegPresent IMPER-read 3sg.mas.-IND Zayd-NOM the-book-ACC
   “Zayd is not reading the book.”

B. lam ya-qra-Ø Zayd-un al-kitaab-a
   NegPast IMPER-read 3sgmas-JUS Zayd-NOM the-book-ACC
   “Zayd did not read the book.”

C. lan ya-qra-a Zayd-un al-kitaab-a
   NegFuture IMPER-read 3sgmas-SUB Zayd-NOM the-book-ACC
   “Zayd will not read the book.”

D. t-tullab-u laa ya-drus-uun
   the-students Neg 3-study-mp-ind
   "The students do not study"

The negation particle laa in SA is tense-inflecting. Depending on the tense of the sentence, it will surface as lam (for negation in the past), lan (for negation in the future), or laa, the elsewhere form.
Negation Con. (in verbless sentences)

A. **maa** Zayd-un fii-/al-dar-i
   Neg Zayd-NOM in-the-house-GEN
   “Zayd is not in the house.”

b. **laysa** Zayd-un fii-/al-dar-i
   Neg3sg.mas. Zayd-NOM in-the-house-GEN
   “Zayd is not in the house.”

c. *laa/lam/lan* Zayd-un fii-/al-dar-i
   Neg Zayd-NOM in-the-house-GEN

*Laa, lam, and lan* all carry tense information that is received from the verb of the sentence. If the sentence is verbless, *maa* or *laysa* is used.
Interrogatives: Wh-Questions

- Wh-questions require a **verb** to follow the wh-element:
  - *man  'akala  at tuffahat-a*
  - *who  ate(3sg Masc)  the apple (acc)*
- However, embedded clauses in the question can follow whatever order they want, so long as a verb follows the wh
  - *mada qalat  muna ‘inna ‘ahmad-a  ‘akala*
  - *what said(3sg fem)  Mona that  Ahmed-Acc  ate (3 sg masc)*
- The wh-element moves up from comp-VP to spec-CP
- Word order of embedded clauses shows that MSA is VSO
  - If Arabic is VSO, the wh-simply moves up the hierarchy from spec-CP to spec-CP without changing any word order
  - If Arabic is SVO, the wh- must move through each spec-CP and then front the verb of the last clause it lands in. Because the fronting does not apply to each clause, SVO is less logical than VSO
VSO
Wh-sentence with embedded clause

What did Mona say Ahmed ate?
Assignment of Case: CP & TP

- CP and TP both assigning case to the “subject” DP of the clause
- C and T with case features have to discharge them
- The case feature that is explicitly realized is the case from the highest head in the tree.

**CP's case is realized on the "subject"**

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ʔaʔtaqidu ʔanna ʔl-walad-a  fii l-bayt-i
Believe.1.a. that the-child-ACC in the-house-GEN ‘I believe that the child is in the house.’
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**TP's case is realized on the "subject"**

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ʔl-ʔawlaad-u
1-ʔawlaad-u
said.1.s. that-it arrived.3.m.s. the-children-NOM ‘I said that the boys arrived’
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CP's Acc.Case is realized

Assignment of Case: C & T

TP's Nom.Case is realized
• verb w/ all of its inflection
  → doesn't need a subject
• Thus a lot of little pro in Arabic
• Called by some a "null-subject language"
ECM

• a "pseudo-ECM"
  o assigns accusative case to the embedded “subject”
  o yet there is a CP present
  o and the “verb” of the complementary phrase is not infinitival but is technically tensed*

ʔa taqidu ḥanna-hu ya-lʕabu
Believe.1.s. that-him 3-playing
‘I believe that he is playing’

*though there may be no “independent temporal” interpreter of the action (see notes).
?aʕtaqidu ?anna-hu ya-lʕabu
Believe.1.s. that-him 3-playing
‘I believe that he is playing’
Questions?