

Noureddine Guella
King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia



Abstract: *This paper exhibits some techniques involved in the formation of a few relative clause structures in some Arabic dialects in northwestern areas of the Maghreb. The analysis yields diverse yet semantically equivalent structures which underlie and reflect a dialectal dynamism.*

Key words: *Arabic dialects of the Maghreb - relative clauses - relative clause introducers - semantically equivalent structures.*

Résumé : *L'article exhibe plusieurs structures de propositions relatives présentes dans quelques dialectes arabes maghrébins. Le résultat est une grande variété de structures sémantiquement équivalentes. Cette diversité témoigne d'une dynamique dialectale telle que seule une influence linguistique et un brassage de structures peuvent en constituer les soubassements.*

Mots-clés : *Dialectes arabes maghrébins - propositions relatives - introducteurs de propositions relatives -structures sémantiquement équivalentes*

1. Introduction

Arabic dialects of the Maghreb have received a great deal of attention. These dialects come in various names and are generally classified as either rural (or Bedouin) or urban, with sometimes 'hybrid' varieties catching the attention of dialectologists, even if it's from a historical perspective (cf. the works of Christophe Pereira [2004; 2006; 2007] concerning the Tripolitan dialect of Arabic).

In the present article, the expression 'Arabic dialect' is used in a loose way and in a very general context. Obviously, not all Arabic dialects are concerned by this study, and many of the structures described here will not necessarily be present in the Arabic dialects of the Maghreb. Rather, it should be stressed from the outset that the grammatical features displayed in this study will be largely borrowed from the dialects situated on both sides of the Algerian border with Morocco, including the urban Arabic dialect of Nédroma which provides the core of the data.

This brief study purports to be a functional and systematic classification of certain techniques of formation of relative clauses and their grammatical relations at the sentence level in general. The data used are transcribed in a loose manner to allow for the various variations inside the dialects. Their representation is more phonemic than phonetic in nature.

2. Methodological Preliminaries

In trying to analyze the notions of syntactic level and that of sentence, one is confronted with the sort of grammar or grammatical theory to be used as reference, especially in a work such as the present one. For theoretical as well as practical purposes, I shall try to avoid the controversies that particular theories carry or generate. I am more inclined to resort to more traditional approaches to make my argument clearer. Consequently, I still find Jespersen's (1924: 307) approach to the definition of a sentence appealing: a sentence is independent and complete if it can occur alone, as a complete utterance. As concerns syntax, I will rely on the excellent work by Frantiček Daneš (1964), a Prague School linguist of the new generation, where three levels are distinguished inside syntax, namely the levels of the grammatical structure of the sentence, the semantic structure of the sentence, and the organization of discourse (1964: 225).

In exhibiting the syntactic structures of Arabic dialects of the Maghreb (henceforth ADM), a special emphasis will be deployed towards the grammatical structure of the sentence, i.e., the level whose units are analyzed in terms of subject, predicate, object, etc. and their subdivisions. Consequently, the sentence is presented as the largest unit of grammatical description, which means that no attempt is made here to examine its relation to discourse and to text organization in general.

3. Complex and Embedded Structures

3.1. The complex structures

Simple-type sentences are not given any mention in this brief study, as the purpose here is to study complex structures, i.e., embedded clauses in other clauses. The latter structures are in fact expanded clauses, and this expansion can be achieved by coordination or by subordination. In the case of coordination, expansion is achieved by linking elements belonging to the same category or to the same grammatical level with coordinators such as [w] 'and', [wella] 'or', et [baṣaħ] 'but'. These coordinated structures are not treated in this article because, after all, any extra conjoined element or structure does not necessarily add or increase the structure's complexity.

In the case of subordination, expansion in principle involves recursive structures whereby elements or constituents are downgraded from a higher category or status to a lower one, i.e., to a position of modifier inside a structure of (originally) similar rank. In fact, a structure may be embedded in various positions (that of subject, for instance), and is thus referred to as a subordinate sentence, or a 'subordinate clause' as traditional grammar would describe it.

The sentence in which this subordinate clause is embedded is referred to as the matrix sentence.

3.2. The embedded structures

The two classical or modern standard Arabic relative pronouns *الذي* [allāḏi] (placed after singular masculine antecedents) and *التي* [allāti] (places after singular feminine antecedents) are represented in Arabic dialects of the Maghreb by [elli] which is a neutral and neutralized form placed after masculine and feminine antecedents. The form [elli] can be pronounced or transcribed in a variety of ways, including [ǐli] for the Gulf Arabic dialects (cf. Holes, 1984: 112ff.) or [lli] for Arabic dialects of the Maghreb (cf. Grand' Henry, 1976), or [eddi] or [ddi] for some dialects like that of Djidjelli in Algeria (Ph. Marçais, 1956), or even in the form of variants [halli] or [yalli] in a wide area in and around the Arabian peninsula and elsewhere (cf. Retsö, 2004 :265). The form is widespread in both rural and urban areas, and is characterized by the germination of [l] (for more details on this, see Retsö, 2004:265, and his references in note 2). It should be noted that the neutralization of the two Classical Arabic relative pronouns is not a novelty by any means. It existed in the classical period in one way or another: Fischer (1997:201) remarks that the dialect of Tayyi' (spoken by the Tayyi' tribe in the *Shammar* region, present-day Saudi Arabia, even from pre-Islamic days) used [ǔ u:], a neutralized form, invariable in gender and in number, of these two particles.

3.3. Other techniques of relative clause formation

There exist, however, other techniques in use and strategies in play in the formation of relative clauses in the dialects under study. Only some of these techniques will be scrutinized in the data that follow.

3.3.1. A general pattern

In general, and in traditional terms, [elli] is followed by a sentence, and not just a clause. The following examples, borrowed from the dialect of Nédroma, illustrate very well this point. (The structure exhibiting a **different word- order** is preceded by the initials **DWO**).

- (i) el - weld elli rbaḥ
The boy who won
- (ii) el- mra elli šerb-et ḥlīb -ha
The woman who drank milk- her
- DWO:** el - mra elli ḥlīb -ha šerb-et
The woman who - milk-her drank-she
= The woman who drank her milk
- (iii) el-šibānija elli ra žel-ha f-el -ḥabs
The old woman who husband-her (is) in prison
= The old woman whose husband is in prison
- DWO :** el-šibānijæ elli f-el- ḥabs ra žel-ha

In the examples (ii) and (iii) above, [-ha] is a replacement pronoun of the relative clause. Examples (i) to (iii) can be said to form one structure and schematized as follows:

Noun Phrase + [elli] + Sentence (1)

3.3.2. A different technique in the formation of relative clauses

A different technique in the formation of relative clauses not obligatorily based on [elli] obtains in the instances where the interrogative pronouns [āš], [-men], et [-āyen] preceded by prepositions such as [b-], [f-], ['la], etc., operate as introductory particles of relative clauses. In this case, however, the following remarks should be noted.

(i) [-āš] is generally used with inanimate objects. When it is attached to a preposition in a construction, it provokes a deletion of the replacement pronoun and plays its role instead. This situation gives rise to different structures that can be schematized as follows:

Noun Phrase + [elli] + Sentence + [préposition + pronom] (2)

Or: Noun Phrase + [prep. + [-āš]] + Sentence (3)

Word-order must be observed and, in pattern (3) above, [elli] may optionally precede the group [prep. + [-āš]]. In pattern (2), however, it is obligatory and yields a construction structurally reminiscent of the construction in pattern (1) above. These alternative patterns, yielding semantically equivalent structures, are exemplified by the following three illustrations the data of which is borrowed from the dialect of Nédroma.

1. Either A: el- mtīrqæ elli semmer bī-ha el-kursi mherrsa
The hammer which nailed-he with- it the chair - broken
Or B: el- mtīrqæ b -āš semmer el-kursi mherrsa
The hammer with-which nailed-he the chair broken
[=The hammer with which he nailed the chair is broken].
2. Either A: el-quffa elli š rāt fī-ha el-lhemm
The bag which bought-she in - it the meat
Or B: el-quffa f -āš š rāt el-lhemm
The bag in-which bought - she the meat
[=The bag in which she bought the meat.]
3. Either: el- metraḥ elli ne's-ū 'lī-h kbīr
The mattress which slept-they on - it (is) large
Or: el- metraḥ 'lā-š ne's-ū kbīr
The mattress on - which slept-they (is) large
[= The mattress on which they slept is large.]

Similarly, [-men] may be attached to a preposition to form a relative group referring to humans and playing the role of a subordination marker 'reinforcing' the optional [elli]. The resulting alternative patterns are similar to (2) and (3) above.

Noun Phrase + [elli] + Sentence + [preposition + pronoun] (4)

Noun Phrase (+ optional [elli]) + [preposition + -men] + Sentence (5)

The examples which follow illustrate these patterns. They are borrowed from the Arabic dialects of Nédroma and Tlemcen in Algeria and that of Oujda in Morocco :

1. Either A: el- wlād elli ddābz- u m 'ā - hum

The boys whom fought-they with-them

Or B: el- wlād m 'ā - men ddābz-u

The boys with-whom fought-they

[=The boys with whom they fought].

2. Either A: el- weld elli šrīn-a ' lī-h žārn-a

The boy whom bought-we from- him (is) neighbour-our

Or B: el- weld ' lī- men šrīn-a el-qāhwa žārn-a

The boy from-whom bought-we the coffee (is) neighbour-our

[= The boy from whom we bought the coffee is our neighbor].

With place names, it is [-āyen] which is affixed to a preposition to play the role of relative. The resulting patterns tend to alternate between (6) and (7) below:

Noun Phrase + [elli] + Sentence + [preposition + pronoun] (6)

Noun Phrase + (preposition + [-āyen]) + Sentence (7)

It is opportune to note that, in pattern (7) above, [elli] may, once again and in an optional manner, precede the group (preposition + [-āyen]).

The examples that follow serve as a vivid illustration of these patterns. They may be recorded or heard in the northwestern region of the Maghreb, more particularly in the areas of Nédroma, Tlemcen, or Maghnia in Algerian territory, or even in Oujda and Berkane in Moroccan territory. However, subtle and minor differences in intonation may occur in one or another of these varieties, with no notable effect on the overall meaning, or on the details of the grammatical analysis being outlined here. In addition to intonation differences, there are also variations in the realization of these prepositions in conjunction with [-āyen], - so that [-āyen] itself is realized as [īn] - to produce groups such as [f-āyen] ~ [f-īn]; [mn -āyen]~ [mn-īn]; [b-āš] ~ [b-āyāš]; ['li-men] ~ [' lā-men]; etc.

1. Either A: el-bāb elli duxl-u menn-u ždīd

The door - which entered-they from-it (is) new

Or B: el- bāb mn -āyen duxl-u ždīd

The door from -which entered-they (is) new

[= The door through which they entered is new.]

2. Either A: el- hammām elli mšā-w l-u b 'ī d

The baths which went - they to-it (is) far

Or B: el- hammām f - āyen mšā-w b 'ī d

The baths in- where went-they (is) far

[= The baths where they went is far.]

All the structures exhibited above and that obtain from patterns (2 - 3), (4 - 5), and (6 - 7) are semantically equivalent. They all enter in an equal measure in the formation of relative clauses in the areas considered, and they should be viewed as valid techniques or strategies because they produce equivalent realizations devoid of any major sociolinguistic idiosyncrasies. It is therefore difficult if not impossible to suggest that one of them is the most frequent or the most accessible. To accommodate the alternative structures exhibited in the patterns above (with the exclusion of the structure in pattern (1) which forms a technique on its own), the following general canvas or format may be formulated:

Either: NP + obligatory [elli] + Sentence + [prep. + pronoun] (8)

Or: NP + optional [elli] + [prep. + $\left[\begin{array}{l} [-\text{āš}] \\ [-\text{men}] \\ [-\text{āyen}] \end{array} \right]$] + Sentence (9)

The constraints or restrictions of occurrence of [-āš], [-men], et [-āyen] are specified under b(i), b(ii), et b(iii) above.

3.3.3. Some references and historical considerations

According to Wright (1967, vol. ii, §175, p. 324), Ibn Malik is the only Arab grammarian to allow this kind of structure. Wright cites the example ضربت ضريث فيمن رغبته whereas the only structure allowed by Arabic grammar is ضربت من رغبته فيه (“*I beat him whom thou desiredst*”). On the other hand, Wright (op. cit.) notes that “some other authorities sanction the following likewise لم يجد يوماً على من يتكل” (“*If, some day, he fails to find one on whom he may rely*”) for من يتكل عليه, i.e., that Arab grammar allowed at least sporadically structures now in use in the Arabic dialects of the Maghreb, since it is nowadays usual and perfectly normal to hear the equivalent expression : صابش علي من يتكل [ma š ābš `li- men yatkal] (“*He didn’t find on whom to rely*”).

It is probable that these sentences, together with the structures representing a number of Arabic dialects in the Maghreb and formulated in (9) above, constitute patterns introduced in the Maghreb and elsewhere through Andalusian Arabic. Ibn Malik himself was born in Jaen, in Spain, in the 13th century, before moving to Syria. He was the author of *Tashīl al-fawā'id* and more particularly of *al-Khulāṣa al-alfiyya* - better known under the shortened name of *al-Alfiyya* - a poem of a thousand verses which, according to Glazer (1941), constitute a fundamental stone in the edifice of Arab grammatical science. Obviously, he was not the only the only grammarian of his time, which means that other grammarians of the same century could very well use and allow grammatical structures similar to those described in (9) above.

I mentioned in the introduction that the Arabic dialects of the Maghreb and their various linguistic structures have been and continue to be the object of active investigation. Guella (1983) cites a great number of references and, among these studies, particular mention should be made of those of Grand’Henry (1972; 1976; 1979), Ph. Marçais (1956), M. Cohen (1912), D.

Cohen (1968), and a host of others. More recent contributions, such as those published in a volume edited by Aguadé, Cressier & Vicente (1998), also deserve special attention. As concerns Maghribin and Andalusian Arabic dialects and their mutual interferences and impacts, the works of Corriente (1977, 1992) remain a fundamental and unavoidable source of inspiration and scholarship. From another historical perspective that should open new avenues in Arabic dialectological research, Clive Holes' (2004) contribution would certainly deserve some attention as an academic reference whose thesis reminds us of the relationship that exists between Romance languages and Vulgar Latin, as opposed to Classical Latin. In fact, Holes brushes aside some widely accepted assumptions concerning the current spoken varieties of Arabic: For him, the latter do not descend from Classical Arabic, but rather constitute offshoots of Old North Arabian dialects that existed in the 7th century.

3.3 .4. A final technique

The structures described earlier do not constitute an exhaustive account of all the techniques of formation of relative clauses in the Arabic dialects of the Maghreb. Yet another technique is again used when what normally follows the relative pronoun [elli] is an indefinite noun or an adjective (or even a participle). In this case, [elli] is pronounced and realized as a reduced forms [el], a form which is homophonous with the Arabic definite article and which is assimilated to the following sound in the same conditions as the definite article. This reduced particle is written in bold and underlined in our examples. These examples are borrowed from the dialects of Nédroma and Oujda, with some differences in pronunciation and intonation.

Ainsi, une construction comme, par exemple :

el- šažra elli šūfer wrāq-ha
 The tree - which - yellow - leaves - its
 = The tree whose leaves are yellow

May be realized as: [el- ša žra **e š** - šūfer wrāq-ha], where [**e š**] precedes the indefinite adjective [šūfer], and plays the role of a reduced relative pronoun.

If, on the other hand, the following stylistically equivalent structure is considered:

el- šažra elli wrāq-ha šūfer
 The tree - which - leaves-its yellow

It will be noticed that the occurrence of the reduced relative does not obtain or apply, simply because what follows [elli], i.e. [wrāq-ha], is made definite par the replacement pronoun [-ha]. Thus, the following occurrence, for example, is just impossible:

*el- šažra **le** - wrāq-ha šūfer

In this case, the use of [elli] is much more extensive. The following instances are provided to illustrate this point further and point to the intricacies of the structure used:

el- tāqa elli mherres zāž - ha
The window - which - broken - glass-its
Either : el- tāqa elli zāž- ha mherres
The window - which - glass-its broken
= The window whose glass is broken
may become : el- tāqa le - mherres zāž - ha
but never : *el- tāqa le - zāž - ha mherres

The phenomenon concerning the occurrence of a reduced form of the relative pronoun when followed by an adjective or participle has already been recorded in many studies in the field of nominal syntax, notably by Killean (1972) for Arabic and by Wise (1975) for Egyptian Arabic, among others. It should be stressed, however, that the idea that this reduced relative plays the role of a determiner in verbal sentences, as suggested by Abubakr (1970) for Sudanese Arabic or by Haddad & Kenstowicz (1980) for Lebanese Arabic, does not seem to apply in the cases analyzed here, and thus lacks linguistic corroboration in the Arabic varieties of the Maghreb examined in this study.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings presented in this article clearly show that the field of relative clause formation in Arabic dialectology is quite a complex one. The various techniques used in some of the Maghribin dialect and summarily presented here are by no means exhaustive. There is no doubt that only a more thorough description and analysis of other dialects in their different classifications - Bedouin, urban, 'hybrid', Andalusian, etc. - together with an investigation of their historical descent and development (cf. Holes, 2004), will reveal other grammatical techniques that will either corroborate and extend the patterns presented here, or refute and reject the structures incorporated in some of these patterns. In other words, only an in-depth analysis of the verbal repertoire of the Arabic dialects of the Maghreb will yield valid generalizations in this and many other fields.

References

- Abubakr, E.R. (1970). *The Noun Phrase in the Spoken Arabic of Sudan*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. University of London.
- Aguadé, J., P. Cressier & Á. Vicente. (Éd.). (1998). *Peuplement et arabisation au Maghreb occidental. Dialectologie et histoire*. Madrid-Zaragoza.
- Cohen, D. (1968). Variantes, variétés dialectales et contacts linguistiques en domaine arabe. *Bulletin de la Société Linguistique de Paris*, Paris, pp. 215-248.
- Cohen, M. (1912). *Le parler arabe des juifs d'Alger*. Paris : H. Champion.
- Corriente, F. (1977). *A Grammatical Sketch of the Spanish Arabic Dialect Bundle*. Madrid: Instituto Hispano-Arabe de Cultura.
- Corriente, F. (1992). *Árabe andalusí y lenguas romances*. Madrid.

- Daneš, F. (1964). "A three-level approach to syntax". In: *Travaux Linguistiques de Prague 1*. Prague : Editions de l'Académie Tchecoslovaque des Sciences, pp. 225-240.
- Fischer, Wolfdietrich. (1997). "Classical Arabic". In Robert Hetzron. (Ed.). *The Semitic Languages*. Routledge. Pp. 187-219.
- Glazer, S. (1941). The Alfiyya of Ibn Mālik : Its importance and place in Arabic grammatical science. *The Muslim World*, vol. 31, pp. 274-279
- Grand'Henry, J. (1972). *Le parler arabe de Cherchell (Algérie)*. Institut Orientaliste de l'Université Catholique de Louvain.
- Grand'Henry, J. (1976). *Les parlers arabes de la région du M'zab (Sahara algérien)*. Leiden, Netherlands : E. J. Brill.
- Grand'Henry, J. (1979). "Le parler arabe de la Saoura". *Arabica*, Tome XXVI, Fascicule 3, pp. 213-228.
- Guella, N. (1983). *A Linguistic Investigation of the Arabic Dialect of Nédroma (Algeria)*. Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis. England: University of Manchester
- Guella, N. (1989). "Notes sur quelques stratégies de formation des propositions relatives en arabe algérien". In : *Cahiers de Dialectologie et de Linguistique Contrastive*, (Université d'Oran), Vol. I, 1989, pp. 39-44.
- Haak, M., K. Versteegh & R. Dejong (eds) (2004) *Approaches to Arabic dialects: A Collection of Articles Presented to Manfred Voidich on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, Leiden-Boston: Brill.
- Haddad, G. & M. Kenstowicz. (1980). "A Note on the Parallels between the Definite Article and the Relative Clause Marker in Arabic". *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 141-147.
- Holes, C. (1984). *Colloquial Arabic of the Gulf and Saudi Arabia*. England: Routledge & Kegan Paul plc.
- Holes, Clive (2004). *Modern Arabic: Structures, Functions, and Varieties*. Georgetown: Georgetown University Press.
- Jespersen, Otto (1924) *The Philosophy of Grammar*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Killean, C. (1972). "Arabic Relative Clauses". *The Chicago Which Hunt*, edited by P. Peranteau, J. Levi & G. Phares. Chicago, Ill.: The Chicago Linguistic Society, pp. 144-152.
- Marçais, Ph. (1956). *Le parler arabe de Djidjelli*. Paris: Publications de l'Institut d'Etudes Orientales d'Alger, XVI.
- Pereira, C. (2004.) "Le parler arabe de Tripoli, un parler mixte", in I. Ferrando and J.J. Sanchez Sandoral (eds) *AIDA Fifth Conference Proceedings*, 431-443.
- Pereira, C. (2006). "Eléments de description du parler arabe de Tripoli", in *L'arabe dialectal: enquêtes, descriptions, interprétations, Actes d'AIDA 6, Cahiers du CERES* (Centre d'Etudes et Recherches Economiques et Sociales), Série Linguistique no. 13, Tunis.

Pereira, Christophe (2007). "Urbanization and Dialect change: the Arabic dialect of Tripoli (Libya)", in C. Miller (ed) (2007) *Arabic in the City: Issues in dialect Contact and Language Variation*, volume 5 of *Routledge Arabic Linguistic series*, Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 77-96.

Retsö, Jan. (2004). "Relative-Clause Marking in Arabic Dialects: A Preliminary Survey". *Approaches to Arabic Dialects: Collection of Articles presented to Manfred Woidich on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, edited by Martine Haak, Rudolph De Jong & Kees Versteegh. Brill: *Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics*, 38, pp. 263-273.

Wise, H. (1975). *A Transformational Grammar of Spoken Egyptian Arabic*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Wright, W. (1967). *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*. (2 volumes). Third edition, revised by W. Robertson Smith & M. J. De Goeje. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.