ADVERBIAL CLAUSES AS TOPICS IN ARABIC: ADVERBIAL CLAUSES IN FRONTAL POSITION SEPARATED FROM THEIR MAIN CLAUSES

SYNOPSIS

1. Introduction
2. The comment marker fa-
   2.1 Topics introduced by 'ammā and its synonyms
   2.2 Topics introduced by 'inna/'anna
   2.3 Casus pendens
   2.4 Sentence adverbials in front extraposition
   2.5 Adverbial clauses in front extraposition
      2.5.1 Conditional clauses as topics
      2.5.2 Temporal clauses as topics
      2.5.3 Clauses of cause as topics
      2.5.4 Clauses of purpose as topics
      2.5.5 Clauses of concession as topics
      2.5.6 Clauses of manner as topics
      2.5.7 Circumstantial clauses as topics
3. The comment marker wa-
   3.1 Topics introduced by 'ammā
   3.2 Casus pendens
   3.1 Sentence adverbials in frontal position
   3.4 Adverbial clauses in frontal position
      3.4.1 wa- following time clauses
      3.4.2 wa- following circumstantial clauses
4. The adverbial clause followed by thumma
5. The comment marker la-
   5.1 la- preceding the complement of the oath
   5.2 la- following topics introduced by 'in/'inna/'anna/lākinna
   5.3 la- in various topic-comment constructions
   5.4 la- following topic adverbial clauses
     la-'in; lau; 'idhā; 'idh; la-'idh; la-matā.
1. *Introduction*

Topics in front extraposition are attested in different languages and have drawn the attention of quite a few linguists. In Arabic, in addition to the long recognized phenomenon of phrases following 'ammā “as to” and isolated from the rest of the sentence by the particle *fa-* , attention has been recently called to other structures of topics in frontal position, such as “tautological” infinitives, cleft-sentences, and sentence adverbials. It is the purpose of this study to show that adverbial clauses in Arabic frequently function as extraposed topics in frontal position isolated from their main clauses (= comments) under conditions similar to those characterizing other types of topics separated from their comments. In addition to the implication this perception might have with regard to other languages exhibiting a similar relation between adverbial clauses and their main clauses, this presentation supplies a common origin and a more comprehensive framework for apparently unrelated phenomena in Arabic. Thus the particle *fa-* after 'ammā phrases, sentence adverbials in frontal position, and conditional and other adverbial clauses, exhibits a common function, namely, it is a particle marking the comment after a topic in front extraposition. This is also the function of *la-* after oaths; topics introduced by 'inna; and conditional clauses introduced by *la-* in and *law*.

The observation that adverbial clauses in front extraposition relate to their main clauses as isolated topics do to their comments was

---

1 For reasons of convenience I use the terms topic/comment for what has often been called psychological, logical, or natural subject/predicate, theme/rheme, etc. For the vast literature dealing with this issue and the different terminology used, cf. Blau, *Adverbials*, 5, n. 11; Goldenberg, “Tautological infinitive”, 37. n. 3; idem., *Cleft sentences*, 127, and especially notes 1–2; Haiman, 583, § 2.2 and the literature cited there. In the present article I use the terms topic/comment according to the two complementary definitions provided by Haiman, namely “the topic is what the speaker is talking about” or “the given or old information in the sentence”; “the comment is what he says about it” or “the new information” (ibid.).


3 Goldenberg, “Tautological infinitive”, 37; 77–8, § 39.
