

The basic word order in Moroccan Arabic

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Moroccan Arabic is historically derived from Classical Arabic. Given its direct contact with Berber, Moroccan Arabic is much influenced by the Berber sound pattern, morphology and lexicon. It is in a diglossic relationship with Classical Arabic [1, 105]. While the latter is high because it is the language of the holy Qur'an, and the vehicle of a large body of literature, Moroccan Arabic is low because it is neither codified nor standardized.

Moroccan Arabic, like Classical Arabic, belongs to the Semitic of the Afro-Asiatic language family. Moroccan Arabic is distinct from Classical Arabic, as well as from the varieties of the Middle East [3, 84].

Today with the expansion of education and the growth of means of communication and the development of urbanization, Moroccan Arabic has become the language of mass communication and daily activities in towns and cities. Moroccan Arabic is spoken by all Moroccans except 10% of monolingual Berbers [4, 78].

Classical Arabic was proclaimed the official language of the State by the constitution of 1961. Classical Arabic, which has no native speakers, is learned exclusively in school and is used only in formal contexts.

By contrast, Moroccan Arabic, the second mother tongue in the country after Berber, is used in informal settings for daily conversations and transactions. The population of Moroccans who use Classical Arabic is estimated at about 25% according to Youssi [4, 77].

Morocco uses Classical Arabic as the official language, which is used throughout the Arab world for writing purposes. Nonetheless, other languages are spoken in Morocco, namely Berber, Moroccan Arabic and French. Moroccan Arabic is a mix of Arabic, Berber, French and Spanish [2]. It is used exclusively for spoken

purposes, while Classical Arabic is used only in writing. In Morocco, there are many dialects of Moroccan Arabic, the most important of which are the Shamali (northern) dialect, the Oujdi dialect (eastern region) the Fassi dialect (of the region of Fès), the Casawi dialect (of Casablanca), the Marrakeshi dialect (of Marrakesh area) and Hassania, spoken in the Sahara.

An important aspect of MA syntax is that it is a head initial language. Verbs, nouns and prepositions always precede their complements. As we shall illustrate in due course, this order is not restricted only to lexical heads, but it applies also to functional categories, namely, Complementizers, Inflections, and Determiners. Another aspect of Moroccan Arabic is its rich morphology: nouns, adjectives, and verbs show a regular inflection for gender, number, and person.

A sentence generally reflects syntactic relations and harmony between constituents in the form of lexical categories such as the noun, the verb, prepositions, adjectives, and functional categories like agreement, tense and aspect. The harmony of these constituents in a MA simple sentence conforms to an ordering that makes such elements both syntactically and semantically congruent.

Recent literature has revealed that Agreement, is the crucial element which determines word order in most natural languages. This agreement could be manifested fully, including gender, number and person, or partially, consisting of person and number or gender and number.

However, the distinction between full and partial agreement in MA is absent, since agreement in this language is always realized in the same way, notably full agreement. There is yet a minor exception, where the feature of gender might be missing and no morphological distinction is made on the verb between the feminine and masculine. This is illustrated clearly with feminine nouns in the plural, as in: 1) a. *d-drari žaw. (SV) the children arrived 'The children (have) arrived'*; b. *žaw d-drari. (VS) arrived -pl the- children 'the children (have) arrived'*; 2) a. *l-bnat žaw. (the- girls arrived-pl 'thegirls (have)arrived.'*); b. *žaw l-bnat. (arrived-pl the girls 'the girls (have arrived')*.

The verb “ža” (arrive) agrees with the NP subject in all features (number, gender and person) regardless of whether this NP precedes it or follows it, with the exception of feminine plurals, where agreement in gender is missing because the verb displays the same agreement features, as in the case of masculine plurals.

Since full agreement is realized in the same pattern (with SVO and VSO), we suggest the basic structure in MA (clauses) to be SVO.

Subject + V + Complement (X)

Where X is a variable that may stand for a direct object NP, a PP or an AdvP, as in: *muḥamed Drab xalid. Mohamed beat Khalid* ‘Mohamed beat Khalid.’; *muḥamed Drab (f)-t-tilifun. Mohamed beat (in) the phone* ‘Mohamed made a phone call’; *muḥamed nVes f l-uṭel. (Mohamed slept in the-hotel* ‘Mohamed slept in the hotel.’).

The hypothesis that the basic structure in MA is VSO explains why clitics cannot co-occur with NPs, as it is clear from the following examples.

In the example “a. *kla l-xubz. (ate the-bread* ‘He ate the bread.’) b. *ža mVa r-ražel. (came with the-man* ‘He came with the man.’)”, the direct object (a) (and the complement (b)) are overtly expressed, but in “a. *kla-h. (ate-it* ‘He ate it.’) b. *ža mV-ah. (came with-him* ‘He came with him.’)” they are realised as clitics.

Concerning the subject in MA, it could be a null pronominal element as in (*ža-w. came-3-ms-pl* ‘They came’). As to the suffix -w, it is an agreement marker since it can co- occur with a syntactic subject: a. *l-wlad ža-w. (the-children came-pl-ms* ‘The children came.’); b. *huma ža-w. (They came-pl-ms* ‘They came.’).

It should be noted that *dual* agreement is not morphologically expressed on the verb: it rather takes the same form as plural agreement.

The number morpheme might be inserted before a *dual* NP as in MA, Berber and French.

We observe here that case is not morphologically realised in the verbal or nominal inflection, in addition to the absence of dual markers. On the basis of the “basic” structure, which we adopted in (5), we will try to distinguish between

different types of simple sentences in MA: we will see that functional categories (tense, agreement and aspect, etc.) merge with lexical categories (N,V,P) in different syntactic contexts to construct well formed sentences.

Given that the concern of the present section is the structure of simple sentence in MA, we will try to provide a description of the most important elements that constitute and govern the construction of a variety of sentences. The focus will be on contexts involving transitivity and intransitivity, negation, nominal sentences and interrogative forms.

References:

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