The Syntax of Word Order Derivation and Agreement in Najrani Arabic: A Minimalist Analysis

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Abstract

The paper aims to explore word order derivation and agreement in Najran Arabic (henceforth, NA) and examines the interaction between the NA data and Chomsky's (2001, 2005) Agree theory which we adopt in this study. The objective is to investigate how word order occurs in NA and provide a satisfactorily unified account of the derivation of SVO and VSO orders and agreement in the language. Furthermore, the study shows how SVO and VSO word orders are derived morpho-syntactically in NA syntax and why and how the derivation of SVO word order comes after that of VSO order. We assume that the derivation of the unmarked SVO in NA takes place after applying a further step to the marked VSO. We propose that the default unmarked word order in NA is SVO, not VSO. Moreover, we propose that the DP which is base-generated in [Spec-vP] is a topic, not a subject. We adopt Rizzy's split-CP hypothesis on the basis of which we assume the existence of a Top Phrase (TopP) projection in the clause structure of NA. We postulate that the phase head C passes its ɸ-features to the functional head T and the Edge feature to TopP. We assume that T in VSO lacks the Edge feature which motivates movement of the subject DP to [Spec-TP]. As a consequence, the subject of VSO structure remains in situ in the subject position of [Spec-vP]. In addition, it explores subject-verb agreement asymmetry (henceforth, SVAA) and shows that the asymmetry in NA is not related to word order differences but rather to gender agreement differences.

Keywords: agree, edge feature, derivation, phase, word order, agreement, asymmetry, Najrani Arabic

1. Introduction

Word order and agreement phenomena have been the focus of considerable attention in the world languages, in general, and Standard Arabic (henceforth, SA) as well as many Arabic varieties, in particular. A number of studies have been conducted and several analyses have been proposed and argued for in the attempt to provide a unified treatment of the subject in question (Mohammed, 1991, 2000; Fassi-Fehri 1993; Aoun et al., 1994; Olarrea (1995); Soltan, 2007; and Fakih 2014b, 2015, 2016), among others. This paper, however, seeks to study word order derivation and agreement in Najrani Arabic and explores how SVO and VSO word orders are derived in the syntax on the basis of Chomsky' (2001, 2005) Agree theory which constitutes the phase model and feature inheritance approach. NA is a variety of SA which is spoken in the Southern part of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; NA has descended from SA. As far as we know, no study has been conducted so far on this topic in NA; this may be the first study which attempts to address word order derivation and agreement phenomena in NA. It should be noted that NA has not received any morpho-syntactic attention of the subject under discussion. The objective of this study is to explore word order derivation and agreement in NA and present a unified account of the derivation of SVO and VSO and how agreement behaves in the language, given the recent developments and challenges posed by minimalism in linguistic theory. It aims to illustrate to what extent possible NA data can interact with Chomsky's (2001, 2005) Agree theory in the course of analysis of the study; it shows that it is in Chomsky's Agree theory that feature valuation plays an important role in the derivation of SVO and VSO structures in NA and explains the agreement patterns in the language.

The study has, however, been organized into the following sections: section 2 reviews the previous studies on SA and Arabic varieties; section 3 discusses the pre-minimalist analyses (the null expletive analysis and agreement

loss hypothesis; section 4 examines the minimalist accounts (base- generation hypothesis (null pro-hypothesis), Fakih's (2014a & 2014b, 2015, 2016) minimalist analysis, and Chomsky's (2001, 2005) Agree theory); section 5 discusses gender agreement in NA and presents a satisfactorily unified account of word order derivation and agreement in NA based on Chomsky's (2005) Agree theory. We assume that the derivation of the unmarked SVO word order in NA comes after the derivation of the marked VSO word order. Besides, we postulate that the default unmarked word order is SVO in NA. The study shows that the interaction between NA data and Chomsky's (2001, 2005) Agree theory illustrates that feature valuation plays an important role in explaining the derivation of SVO and VSO in NA; and section 6 summarizes the findings of the study.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Arabic Sentence and Word Order in Arabic Syntactic Analysis

The existing literature on SA shows that a sentence is a meaningful structure composed of two or more words (Wright, 1989 and Al-Rajehi, 1998). On the basis of their morpho-syntactic analysis, the traditional Arab grammarians (like Al-Khalil, 786; Sibawayh, 796; and Ibn Hisham, 1360, among others), divided the Standard Arabic sentence into two types: a nominal sentence and a verbal sentence. The type of a sentence is determined by its first constituent. That is, if it starts with a noun phrase (NP), then it is a nominal sentence and if it starts with a verb, it is then a verbal one (Al-Rajehi, 1998). According to the Arab grammarians, the Arabic sentence with SVO word order is viewed as a nominal sentence while that with VSO order is a verbal one. Al-Rahawi (2007) points out that a verbless sentence is a nominal sentence to all Arab grammarians. However, there has been a debate upon the nature of a sentence which starts with an NP followed by a verb phrase (VP), as in zaid-un qaama 'Zaid stood up'. That is, whether SVO word order was dealt with as a nominal sentence or a verbal one was a source for discussions. Moreover, let us have a look at the views of the two major linguistic schools which were concerned with SA grammar: Basry and Kufan. According to Al-Rahawi (2007), Basries' argue that SVO is a nominal sentence in which the verb with its constituents constitutes the predicate of the nominal sentence; this view was advocated by Ibn-Jenni (1002), Al-Jarjani (1079), and Ibn Hisham (1360), among others. On the other hand, Basries claim that a subject can never precede its verb, thus the first NP in SVO word order is not viewed as a subject.

However, Kufans, such as Ibn Al-Mubarrad (898), hold another view that SVO word order is not a nominal sentence but a verbal sentence in which the subject precedes the verb. According to their view, the verbal sentence is the one which contains a verb regardless of the position occupied by the verb in the sentence. However, according to Al-Rajehi (1998), the most acceptable view is that SVO word order begins with an NP and is thus a nominal sentence. In this study, we adopt the view that the preverbal subject in SVO word order is not a subject, but rather a topic.

2.2 Word Order and Agreement in SA

A closer look at the existing literature on SA shows that it exhibits two dominant word order alternations: SVO and VSO (Mohammed, 1991, 2000; Fassi-Fehri 1993; Soltan, 2007; Al-Horais, 2009; and Fakih 2014b, 2015, 2016, among others). With respect to agreement, such alternations create an asymmetry known as subject-verb agreement asymmetry which has become a major source for study and analysis, and which has also received considerable attention in the last two decades by Arab and Western linguists (Bahluol & Harbert, 1992; Aoun et al., 1994; Ouhallah, 1994; and Olarrea, 1995; Benmamoun, 2000; and Fakih, 2015, 2016). With SVO word order, full agreement can be found between the subject and the verb in all phi-features (i.e. gender, person and number). However, with VSO word order only gender agreement can be obtained, i.e., partial agreement (Fassi-Fehri 1993; Mohammed 2000; Benmamoun, 2000; and Soltan, 2007, among others). This means that number agreement cannot be obtained. Such an asymmetry can be seen in the following examples in (1), taken from Olarrea (1995:134).

1a. ɑl-ʔɑwlɑɑd-u   jɑɑʔ-uu   SV+ full agreement
     the.boys.nom   came.3.pl.m(they).
          'The boys came.'

     jɑɑʔɑ   ɑl-ʔɑwlɑɑd-u   VS+ partial agreement
     sit.3sg.m   the.boys.nom
          'The boys came.'

b.　　* jɑɑʕ-uu　　　　ɑl-ʔɑwlɑɑd-u　　　　　VS+ full agreement

　　　came.3pl.m.　　　the.boys.nom

c.　　* ɑl-ʔɑwlɑɑd-u　　jɑɑʔa　　　　　　　SV+ partial agreement

　　　the-boys.nom　　sit.3sg.m

The sentences in (1) show that subject- verb agreement in SA depends on the subject position. In the case of the preverbal DPs, full agreement can be obtained, as in (1a), whereas partial agreement can be achieved between the post-verbal DPs and the verb in the gender feature only, as illustrated in (1b). The post-verbal DPs can never fully agree with the verbs, as shown in (1c) and the preverbal DPs cannot agree partially with the verbs, as in (1d). This means that SVO word order in SA always exhibits full agreement, whereby the subject DP agrees fully with its verb in the phi-features (i.e. gender, person, and number). However, VSO order shows partial agreement, only gender agreement can be realized between the subject DP and the verb.

However, subject-verb agreement asymmetry in SA does not acquire in some of today's Arabic dialects. It is worth to mention Versteegh's (1997) view on this issue. Versteegh states that SVO-VSO alternation is not a feature of many Arabic dialects. He stresses that there will be only one dominant order SVO; VSO will be used "as a stylistic variant. But even in those instances in which the verb precedes the subject, there is full number agreement between them." (p. 101).

The examples in (2) below show that both Lebanese Arabic (LA) and Moroccan Arabic (MA) exhibit the absence of the SVAA phenomenon. The data in (2) are taken from MA, cited from Aoun et al. (1994:196).

2a.　　lə-wlaad　　　nʕas-u　　　　　　√ SV+full agreement **(MA)**

　　　the-children　　slept.3p.pl

　　　'The children slept.'

b.　　*lə-wlaad　　　nʕas　　　　　　　SV+partial agreement

　　　the-children　　slept.3p.sg

c.　　nʕas-u　　　　lə-wlaad　　　　　√ VS+full agreement

　　　slept.3p.pl　　the-children

　　　'The children slept.'

d.　　*nʕas　　　　lə-wlaad　　　　　　VS+partial agreement

　　　slept.3p.sg　　the-children

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(Aoun et al., 1994:196)

Now let us consider the following examples in (3) from NA in order to examine whether or not NA allows the SVAA phenomenon.

3a.　　el-ʕyaal　　　jlesau　　　　　√ SV+full agreement

　　　the.boys　　　sat.3p.pl.m

　　　'The boys sat down.'

b.　　*el-ʕyaal　　　jalas　　　　　　SV+ partial agreement

　　　the.boys　　　sat.3p.sg.m

c.　　jlesau　　　　el-ʕyaal　　　　√　VS+full agreement

　　　sat.3p.pl.m　　the.boys

　　　'The boys sat down.'

d.　　*jalas　　　　el-ʕyaal　　　　　VS+ partial agreement

　　　sat.3p.sg.m　　the.boys

The sentences in (3) illustrate that NA does not show SVAA asymmetry either. In (3a) and (3c) full agreement

can be obtained in both SVO and VSO word orders. However, (3b) and (3d) are unacceptable sentences in NA due to number agreement violations. It is normal to say that in NA a plural verb agrees with a plural subject and a singular verb agrees with a singular subject. That is, a singular verb can never agree with a plural subject and vice versa. However, there exists in NA a kind of SVAA asymmetry which is not related to word order differences but rather to gender agreement differences. This can be explored in gender agreement in NA below.

In order to account for this asymmetry, which refers to the difference in the agreement pattern according to a difference in the word order in SA, a number of proposals have been proposed and argued for among which are the null expletive analysis (Mohammad, 1990, 2000; Ouhalla, 1994; Olarrea, 1996; Soltan, 2007; and Al-Horais, 2009, among others), agreement loss analysis (Aoun *et al* 1994), and a base-generation analysis (Soltan, 2006, 2007). The objective was to provide a unified account on the subject under discussion. Let us have a careful look at such accounts in the following sections.

3. Preminimalist Analyses

3.1 Null Expletive Analysis

In his influential work on Arabic agreement, Mohammad (1990) assumes that agreement in SA is the result of a Spec-head relation. Full agreement, on the one hand, in SVO word order in SA is seen to be the result of a Spec-head relation between the verb on T(ense) and a lexical element on its Spec. On the other hand, partial agreement in VSO word order is viewed to be the outcome of the same relation but between the verb on T and a null expletive on its Spec. Mohammad's (1990, 2000) analysis can be demonstrated in (4) below where he assumes that the null expletive should be third person singular in order to account for the partial agreement phenomenon in Standard Arabic (Other analyses in this regard are also seen in Soltan, 2007 and Al-Horais, 2009).

4.

full agreement   partial agreement
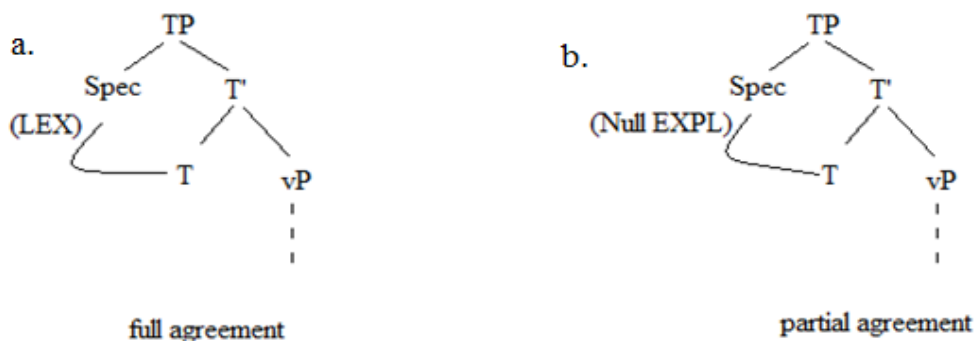
It should, however, be noted that there are some arguments raised against the null expletive hypothesis. The first argument is that it fails to account for the full agreement pattern in VSO word order in local varieties of Standard Arabic such as Moroccan Arabic. In addition, the null expletive should not necessarily be a third person singular. This can be clearly observed when using plural pronominal subjects instead of lexical subjects. This can be shown in Fassi Fahri's (1993) examples in (5) below. Moreover, the hypothesis fails to account for sentences where the verb shows full agreement with pronominal subjects as shown in Bahloul & Herbert's (1992) examples in (6) below.

5.   hum   al-junuud-u

      they.m.   the-soldiers-nom

          'It is the soldiers / That's soldiers.'   (SA)   (Fassi Fehri, 1993:40)

6a.   xaraj-uu   hum   wa   sami

      left.3.m.pl   they   and   Sami

          'They and Sami left.'

b.   * xaraj-a   hum   wa   sami

        left.3p.m.sg they   and   Sami

          'They and Sami left.'   (Bahloul & Harbert, 1992:21).

3.2 Agreement Loss Hypothesis

Aoun et al. (1994) propose that both SVO and VSO word orders have full agreement patterns under a Spec-head relation. With VSO word order, part of the agreement, more particularly, number agreement gets lost in the movement of the verb from T(ense) to a higher functional head position, designated as F. Aoun et al. (1994) argue that the verb succeeds in preserving gender agreement but fails to maintain number agreement. This hypothesis is considered to be weak because the motive behind the movement of the verb to FP is not clear and is not also examined in detail in Aoun et al. (1994).

4. Minimalist Analyses

4.1 Base-generation Hypothesis (Null Pro-hypothesis)

A recent account has been proposed by Soltan (2006), which he calls a base-generated analysis. Under this analysis, SVO-VSO word order alternation in SA is assumed to be not a result of "the presence versus absence of subject movement to [Spec-TP], but is instead a consequence of two different base-generated structural representations" (p.1). In preverbal DPs, the subject is base-generated in its position, [Spec-TP], rather than arriving there via movement. According to Soltan (2006), Spec-vP is occupied by a null subject pro. Soltan assumes that T(ense) in such structures has EPP features, CLASS features; gender features, and phi-features; for number and person. Soltan (2007) assumes that "T has the following inventory of uninterpretable features: First, φ-features for Person and Number features … Second, T also has a separate CLASS feature, which appears as a Gender feature in many languages … Finally, T may appear with … EPP feature" (p. 69-70). Full agreement occurs as a manifestation of an Agree relation between T and pro. In post-verbal DPs, the subject is base-generated in [Spec-vP]. According to Soltan's proposal, T(ense) does not have any EPP features. It bears only CLASS features; gender features. Partial agreement is "due to a default agreement option in the language for φ-feature valuation" (pp.93). Hence, partial agreement is the result of an Agree relation between T and the subject in [Spec-vP]. Soltan represents his proposal for both word order alternations in SA in the following diagrams (7) and (8).

7.

(cf. Soltan 2006:256, eg. 40)

8.

(cf. Soltan 2006:256, eg. 41)
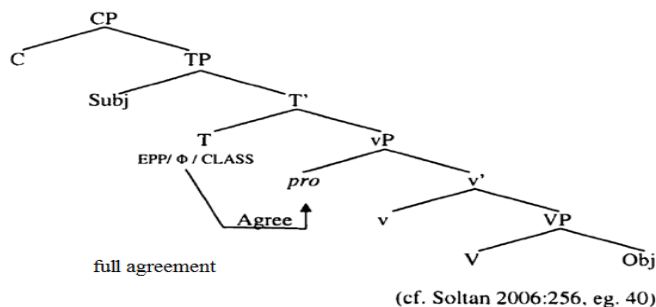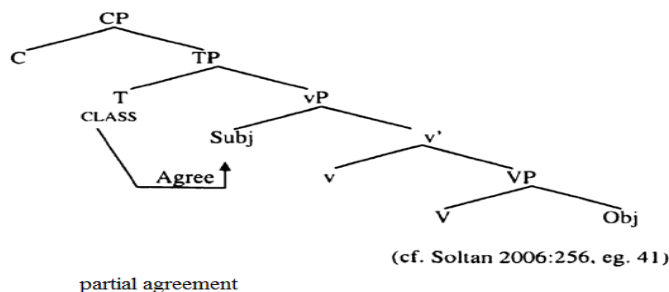
It can be observed that Soltan's analysis contains a weak assumption concerning his null *pro* subject proposal. He assumes that full agreement pattern requires the presence of full T (with EEP, CLASS, and φ-features). As T has unvalued features, it probes down for a matching goal with valued features. Assuming *pro* to be the goal will not be acceptable because *pro* is an unidentified element and only the interpretable features of argumental DPs are able to value the φ-features of T. Thus, *pro* will be a vague and an unsuitable goal for valuing T's features (Chomsky, 1995; Holmberg, 2005, 2008; and Al-Hurais, 2009).

4.2 Fakih's (2014a&b, 2015, 2016) Minimalist Account

In work entitled "Subject Wh-movement in Najrani Arabic and minimalism", Fakih (2014a) points out that NA is an SVO language, where he stresses that wh-questions are derived in SVO word order. He also indicates that VSO can be used but it is not as common and acceptable by the native speakers as SVO. Moreover, in a subsequent minimalist study on Wh-questions in Hodeidi Arabic, spoken in the Western region of Yemen, Fakih (2015) demonstrates how the subject wh-phrase can be extracted out of intransitive structures in VSO word order. Fakih (2015) shows that Hodeidi Arabic has both SVO and VSO word orders which are used in daily conversations. He also illustrates that the intransitive and transitive structures can be used with VSO and SVO word orders. However, in the analysis of the derivation of subject wh-questions in Hodeidi Arabic, he points out that Hodeidi Arabic tends to use VSO word order for morpho-syntactic convenience.

Furthermore, in his analysis of the syntax of the null *pro* subject in Early Modern English, Standard Arabic and Modern Standard English, Fakih (2014b) shows how nominative Case and agreement features of the (*pro*) subject are licensed and how the tense features of the verb are checked in Early Modern English and Standard Arabic. Furthermore, he presents an alternative analysis which accounts for the occurrence of the null *pro* in finite clauses of Standard Arabic. He assumes that the D-feature of I(NFL) is invariably strong in VSO and SVO structures with null *pro* subjects in Standard Arabic. Given this, he argues that the subject *pro* moves from the VP-internal position to the thematic and structural subject position of the sentence occupying [Spec, IP] for feature licensing purposes. The movement of the *pro* subject and the verb is driven by the necessity to check the morphological features via a Spec-head agreement relation, where the nominative Case and agreement features of the subject as well as the tense feature of the verb are licensed, thus ensuring that all features are interpretable in the syntax.

In a recent minimalist study, Fakih (2016) examines agreement in VSO and SVO word orders in Standard Arabic, points out how VSO and SVO are derived in the syntax, and proposes an alternative analysis based on Chomsky' (2005) feature-based-inheritance approach, which seeks to provide a unified account on the subject. Fakih's (2016) account attempts to explore the interaction between the SA data and Chomsky's feature inheritance analysis; it shows that whether the subject (i.e. the goal with which C agrees) in Spec-v*P in VSO order or in Spec-TopP (=Topic Phrase) in SVO order, the Agree relation can apply and all unvalued uninterpretable features are valued and deleted by matching them with their valued interpretable counterparts. Furthermore, Fakih argues that since the edge feature of the head C of the CP phase is inherited by the Top head, the topicalised elements in Standard Arabic are raised from lower positions to Spec-TopP in SVO order, not the specifier of CP, as assumed in Chomsky (2005). Besides, he shows that in SA the features of T in VSO order and the features of T and Top in SVO order are inherited from C, the head of the CP phase. He also adopts Rizzi's (1997) Spilt-CP analysis and in turn proposes a modification of Chomsky's (2005) clause structure in order to account for the position of the topicalised subject in SVO in SA. Fakih's (2016) analysis shows that the difference between VSO and SVO is that the subject in VSO remains in situ while in SVO it moves from Spec-vP to Spec-TopP via TP. This explains how SVO and VSO are derived in SA minimalist syntax.

4.3 Chomsky's (2001, 2005) Minimalist Analysis

Case and agreement features have received considerable attention in minimalist analysis of linguistic theory. Case and agreement have been studied in relation to each other in a number of linguistic modules. In GB theory (Chomsky 1981-1991) Case features were assumed to be licensed in two syntactic configurations; a Spec-head agreement configuration or a head-complement agreement. In early versions of the minimalist framework (Chomsky 1993 and 1995), specifically in the Spec-head approach, Case was assumed to be licensed via agreement with AGR heads. Moreover, in the Minimalist Inquiries of Chomsky's (2000, and 2001) an agreement relation via an operation Agree was assumed to license Case and agreement features; in this work Case and agreement are interrelated and hence should be studied in relation to each other.

A closer look at the latest development of Agree theory shows that Chomsky (2005) proposes two phases CP and vP, but not TP and VP. These phases contain two types of features; Agree features (phi-features) and the Edge feature (the EPP feature in previous accounts) in addition to a tense feature on C (the phase head) only. Chomsky

(2005) indicates that TP and VP are not phases and do not have features. Chomsky (2001) points out that "the phases are CP and vP but crucially not TP" (p. 6). He also argues that T and V inherit their features from their phase heads C and v, respectively.

With regard to T, Chomsky (2005) argues that T lacks ɸ-features and tense features in the lexicon and it inherits them from C, being the phase head of CP. Chomsky claims that "T manifests the basic tense features if and only if it is selected by C…; if not, it is a raising … infinitival, lacking ɸ-features and basic tense. So it makes sense to assume that Agree- and Tense-features are inherited from C, the phase head" (Chomsky, 2005: 10). Given this, T and C form a complex unit probing together for a matching goal. On this basis, we adopt Chomsky's (2001, 2005) phase-based model and feature inheritance approach in order to account neatly for agreement and word order variation in NA. Following Chomsky (2005), we assume that in NA ɸ-features and Edge feature are inherited from the head C, the CP phase. That is, the phase head C transmits its ɸ-features and Edge feature to the functional head T in SVO word order in NA, but only transmits ɸ-features to T in VSO word order in the same language. The reason why this happens in VSO word order in NA can be attributed to the fact that T lacks an Edge (i.e. tense) feature which triggers movement of the subject DP from the base position of [Spec-vP] to [Spec-TP].

According to the minimalist analysis, the syntactic operation Agree is defined to be the relationship between an uninterpretable feature on a probe and a target in the probe's c-command domain (Chomsky 2000 and 2001; Bardeas, 2005; and Heck & Richards, 2007). What is interesting about Agree is that it helps in checking the uninterpretable features in order to cause them to converge in the syntax. Given this, Agree contributes to the development of a more flexible understanding of the agreement phenomenon and also provides an explanation of the word order asymmetry observed in languages such as Arabic. It differs from the earlier conception of agreement in the GB framework in that it does not require movement and it is not specifically a Spec-head relation.

Thus, agreement has been treated as the result of a built-in operation; Agree in which an agreement relation between two elements of a sentence can be established at a distance, though still subject to certain locality considerations. Soltan (2007) presents a good account on Agree-Based analysis in Standard Arabic; the following representation in (9) illustrates Soltan's minimalsit treament of Agree in a more pricipled fashion.

9.
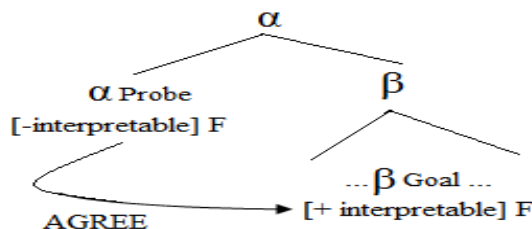
Moreover, the introduction of the concepts of phase and feature inheritance in Chomsky (2001, 2005) brought a significant improvement to the notion of Agree. Chomsky (2001) defines phases as "the operative elements" (p. 15) within a structure which means that they are the locus of features and the source for syntactic operations. Chomsky (2001, 2005) divides a structure into two basic phases; CP and vP. TP and VP are not phases, and they do not have features themselves but they inherit their features from the phase heads. For T, Chomsky asserts that it is not a phase and claims that "in the lexicon, T lacks these features. T manifests the basic tense features if and only if it is selected by C… Agree- and Tense-features are inherited from C, the phase head" (Chomsky, 2005:11). Given Chomsky's (2005) minimalist assumptions, it can be observed that the valuation of Case and agreement occurs as a manifestation of the operation Agree between the phase head and a DP.

5. Word Order in NA

We have already shown that SA allows SVO and VSO word orders; the former (i.e. SVO) is considered to be the marked order while the latter is the unmarked order. The only difference between such orders is whether the speaker wants to emphasize the action or the doer of the action. When the emphasis is on the action of the verb, the VSO order is used, and when the emphasis is on the doer of the action the SVO order is used. Consider the examples in (10) below to illustrate the point.

10a.   kataba   zaid-un   risaalat-an.   (VSO)

           wrote.3p.sg.m   Zaid.nom   letter.acc.indef

                ' Zaid wrote a letter.'

b.   zaid-un   kataba   risaalat-an.   (SVO)

        Zaid.nom   wrote.3p.sg.m   letter.acc.indef

                ' Zaid wrote a letter.'

However, the structure of the Arabic sentence has changed through time. In this respect, Versteegh (1997) points out that "the sentence structure of Classical Arabic has changed drastically in the modern dialects. The distinction between the two types of sentences has disappeared. In its place, one canonical word order has emerged, which seems to be in most dialects subject-verb-object, although verb-subject occurs in many dialects as a stylistic variant." (p. 101).

Since this study focuses on Najrani Arabic which is a variety of Standard Arabic, the question is: does Najrani Arabic allow SVO or VSO word order or both? Let us examine the issue of word order derivation in the following examples in (11) in order to illustrate the point.

11a.   ahmad   yalʕab   kuurah

       Ahmad.nom   play.3p.sg.m   football.acc

           'Ahmad is playing football.'

b.   elʕyaal   yalʕeb-uun

        the.boys.nom   play.3p.pl.m-they.nom.

            'The boys are playing.'

c.   ahmad   raaH   el-souq

        Ahmad.nom   went.3p.sg.m.   the.market.acc

           'Ahmad went to the market.'

d.   haamed   shara   Xubz

        Haamed.nom   bought.3p.sg.m   bread.acc

            'Haamed bought bread.'

From the examples in (11), we can notice that the canonical word order of NA sentences is SVO, where the subject DP usually precedes the verb in the construction. When the verb occurs sentence-initially, the sentence is considered to be unacceptable in NA. Consider the following examples in (12) to illustrate the point.

 12a.   *yalʕab   ahmad   kuurah

         play.3p.sg.m.   Ahmad.nom   football.acc

b.   *Yalʕeb-uun   elʕyaal

        play.3p.pl.m-they.nom   the.boys.nom

However, some sentences can be formed with VSO order and yet they are still acceptable by the native speakers of NA, as demonstrated in (13) below.

13a.   raaH   ahmad   el-souq

          went.3p.sg.m.   Ahmad.nom   the.market.acc

            'Ahmad went to the market.'

b.   lʕeb   ahmad   kuurah

        played.3p.sg.m   Ahmad.nom   football.acc

            'Ahmad played football.'

c.   shara   haamed   xubz

         bought.3p.sg.m.   Haamed.nom   bread.acc

            'Haamed bought bread.'

d.   *YruuH   ahmad   el-soug

    going.3p.sg.m.   Ahmad.nom   the.market.acc

e.   *yashteri   haamed   xubz

    buying.3p.sg.m.   Haamed.nom   bread.acc

The reason why the sentences in (13a-c) are acceptable in NA can be attributed to the tense of the sentences. When the tense of the sentence is in the past, VSO word order is used. However, if the tense of the same sentence changes into present, then the construction becomes unacceptable by the native speakers of NA, as shown in (13d) and (13e) above.

As a variety of Standard Arabic, NA also allows both SVO and VSO word orders. It can be observed that the use of a certain word order over the other is not optional in NA syntax. It can be realized that the word order in NA is tense-specific. That is, the order of a sentence depends on its tense, whether it is past or present. The predominant word order in NA is SVO.   It can be observed that SVO can sometimes be used with both past and present tenses, but VSO can only be used with the past tense. Using VSO with a present tense sentence renders the sentence unacceptable in NA. Consider the following examples in (14) for more clarification.

14a.   leʕbau   el-ʕyaal

    played.3p.pl.m.   the boys.nom   (√ past; VS)

      'The boys played.'

b.   *el-ʕyaal   leʕbau   (* past; SV)

    the boys.nom   played.3p.pl.m.

c.   fatmah   tnaDhif   el-.bait   (√ present; SVO)

    Fatmah.nom   clean.3p.sg.f.   the.house.acc

      'Fatmah is cleaning the house.'

d.   * tnaDhif   fatmah   el-abait   (* present; VSO)

    clean.3p.sg.f.   Fatmah.nom   the.house.acc

      'Fatmah is cleaning the house.'

e.   gara   el-walad   el-jeriidah   (√ past; VSO)

    read.3p.sg.m   the.boy.nom   the.newspaper.acc

      'The boy read the newspaper.'

The examples in (14) above show that the dominant word order in NA is SVO. However, VSO can sometimes be used but when the tense of the sentence is in the past. Hence, we cannot over generalize this position to all the instances of the past tense sentences. This is due to the fact that SVO order can be used with both past and present. That is, SVO is more preferable to be used among the native speakers of NA. On the other hand, VSO word order is especially preferable by the native speakers of NA when the past sentence has its subject as a bound pronominal. It seems that the use of VSO word order over SVO order is only a stylistic variation within the language. There is no syntactic or semantic justification for the phenomenon; it does not seem to have any explanation other than this. It can be attributed to a stylistic strategy of NA. Consider the following examples in (15).

15a.   garei-t   ktaab

    read.1p.sg-I.nom   book.acc.indef

      'I read a book.'

b.   kallam-t   ummy

    talked.1p.sg-I.nom   mother.my

      'I talked to my mother.'

c.   sherbau   el-ʕaSiir

    drank.3p.pl.m-they.nom   the.juice.acc

      'They drank the juice.'

d.   ruH-naa   el-soug

    went.1p.pl-we.nom   the.market.acc

       'We went to the market.'

e.   *Hen   ruHnaa   elsoug

     we.nom   went.1p.pl-we.nom   the.market.acc

As shown in (15), there are different sentences which are all in the past tense. The subjects are pronominal clitics attached to the verbs. In (15e), the sentence is unacceptable simply because it is not allowed by the native speakers of NA to begin a sentence with a pronominal subject.

5.1 Gender Agreement in NA

Previous studies on agreement reflect that agreement asymmetries are found in languages such as, Spanish, Latin, and French but not in English. It has been found that "no asymmetry in gender marking was found in most empirical studies on gender (in Italian [Vigliocco & Franck, 1999]; in Spanish [Igoa, Garcı´a-Albea & Sa´nchez-Casas, 1999; Anto´n- Me´ndez, 1999) … But an effect of gender has been reported for French (Vigliocco & Franck, 1999)" (Anto´n-Me´ndez, Nicol, & Garrett, 2002:23). Languages with masculine, feminine gender distinction tend to take one of these genders to be its default gender. In French, it is found that the default gender is masculine (Harris, 1991). Moreover, in SA masculine is found as the default gender. In this connection, we assume in this study that the default unmarked gender in NA is also masculine.

Gender agreement in NA is not affected by a difference in the word order. Rather, it is only affected by the difference in number. In the case of plurals, NA uses one gender form. It generalizes the use of a masculine plural verb with both masculine and feminine plural subjects. However, NA uses two gender forms with singular subjects. That is, it uses a singular masculine verb for a singular masculine subject and a singular feminine verb for a singular feminine subject. The examples in (16-17) clarify the point.

Plural forms

16a. el-ʕyaal   yamsh-uun   SV+ full agreement

    the.boys.nom   walking.pl.m.

       'The boys are walking.'

b.   el-banaat   yamsh-uun   SV+ partial agreement

    the.girls.nom   walking.pl.m.

       'The girls are walking.'

c.   leʕbau   el-ʕyaal   VS+ full agreement

    played.pl.m   the.boys.nom

       'The boys played.'

d.   leʕbau   al-banaat   VS+ partial agreement

    played.pl.m   the.girls.nom

       'The girls played.'

e.   * lʕeb   el-ʕyaal

     played.sg.m.   the.boys.nom

f.   * lʕeb   el.banaat

     played.sg.m.   the.girls.nom

g.   * leʕb-at   el-banaat

     played.sg.f.   the.girls.nom

Singular forms

17a.   el-walad   ya-mshi   SV+ full agreement

    the.boy.nom   walking.sg.m

       'The boy is walking.'

b.   el-bint   ta-mshi   SV+ full agreement

    the.girl.nom   walking.sg.f

        'The girl is walking.'

c.   jalas   el-walad   VS+ full agreement

    sat.sg.m.   the.boy.nom

        'The boy sat'

d.   jles-at   el-bint   VS+ full agreement

    sat.sg. f.   the.girl.nom

        'The girl sat'

In (16a) and (16c), there is full agreement in all ɸ-features (i.e. gender, number, and person) between the subject and the verb. In (16b) and (16d), there is only partial agreement in number and person but not in gender as the gender manifests itself in the default masculine form, regardless of the subject gender. However, (16e), (16f), and (16g) are ungrammatical because of number agreement differences between the subject and the verb. Moreover, in (17), there are full agreement patterns in all ɸ-features (i.e. gender, number, and person) of all the sentences. Therefore, it can be pointed out that NA usually shows full agreement patterns in the instances above except with plural feminine subjects which show partial agreement, i.e., only in gender. Given this, we assume that the default unmarked gender in NA is also masculine. Hence, SVAA in NA is not related to word order differences but rather to gender agreement differences. To be more precise, full agreement and partial agreement patterns in NA are not related to word order differences, as the case in SA, but rather to some gender agreement patterns. It can be concluded that asymmetry in NA is not related to word order but rather to gender agreement.

5.2 The Derivation of SVO and VSO Word Orders in NA

It can be observed in the existing literature that the sentence derivation in SA has been investigated by different linguists. Among these linguists is Soltan who proposes the null pro hypothesis. Soltan (2007) offers two different analyses to account for word order alternation in SA. They can be demonstrated in (18).

18. Structural representations to VSO and SVO orders:

a.   VS: [TP T+[v*+V] [v*P DP tv* [VP tV YP]]]

b.   SV: [TP DP T+[v*+V] [v*P *pro* tv* [VP tV YP]]]   (p. 63)

Moreover, Musabhein (2009) proposes two derivational procedures to account for word order variations in Jordanian Arabic (henceforth, JA) similar to these in SA. Musabhein (2009) proposes that SVO word order is derived by raising the verb to T and then moving the subject DP from [Spec-vP] to [Spec-TP]. In addition, Musabhein (2009) assumes that in VSO word order, the verb is topicalized by raising it to TopP "carrying with it the cliticised resumptive pronoun" while the subject DP moves to [Spec-TP] (p. 222).

The question that can be posed here is: how can we derive SVO and VSO word orders in NA structures? In the following sub-sections, we explore the issue of the derivation of SVO and VSO orders in NA and attempt to provide a unified answer to this question.

Soltan (2007) proposes that the position of the subject depends on the order of the sentence whether it is SVO or VSO. Soltan assumes that the subject in an SVO sentence is base-generated in [Spec-TP] whereas the subject of a VSO sentence is base-generated in [Spec-vP]. Contra to Soltan's (2007) proposal, we propose that the subject in SVO and VSO word orders in NA is base-generated in [Spec-vP] and that it reaches its surface position via movement. This will be addressed in detail below.

Building on Musabhein's (2009) analysis in Jordanian Arabic, we assume that the derivation of the unmarked SVO order in NA takes place after applying a further step to the marked VSO order in the language. That is, the derivation of SVO word order in NA comes after the derivation of the marked VSO order. Given this, we propose that the default unmarked word order in NA is SVO order. Moreover, we view pronominal clitics attached to the verbs in NA structures as resumptive pronouns, not as number markers. This will be discussed in detail below.

5.3 VSO Derivation in NA

In this sub-section, we explore NA structures and show how VSO word order is derived in the syntax. The analysis is based on Chomsky's (2001, 2005) Agree theory; the phase model and feature inheritance approach. This can be demonstrated in (19) below.

19a. lʕeb   zaid   kuurah   (VSO in NA)
      played.3p.sg.m.   Zaid.nom   football.acc.
           'Zaid played football.'

  b. raaH   ahmad   el-souq
      went.3p.sg.m.   Ahmad.nom   the.market.acc
           'Ahmad went to the market.'

As shown in (19) above, the derivation of VSO structures starts by merging the verb with the nominal DP, the object, to form VP. The lexical verb moves from the V position to the functional light v and forms v'. The V movement to the phase head v is to lexically support it; the latter (i.e. v) is originally proposed for the sake of valuing the uninterpretable accusative Case feature of the object DP. The v' merges with the subject DP which is base-generated in [Spec-vP] to form vP, the phase. The v head, of the vP phase, has unvalued uninterpretable φ-features [φ-features [uF]] and an interpretable Case feature [Case [F]]. The subject DP in [Spec-vP] has interpretable φ-features [φ-features [F]] and an uninterpretable Case feature [Case [uF]]. The uninterpretable features make a constituent an active probe in order to be able to search for a matching goal with interpretable features.

Furthermore, T is a strong affixal node which inherits its features from the phase head C. It has an interpretable Case feature, and uninterpretable φ-features. T triggers the movement of the verb from v to T so that all unvalued uninterpretable features are valued and then deleted in the syntax. After that, T agrees with the subject DP and values its Case and φ-features. We assume that since the head C of the CP phase does not have an Edge feature (EPP feature in previous minimalist accounts) in VSO word order in NA, the subject DP cannot raise higher up in the clause structure. As a result, the subject DP has to remain in [Spec-vP], i.e., it has to stay in situ. Hence, a derived convergent VSO structure in NA results in this syntactic operation. This can be shown in (20), where (19a) above is reproduced as (20) below for more clarification.

20a. lʕeb   zaid   kuurah   (VSO in NA)
      played.3p.sg.m   Zaid.nom   football.acc.
           'Zaid played football.'

20b

The derivation of VSO sentences
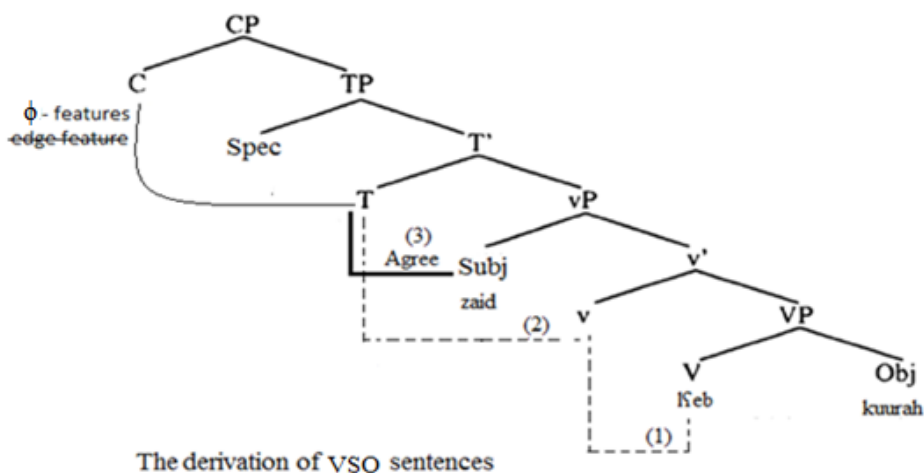
In the diagram (20b), the numbers with the dotted arrows indicate the derivational steps of VSO word order in NA illustrated in (20a) above. The curved solid arrow indicates the morpho-syntactic transmission of the feature inheritance property from the phase head C to the functional head T of TP. The phase head C transmits φ-features to T, but not an Edge feature (i.e. tense feature or EEP feature used in earlier analyses). As shown on the clause structure of NA in (20b) above, the lexical V moves to the functional head v, where it agrees with the object *kuurah* 'football' and assigns accusative Case to it. Then the functional light head v raises to the

functional head T, where the latter (i.e. T) agrees with the subject DP *Zaid* and values the unvalued uninterpretable features (such as Nominative Case and ɸ-features), hence such features are deleted in the syntax. We assume that the phase head C transmits only ɸ-features to the head T in VSO order because it is in VSO word order in NA that the head T does not have an Edge feature which triggers syntactic movement of the subject DP from [Spec-vP] to [Spec-TP]. This can explain why the subject DP remains in situ in VSO word order in NA syntax.

5.4 SVO Derivation in NA

NA poses no restrictions on the definiteness of the subject. That is, the subject DP can either be definite or indefinite, specific or non-specific. Given this, we agree with the traditional Arab grammarians' view that the real subject DP in SA cannot precede its verb, thus the DP in SVO is seen as a topic, not a subject, by modern Arab and Western linguists working on Standard Arabic syntax. Besides, we adopt Rizzi's (1997) Split-CP Hypothesis which states that CP can be split into a number of projections; force phrase, topic phrase, focus phrase, and finite phrase, all of which are lower than CP and above TP projections.

The question that can be posed here is: on what basis should the preverbal subject DP be treated in SVO word order in NA? If we agree with Chomsky's (2005) minimalist assumption that the phase head C passes an Edge feature to the head T so that the subject can raise to [Spec-TP], then this line of argument may not be able to account for the position of the raised preverbal subject (Topic) in SVO word order in NA. Following Rizzi's (1997) Split-CP analysis and Musabhein's (2009) minimalist account, we assume that there is a dire need of adding a Topic Phrase (TopP) projection within the CP projection layer of the clause structure of NA, a projection which has to be accommodated between CP and TP projections. The reason why we suggest this TopP projection can be attributed to the fact that the occurrence and the position of the preverbal topicalized subject have to be explained neatly in SVO word order in NA.

Like VSO word order derivation in NA, SVO order is also derived morpho-syntactically in a similar way but differs in a further syntactic step; the subject DP in SVO order in NA has to raise higher up in the clause structure, where it is topicalized. Let us illustrate this in (21) below for more exposure.

21a.   zaid   lʕeb   kuurah   (SVO in NA)

        Zaid.nom   played.3p.sg.m   football.acc.indef.

            'Zaid played football.'

21b

The derivation of SVO sentences
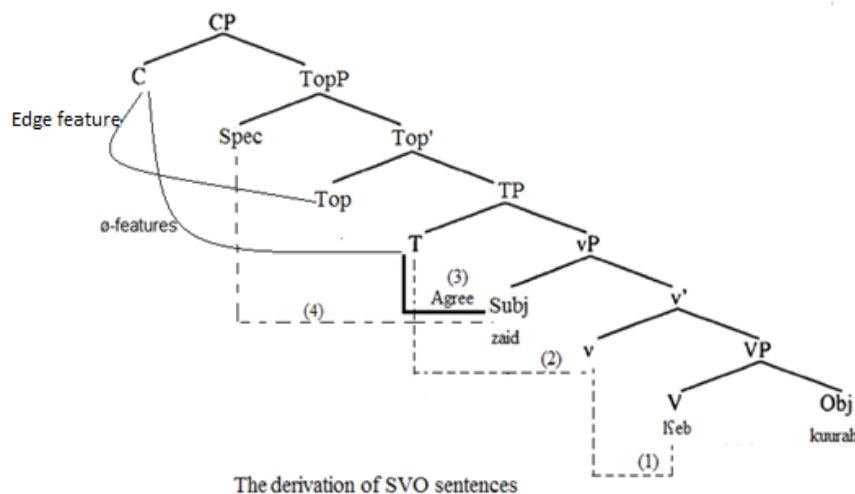
As shown on the clause structure in (21b) above, the dotted arrows illustrate the movement of the lexical V *lʕeb* 'played' to the functional head v where it agrees with the object *kuurah* 'football' and assigns accusative Case to it. Then the head v raises to the head T for feature valuation purposes, where it (i.e. T) agrees with the subject DP *Zaid* and values the unvalued uninterpretable features (such as Nominative Case and phi-features). Once these unvalued uninterpretable features are valued they get deleted in the course of the derivation. The curved solid arrows indicate the syntactic process of the transmission of the feature inheritance property from the phase head

C to the heads Top and T. We assume that the phase head C transmits ɸ-features to T, and the Edge feature to Top. It is the Edge feature on the head Top which motivates the subject DP to move to [Spec-TopP] where unvalued uninterpretable features are valued and hence deleted in the course of the derivation, thus generating a convergent structure in the language.

6. Conclusion

This study has attempted to present a satisfactorily unified account of word order derivation and agreement in NA based on Chomsky's (2005) Agree theory. We have assumed that the derivation of the unmarked SVO word order in NA comes after the derivation of the marked VSO word order; it has demonstrated that SVO is derived after VSO in NA. Given this, we have postulated that the default unmarked word order is SVO in NA. It has illustrated that the derivational analysis of the word order in NA starts by assuming that T in VSO lacks the Edge feature which motivates movement of the subject DP to [Spec-TP]. As a consequence, the subject of VSO structure remains in situ, that is, it stays in the subject position of [Spec-vP].

On the other hand, we have proposed that the derivation of SVO word order in NA comes as a further derivational step after the derivation of VSO word order. We have proposed that the DP which is base-generated in [Spec-vP] is a topic, not a subject. Moreover, we have adopted Rizzy's split-CP hypothesis on the basis of which we have assumed the existence of a Top Phrase (TopP) projection in the clause structure of NA. Furthermore, we have postulated that the phase head C passes its ɸ-features to the functional head T and the Edge feature to TopP. The paper has shown that the derivational steps in NA are motivated by the necessity to value the uninterpretable features. We have assumed that features in NA are inherited from the phase heads; there are different types of features among which are the agreement features (ɸ-features) which are uninterpretable on the phase heads. It has shown that the uninterpretable features on the phase heads allow them to enter into an Agree relation with the nearest matching interpretable feature on a DP to value such features, hence all the uninterpretable features are valued and deleted in the syntax. Once a feature is processed and valued, a convergent structure is generated in the syntax. What has been interesting about Chomsky's (2001, 2005) Agree theory is that feature valuation has played an important role in the derivation of SVO and VSO structures and has explained agreement patterns in NA. Moreover, it has explored subject-verb agreement asymmetry and has shown that the asymmetry in NA is not related to word order differences but rather to gender agreement differences.

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