

Odd pronouns in Egyptian Arabic

Malcolm Edwards

m.edwards@bbk.ac.uk

In Egyptian Arabic (EA), as in other dialects of Arabic, apparently regular pronominal elements may assume functions not normally associated with pronouns. One such odd pronoun is the so-called 'copula pronoun' described in Eid (1983, 1989), among others. Pronouns also appear as pre-sentential question particles (Kenstowica and Wahba 1983, Eid 1995, Ouhalla and Edwards 1996). While 'Copula pronoun' ('Pron') constructions have been the subject of considerable attention in the literature, 'Question Pronouns' ('QP') have received sporadic treatment. The present paper describes the syntactic and discourse properties of odd pronouns, and considers how they might be analysed in the light of recent proposals concerning the syntactic relationship between focus and agreement marking.

1. Pronominal Constructions in EA

The constructions we are concerned with have the following properties. The first type - Copula Pronouns (glossed here as 'Pron') - are a feature of one type of verbless sentence in EA. In such sentences the predicate phrase is preceded by a pronoun which agrees with the subject:¹

- (1) Il-walad huwwa il-mas'u:l
the-boy Pron the-responsible
the boy is the one responsible
- (2) nadya hiyya il-mumarriDa
Nadya Pron the-nurse
Nadya is the nurse

The second type - Question Pronouns (QP) - appear in both polar and constituent questions. The pronoun invariably appears sentence-initially, and agrees with the NP - either the subject or the topic - which immediately follows it. Sentences (3) and (4) exemplify the QP with masculine and feminine subjects respectively, while in (5) the QP appears before a topicalised NP in i

- (3) huwwa magdi ra:H maSr
Pron Magdi went Cairo
Did Magdi go to Cairo?
- (4) humma it-talamza HayruHu bukra
Pron(Pl) the-students will-go tomorrow
Will the students go tomorrow?
- (5) hiyya nadya magdi fayyal-ha
Pron(FS) Nadya Magdi employed-her
Did Magdi give Nadya a job?

¹ Pron-constructions are not predicational, and the term 'predicate' is used here in a loose sense to designate the second or rightmost term in the construction.

Superficially, apart from the fact that both copula and question pronouns invariably take the form of nominative (iSubject or 'independent') pronouns, the two types would appear to have nothing in common. On closer inspection, both Pron and QP turn out to share a number of properties. Starting with Pron, we find that Pron is notably restricted with regard to form. Instances of Pron are invariably third-person forms. If the subject is other than third person, Pron agrees with the subject for number and gender, but not for person, remaining in the third person form:

- (6) 'inta huwwa il-mudarris
you(MS) Pron(3SM) the-teacher
you're the teacher

Copula pronouns appear to resemble verbs in terms of their surface position and their copular function, but unlike verbal copulas, copula pronouns are only found in 'equational' sentences in which the subject and the predicate phrase have identical referents:

- (7) fawziyya hiyya il-mumarrida
Fawziyya Pron the-nurse
Fawziyya is the nurse

- (8) *fawziyya hiyya mumarrida
Fawziyya Pron nurse
Fawziyya is (a) nurse

Pron also differs from verbs, including the copula verb *ka:n*, in that it can only appear in pre-predicate position, and cannot be inverted with the subject:

- (7) *hiyya fawziyya il-mumarrida
Pron Fawziyya the-nurse
(not 'Fawziyya is the nurse', but 'is Fawziyya the nurse?')

- (8) ka:nit Fawziyya il-mumarrida
was Fawziyya the-nurse
Fawziyya was the nurse

Pron is also incompatible with the appearance of a verb:

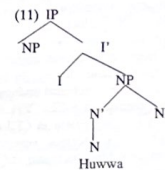
- (9) *fawziyya ka:nit hiyya il-mumarrida
Fawziyya was Pron the-nurse

Much has been made of the apparent similarities between Pron and verbs. The requirement that Pron appear in pre-predicate position, and the fact that it cannot co-occur with verbs, have frequently been seen as evidence that such pronouns have a verb-like character. The quasi-verbal nature of copular pronouns has been addressed in a number of ways in the literature. In an early study, Eid (1983) proposes a functional explanation of Pron, arguing that EA, among other languages, makes use of

pronouns as suppletive copular forms.² Functional explanations along these lines are also attested in traditional Arabic grammar, where copular pronouns are analysed as 'separating pronouns' (Damir fa-Sil), which serve to clearly distinguish subject and predicate. It is clear, as will be argued below, that such pronouns have a special functional status, but functional explanations fail to explain why it is pronouns, rather than say verbs or focusing particles, that appear in these contexts, why these pronouns manifest unusual agreement patterns. Similarly, functional explanations leave unanswered the question of what position such pronouns occupy in the structure of the sentence.

Formal explanations of these aspects of Pron have typically focused on the relationship between pronouns, inflection and INFL. Typically it has been claimed that Pron is generated under, or surfaces in I. Work by Doron (1986) and Rapoport (1986) argued that Hebrew Pron is the phonetic realization of AGR features in INFL, which, in the absence of a verb, are spelled out as a pronoun. Jelinek (1983) offers an analysis of EA data which differs in its formal assumptions from these analyses, but which is conceptually in harmony with them. Jelinek argues that Pron in EA appears under an AUX node, which is generated under S, and is hence separate from the Predicate, and which plays host to a variety of elements, including negation and tense as well as Pron.

The most detailed study of the grammar of Pron in EA is to be found in Eid (1989). Eid examines data from both EA and Hebrew, and proposes an analysis which seeks to integrate functional and formal properties of Pron. Eid is particularly concerned with explaining two aspects of Pron: its ambiguous categorial status, which appears to combine both nominal and verbal properties, and the fact that Pron occurs only with definite predicates. To provide a unified explanation of these properties, Eid argues that Pron is itself a predicate, specifically an identity predicate, and hence has quasi-verbal properties, and that the nominal properties of Pron can be explained if it is analysed as the head of a NP in predicate position. Eid's proposed structure for Pron constructions is given in (11):



Two main themes emerge from this brief survey of proposals regarding Pron. Firstly, there is the elusive relationship between Pron and agreement. On the one hand, Pron agrees with the subject, and this has prompted speculations to the effect that Pron is an agreement marker. On the other hand, the idiosyncratic nature of Pron's agreement properties suggest Pron cannot be regarded simply a marker of agreement. The second emergent theme concerns the relationship between form and function.

² The historical development of copula elements from pronouns is well documented: see Li and Thompson (1976).

Pron is morphologically a nominal element, but appears to function in a quasi-verbal fashion. Added to these formal issues, is the arguably functional consideration that Pron only appears in construction with definite predicates.

Turning now to question pronouns, these resemble Pron in that both their distribution and their agreement properties are reduced, by comparison with normal pronouns. In terms of distribution, QP appear initially in the sentence, and are restricted to matrix clauses. Eid (1993) notes that QP cannot appear in embedded contexts, and further observes that embedded interrogatives are introduced by the copular/tense-marking verb *ka:n*:

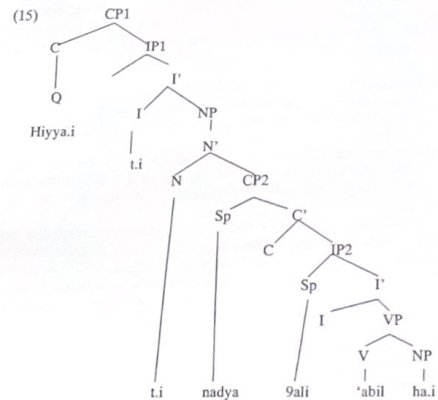
- (12) *sa'alni 'iza (*huwwa) magdi ka:n rigi9*
 asked-me if (*Pron) Magdi was returned
 he asked me if Magdi has come back

The QP also displays reduced agreement. If the NP following the QP is itself a pronoun, the QP is invariably the third-person singular masculine pronoun *huwwa*:

- (13) *huwwa 'ana magnun*
 Pron I mad
 Am I mad?

- (14) *huwwa 'ihna msafri:n bukra*
 Pron we go-away(P) tomorrow
 Are we leaving tomorrow?

On the basis of these facts, Eid develops an analysis of QP that relates them to the copula variety. The reduced agreement found with both Pron and QP suggests both that these pronouns are not regular pronouns, but rather elements with a special function. With regard to QP Eid further assumes that the appearance of the copula verb *ka:n* in embedded questions reflects a general property of questions, namely that they all contain a predicate expression (which she glosses 'BE'), which surfaces as the verb *ka:n* in embedded questions, and as a pronoun in matrix questions. As with her analysis of copula pronouns, Eid analyses question pronouns as predicates, originating within an NP projection whose complement is the interrogative clause. In Eid's analysis, the surface form of a question in EA reflects a complex, biclausal underlying structure in which the question pronoun is in the Comp position of a CP (CP1). CP1 contains the Predicate NP headed by the pronoun, whose complement is CP2 (the actual interrogative sentence). The pronominal head N first receives agreement features, via percolation and Spec-Head agreement from the subject (or topic) of CP2, following which it moves to its surface position in the Comp of the higher clause. The essential components of Eid's analysis are shown in (15).



The QP (*hiyya*) originates under N, then moves to I, and ultimately to the topmost C node. In this way, both the agreement between the QP and the initial (subject or topic) NP is explained, as is the position and function of the QP as a marker of interrogation.

2. Discussion

The formal analyses of both Pron and QP outlined above are largely concerned with explaining specifically grammatical aspects of agreement as a property of the I constituent. The approach to be developed here starts from the premise that both types of pronoun are associated with focus. This idea springs from proposals advanced in Ouhalla and Edwards (1996), and links these to a recent paper by Simpson and Wu (2000).

The association of Pron-constructions with focus is evidenced by several facts. It is clear, for example, that sentences with Pron are distinct, in terms of both syntactic and informational structure, from simple Predicational constructions. In EA, both types of constructions are verbless. Predicational constructions consist of a (definite) Subject and a Predicate phrase which is indefinite:

- (16) *magdi mumarriD*
 Magdi nurse
 Magdi is a nurse

The relationship expressed in (16) is one of simple predication: the property of being a nurse is predicated of Magdi. As we have already seen, Pron is incompatible with indefinite predicates, and hence is not associated with the predication relationship. As has also been suggested, the relationship expressed by Pron is that of identity between

the two terms linked by Pron. At the discourse/pragmatic level, such sentences are marked and invariably have a focus reading, in which Pron is the focused element. (cf. Ouhalla and Edwards 1996). Pron is regularly associated with focus, as in the sentences below:

(17) *il-mu/kila hiyya 'inn-ak mi/f fa:him il-Hika:ya*
 the-problem Pron that-you Neg understand the-story
 the problem is that you don't understand what's going on

(18) *illi 'ana mistayrab minn-u huwwa 'inn-aha mi/f 9ayza minn-i Ha:ga*
 Rel I surprised from-it Pron that-she Neg want from-me thing
 What I find strange is that she doesn't want anything from me

As the second of these sentences shows, Pron is a feature of one type of cleft in EA. Structurally speaking, 'ordinary' Pron constructions closely resemble clefts, with Pron acting as the focus. More generally, there is a regular relationship between the appearance of pronouns and focus. One widely-documented instance is the case of so-called 'negative pronouns'. These are subject pronouns which can appear in verbless sentences with the discontinuous negative marker *ma-f*:

(19) *ma-huwwa:-f Hara:mi*
 Neg-he-Neg thief
 He's not a thief

(20) *ma-nta:-f murta:H*
 Neg-you-Neg content
 You're not content

A further instance of pronouns as focus is found in constructions where an independent pronoun is used to 'double' and hence focus a bound pronoun:

(21) *fuft-u HUWWA*
 saw-him HE
 I saw HIM ('it was him I saw')

While the above suggests that there is indeed an association between 'copula' Pron and focus, what is not clear is where Pron appears in the clausal structure. In Edwards and Ouhalla (1996) it is suggested that Pron is in fact in subject position, and that the NP (or clause) to its left is a left-dislocated topic category. It is clear, however, that Pron does not have the properties of a regular subject. What appears to have happened is that an earlier Topic-Focus structure, in which Pron appeared as a pronominal copy of the dislocated element, has become reanalyzed, with Pron losing its original resumptive status, and 'fossilising' as a marker of focus. If, as this suggestion implies, Pron is neither a pronoun or a verb, the fact that it fails to show 'full' agreement may be explained. Pursuing this theme, Pron appears to have been reanalyzed as a quasi-functional element. With this in mind, various possibilities suggest themselves for the position it may occupy. Simpson and Wu (2000) consider a variety of constructions in a range of languages which provide evidence for a historically productive developmental relationship between focus projections and agreement. The core of Simpson and Wu's analysis is the proposal that a functional head may induce a lower

focus projection, containing semantically significant material. Over time, the semantic content of the head of the focus decays, and the projection condenses into a lexical head (ie. an X₀ category). Simpson and Wu's proposal has suggestive parallels with the analysis of Pron-constructions sketched above: Pron is an 'odd' category: which has the morphological properties of pronouns (and is hence a matrix of phi-features), but which has none of the other properties normally found in pronouns. Additionally, Pron appears to have fossilized as a feature of a particular construction type.

An analysis of Pron might proceed along the following lines. Assuming, as above, that Pron originated as a (subject) resumptive pronoun in a dislocated construction, it has been subsequently reanalyzed as a functional element associated with focus. A suggestion in Simpson and Wu's paper goes some way towards explaining the formal mechanisms involved. In the course of developing an analysis of the evolution of subject agreement, Simpson and Wu suggest that subject pronouns may be reanalyzed as the head of a VP shell, that is, as instantiations of v⁰. This 'semi-functional' head subsequently selects a lower focus projection, containing a lexical category, which raises to become the surface subject. While Simpson and Wu are concerned with explaining subject agreement, they remark in a footnote that pronouns functioning as copulas in Arabic are likely to occupy, and instantiate, verb-like semi-functional heads. Clearly the implications of this proposal for the analysis of Pron require further, detailed, exploration, but it would appear to offer an explanation of several key aspects of Pron: its semi-verbal nature, the fact that Pron appears not to represent a maximal projection, but rather a lexical element. Additionally, as suggested above, the reanalysis – and grammaticalisation – of Pron as such an element explains its otherwise odd behaviour with regard to agreement.

Question pronouns may have a similar source. In order to integrate the functional character of the QP with its syntactic character, Eid proposes that all questions in EA have a bi-clausal structure. Eid's analysis also fails to offer an explanation of the reduced agreement found with QP. While Eid's detailed analysis of these constructions is persuasive, its assumption that all types of question in EA are biclausal is questionable. Indeed, interrogatives with the QP are a special subclass of questions which have been termed 'verificational questions' (Salib, 1986). The term 'verificational' requires some elaboration, but it reflects the insight that questions with the QP are not discourse-neutral, but are rather associated with special emphasis. The effect of the pronoun may be illustrated by reference to the examples below.

(22) *'ana magnu:n*
 I mad

(23) *huwwa 'ana magnu:n*
 Pron I mad

Sentence (22), uttered with appropriate rising intonation, can be considered (as far as the content of the question allows) as a neutral request for information. The presence of the pronoun in (22), however, gives the question an additional emphatic quality, whose force is that of a rhetorical question, perhaps equivalent to that of 'do you think I'm mad?'. This reflects the generalization that questions with the QP are, as Salib's label 'verificational' suggests, used to request confirmation of existing information, rather than to elicit wholly new information. Thus (24) below would be appropriate in a context in which it is known to both speaker and hearer that the students in question were supposed to leave:

(24) humma iT-Talaba ra:Hu: wala lissa
 Pron the-students went or yet
 Have the students gone, or not yet?

Here again, a pronoun is serving to mark focus, and it is this function which Eid's biclausal analysis of the QP is attempting, in part, to express, by positing a cleft-like, biclausal structure for interrogatives with the QP, as noted in Ouhalla and Edwards (1996). In terms of the proposals sketched above with regard to the syntax of Pron, it appears likely that QP also instantiates a process whereby a functional head selects a focus projection.³ Here, however, it is the NP following QP which is focused.

3. Conclusion.

This paper has reviewed some facts regarding the distribution and function of two types of 'odd' pronoun in Egyptian Arabic. It has been argued that these pronouns – as with other instances of 'redundant' pronouns in EA – are invariably associated with focus. It was suggested, on the basis of a consideration of the reduced agreement found with these pronouns, that they have assumed a functional status, and have been grammaticalised as X⁰ markers of focus, while losing their original categorial status of pronouns. A tentative proposal regarding the formal processes underlying these processes was sketched. A number of specific questions, both language-internal and theoretical remain to be answered. Language-internal issues concern how Pron and QP came to have the role of focusing elements, and exactly how their structural properties may be related to those of other focusing constructions, notably clefts. From a more general, theoretical perspective, the data from EA raises questions for the idea advanced in Simpson and Wu (2000) regarding the relationship between agreement and focus.

³ Note the similarity between focus expressed by 'doubling' a clitic pronoun with an independent pronoun in (21), and what appears to be a similar doubling effect with the QP. Additionally, demonstratives may perform a similar function to the QP: see Eid (1994).

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