

Chapter 14

Verb second not verb second in Syrian Arabic

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This paper discusses the obligatory verb second order in a non-verb second dialect, Syrian Arabic. It will be argued following Holmberg (2012) that the obligatory Wh-V-S order in Syrian Arabic is a consequence of a property on a functional head F in the left periphery similar to that on C in V2 languages. This head has another property that allows movement of one and only one constituent past its specifier. In cases where more than one XP precedes the verb, the first XP is externally merged. Unlike C, it does not have to attract a constituent to its Spec, so declarative clauses may have VS(O) order.

1 Verb second and residual verb second

In verb second (V2) languages, the finite verb must obligatorily be the second constituent in main clauses or in all finite clauses (den Besten 1977; Rizzi 1990b; Holmberg 2012). Some languages manifest V2 in specific constructions, as is the case with wh-questions in languages such as English and Italian illustrated in (1) and (2). A subject cannot intervene between the wh-element and the auxiliary in main questions. These languages are classified as residual verb second, a residue of a verb second system.

(1) English (Rizzi 1996: 63)

- a. What has Mary said?
- b. *What Mary has said?

(2) Italian

- a. Che cosa ha detto Maria?
what has said Maria
'What has Mary said?'
- b. *Che cosa ha Maria detto?
what has Maria said



Similarly, some languages derive verb second order; however, they are not real V2 languages. This is the case in Standard Arabic:

- (3) Standard Arabic (Fassi Fehri 1993: 13)
- a. Kataba Zayd-un r-risaalat-a.
wrote.3SG.M Zayd-NOM the-letter-ACC
'Zaid wrote the letter.'
- b. Zaydun kataba r-risaalat-a.
Zayd-NOM wrote.3SG.M the-letter-ACC
'Zayd wrote the letter.'

Sentences like (3b) manifest a V2-like effect; however, Standard Arabic is different from V2 languages in that it allows a V-initial order as the unmarked order see Fassi Fehri (1993: 27ff).

In this paper, I argue that Syrian Arabic is not a residual V2 language, yet the subject cannot intervene between the *wh*-phrase and the verb in *wh*-questions. This order can be accounted for if we assume that there is a specific feature on a lower functional head in the left periphery that is in common with V2 languages.

2 Syrian Arabic: A non-residual V2-language

Syrian Arabic employs the VSO order, as is the case in Standard Arabic. V2 orders are forced in specific constructions, as in SVO declarative sentences and *wh*-questions. The *Wh-V-S* order is obligatory with most questions introduced by argumental *wh*-phrases.

- (4) Syrian Arabic (Sulaiman 2016: 32)
- a. shw haka basem?
what said.3SG.M Basem
'What did Bassel say?'
- b. * shw basem haka?
what Basem said.3SG.M
- (5) a. miin shaf Iyad?
who saw.3SG.M Iyad
'Who did Iyad see?'
- b. * miin Iyad shaf?
who Iyad saw.3SG.M

However, the *Wh-V-S* can be optional with some questions introduced with certain adjuncts like *lesh* 'why'. Compare (6a) and (6b):

- (6) a. lesh mary tdday?-et?
 why Mary upsetted-3SG.F
 ‘What did upset Mary?’
 b. lesh tdday?-et mary?
 why upsetted-3SG.F Mary
 ‘What did upset Mary?’

It is also possible to have a topic phrase preceding the *wh*-phrase in questions, as in (7):

- (7) a. bassel šw ħaka?
 Bassel what said
 ‘What did Bassel say?’
 b. mama lesh ħam tħayeT?
 mom why PROG shouting
 ‘Why is mom shouting?’

An adverbial phrase can intervene between the *wh*-phrase and the verb see (8).

- (8) a. min halla? ija?
 who now come
 ‘Who has just arrived?’
 b. shw issa ħam t-ħml-i?
 what still PROG PRES.F-doing-2SG.F
 ‘What are you still doing?’

In contrast, movement of either an auxiliary or the support *do* to C is obligatory in English, leaving the adverb behind, as in (9a, b).

- (9) a. Who would you never offend with your actions?
 b. Which language does Pepita still study in her free time?

From what has been discussed, it can be concluded that Syrian Arabic is not a V2 or a residual V2 language, yet it manifests a V2 order in specific constructions derived by V movement to a lower functional head in the left periphery (see Benmamoun 2000; Aoun et al. 2010; Sulaiman 2016 for an overview). The obligatory restriction on the verb appearing in a second position in *wh*-questions can be explained following Holmberg’s (2012) account of V2 languages.

3 Movement condition

Holmberg (2012) argues that V2 languages are characterised by two properties: There is a functional head in the left periphery, C1, which (a) attracts the finite verb, and (b) has

an EPP feature that requires movement of a constituent to the Spec of C1. C1 has a third property as well: it prevents movement of any other constituent across it, apart from the one attracted by its EPP feature. The rationale for this property, in Holmberg (2012), who follows Roberts (2004), is the following: the EPP feature can attract any constituent (argument or adjunct or wh-phrase, with almost any features). This property blocks movement of any other category to a higher position than Spec of C1. This allows for the possibility, however, that categories are externally merged in the C-domain higher than Spec of C1. The two properties are independent, so in some languages C1 may have property (a) but not property (b), as is the case in certain VSO languages. It is also possible that a language may have a finiteness particle or a null C as C1 with the EPP with no verb movement to C1.

Following from these assumptions, it can be argued that in Syrian Arabic, there is a functional head in the left periphery marked with a feature that is in common with that of C1 in V2 languages. This head allows movement of only one constituent past its specifier, assuming Rizzi's (1997) fine structure of the left periphery. More than one constituent can appear before the verb if one of the constituents is externally merged. Unlike C1, it does not have to attract a constituent to its Spec, so declarative clauses may have the VS(O) order.

This analysis can thus explain sentences like (10), where more than one XP can appear before the verb.

- (10) a. basem šw ħaka?
 Basem what said.3SG.M
 'What did Bassel say?'
 b. Mama lesh ŷam t-ŷayeT?
 mom why PROG PRES-shouting.3SG.F
 'Why is mom shouting?'

Basem in (10a) and *mama* in (10b) can be externally merged in the highest TopP position in the left periphery, only when the wh-phrase raises across C1.¹

This analysis can also explain sentences like (8), in which an adverbial phrase intervenes between the verb and the wh-phrase, if we assume that the adverb is externally merged as an adjunct.

A subject can intervene between the wh-phrase and the verb in questions introduced with wh-phrases like *lesh* 'why', as illustrated in (11):

- (11) a. lesh mary tdday?-et?
 why Mary upset-3SG.F
 'What upset Mary?'
 b. lesh tdday?-et mary?
 why upset-3SG.F Mary
 'What upset Mary?'

¹For discussion on externally merged *aboutness topics* see Reinhart (1981); Lambrecht (1994), and Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl (2007).

It is well known since Rizzi (1991) that *why* questions are distinctive. Rizzi noted that while other *wh*-questions require inversion in Italian, this is not the case with *perché* ‘why’.

(12) Italian (Rizzi 2001: 273)

- a. Dove è andato Gianni?
where went Gianni
‘Where did Gianni go?’
- b. *Dove Gianni è andato?
where Gianni went

Rizzi (1991) proposed that this is because *perché* ‘why’ is base-generated (i.e. externally merged) in the C-domain. Rizzi (2001) suggests that *perché* is externally merged in SpecINT, a position higher than the landing site of other, moved *wh*-phrases. INT is an interrogative head marked with an [uWh] feature. This feature is checked/valued by movement of the *wh*-phrase to SpecC1, or by an externally merged *wh*-phrase in SpecINTP like *lesh* ‘why’. This can also be the case for *lesh* ‘why’. If *lesh* ‘why’ is externally merged in the C-domain, the EPP feature on C1 can still attract a subject to its Spec, which explains subject intervention between the *wh*-phrase and the verb in (11a).

While V2 appears as a restrictive order in Germanic languages, V2 is only triggered in certain constructions like *wh*-questions in Syrian Arabic. V3 orders are possible in *wh*-questions provided that the first constituent is initially merged in that position as is the case with a topic preceding the *wh*-phrase, or a base generated *wh*-adjunct. This can be accounted for following Poletto’s (2002) theory that languages can vary with regards to whether left-peripheral functional features are distributed over a hierarchy of distinct heads, each with its own Spec, assuming Rizzi’s (2001) hierarchy of [Force, Focus, Topic, and Finiteness], and that only one Spec-position higher than the head hosting the finite verb can be filled by movement, which can be the case in Syrian Arabic, or whether they are encoded in one head, with one Spec-position.

4 Conclusion

The fact that the subject cannot intervene between a *wh*-phrase and the inflected verb in main questions renders Syrian Arabic similar to residual V2 languages; however, different facts prove Syrian Arabic not to be a V2 or a residual V2 language, yet this restrictive V2 order can best be accounted for following Holmberg’s (2012) analysis of V2 languages. The assumption that a lower functional head in the left periphery is specified for a feature that attracts a finite verb, and an EPP feature that can attract a subject or a *wh*-phrase allowing movement of only one constituent past its specifier can justify this restrictive Wh-V-S order in most questions.

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