

Verbal Complexes in Lebanese Arabic

This talk surveys the behavior of a construction in Lebanese Arabic that at first glance resembles backwards control (cf. Potsdam & Polinsky 2002, *Backward Control*, LI vol. 33), but finds instead that it exemplifies verbal complex formation (cf. Evers 1975, *The Transformational Cycle*, Utrecht dissertation), where a finite verb syntactically clusters together with subordinate verbs. In Lebanese Arabic, the cluster may precede the subject, giving the appearance that the subject is lower in the clause than it actually is.

The sentence in (1) is a control structure. The second verb in the clause, though it agrees with the subject, does not allow tense alternations, and its implicit subject is obligatorily bound by the matrix subject.

- (1) ḥāwal ḥannā yiftaḥ / *b-yiftaḥ / *fataḥ l-ḥilbeh
 tried John open / *PRES-open / *opened the-box
 ‘John tried to open / *opens / *opened the box.’
 *‘John_i tried to get him_j to open the box.’

Both definite, indefinite and quantificational subjects may directly follow either the first or second verb.

- (2) a. ḥāwal <ḥadan> yiftaḥ <ḥadan> l-ḥilbeh
 tried <someone> open <someone> the-box
 ‘Someone tried to open the box.’
 b. ḥāwal <kill walad> yiftaḥ <kill walad> l-ḥilbeh
 tried <every child> open <every child> the-box
 ‘Every child tried to open the box.’

When the first verb is negated, both subject positions fall in the scope of negation.

- (3) a. mā ḥāwal <ḥadan> yiftaḥ <ḥadan> l-ḥilbeh
 not tried <someone> open <someone> the-box
 ‘No one tried to open the box.’
 b. mā ḥāwal <kill walad> yiftaḥ <kill walad> l-ḥilbeh
 not tried <every child> open <every child> the-box
 ‘Not every child tried to open the box.’

Assuming that linear order reflects surface c-command, then when the second verb is negated, the expectation arises that the first subject position will escape the scope of negation, while the second will fall into its scope. In fact, however, neither subject position falls into the scope of negation on the second verb.

- (4) a. ḥāwal <ḥadan> ma yizfoj <ḥadan> jār-uh
 tried <someone> not disturb <someone> neighbor-his
 ‘Someone tried to not disturb his neighbor.’

- b. ḥāwal <kill resident> ma yizfoj <kill resident> jār-uh
 tried <every resident> not disturb <every resident> neighbor-his
 ‘Every resident tried to not disturb his neighbor.’

It appears that subjects that follow the second verb behave scopally like subjects that follow the first verb, suggesting that the apparently low position of the subject in such cases in fact results from leftward displacement of the material separating the first subject position from the verbal complement (objects), schematized in (5). This transformation concatenates the two verbs, forming a verbal complex without changing scopal relations in the base.

- (5) ḥāwal [ma yizfoj]_i kill resident t_i jār-uh
 tried [not disturb]_i every resident t_i neighbor-his
 ‘Every resident tried to not disturb his neighbor.’

Additional evidence that the transformation involved is leftward movement of the verb (possibly together with negation) and not rightward movement of the subject is that the subject may not occur sandwiched between complements of the verb.

- (6) a. tabarraḥ <ḥannā> bi-mīt ktāb <*ḥannā> li-l-maktabeh
 donated <John> with-hundred book <*John> to-the-library
 ‘John donated 100 books to the library.’

The data are compatible with both a head movement analysis (as sketched in (5) assuming negation forms a complex head with the negated verb) and a remnant movement analysis (as sketched in (7), cf. Koopman & Szabolsci 2000, *Verbal Complexes*, MIT Press).

- (7) ḥāwal [ma yizfoj t_i]_j kill resident [jār-uh]_i t_j

A remnant movement analysis might also capture the possibility of subject postposing, which also allows the subject to escape negation of the second verb but not necessarily the first, if object movement (the i -chain in (7)) is optional.

- (8) a. ḥāwal mā yizfoj jār-uh kill resident
 tried not disturb neighbor-his every resident
 ‘Every resident tried to not disturb his neighbor.’
 b. mā ḥāwal yizfoj jār-uh kill resident
 not tried disturb neighbor-his every resident
 ‘Not every resident tried to disturb his neighbor.’

However, subject postposing is contingent on the definiteness of the subject, with only definite and not indefinite DPs undergoing the operation.

- (9) ḥāwal yiftaḥ l-ḥilbeh ḥannā / *ḥada
 tried open the-box John / *someone
 ‘John/someone tried to open the box.’

We conclude that subject postposing is an operation that moves the subject itself, contingent on definiteness, and is not related to the mechanism of verbal complex formation.