

On Copular Constructions in Yemeni Arabic and the Cartography of Subjects

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Abstract : This paper investigates copular constructions in Raimi Yemeni Arabic (RYA). The aim of the paper is actually twofold. First it explores the types of copular constructions in Raimi Yemeni Arabic, a variety of Arabic that has not attracted a lot of attention. In this connection, the paper shows that RYA manifests 'bare', verbal and pronominal/PRON copular constructions, just like other varieties of Arabic and indeed other Semitic languages like Hebrew. The sentences below from RYA represent the three constructions, respectively. (1) a. nada Hilwah Nada pretty.3sf 'Nada is pretty' b. kan al-banat hina was the-girls here 'The girls were here c. ali hu-l mudiir Ali he-the manager 'Ali is the manager' Interestingly, in addition to these common types of copular constructions, RYA seems to exhibit dual copula sentences, a construction that features both a pronominal copula and a verbal copula. Such a construction is attested neither in Standard Arabic nor in other modern varieties of Arabic such as Lebanese, Moroccan, Egyptian, Jordanian. Remarkably, dual copular sentences do not appear even in other dialects of Yemeni Arabic such as Sanaani, Adeni and Tehami. (2) is an example. (2) maha kan-ih mudarrisah maha was-she teacher.3sf 'Maha was a teacehr' Second, the paper considers the cartography of subject positions in copular constructions proposed by Shlonsky and Rizzi (2018). Different copular constructions seem to involve different subject positions (which might eventually correlate with different interpretations - not our concern in this paper). Here, it is argued that in a bare copular sentence, as in (1a), RYA might exploit two criterial subject positions (in Rizzi's sense), in addition to the canonical Spec,TP position. Under mainstream minimalist assumption, a copular sentence is analyzed as a PredP. Thus, in addition to the PredP-related thematic subject position, a criterial subject position is posited outside of PredP. (3) below represents the cartography of subject positions in a bare copular construction. (3) [.....DP subj PredP DP Pred DP/AP/PP] In PRON sentences, as exemplified in (1c), another two subject positions are postulated high in the clause, particularly above PolP. (4) illustrates the hierarchy of the subject positions in a PRON copular construction. The subject resides in Spec,SUBJ2P. (4) ...DP SUBJ2 ...DP SUBJ1 ... Pol ... DP subj PredP Another related phenomenon in RYA which sets it apart from other languages like Hebrew is that of negative bare copular construction. This construction involves a PRON, which is not found in its affirmative counterpart. PRON, however, is hosted neither by SUBJ20 nor by SUBJ10. Rather, PRON occurs below Neg0 (Pol0 in the hierarchy). This situation raises interesting issues for the hierarchy of subjects in copular constructions as well as to the syntax of the left periphery in general. With regard to what causes the subject to move, there are different potential triggers. For instance, movement of the subject at the base, i.e., out of PredP is triggered by a labeling failure. Other movements of the subject can be driven by a formal feature like EPP, or a criterial feature like [subj].

Keywords : Yemeni Arabic, copular constructions, cartography of subjects, labeling, criterial positions

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