Topic particles, agreement and movement in an Arabic dialect

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The paper is about a set of particles in the left periphery of the Arabic dialect of North Hail in Saudi Arabia (North Hail Arabic: NHA). The particles mark different types of topic: Shift topic (S-topic), Contrastive topic (C-topic) and Familiar topic (F-topic). These are the three topic types described by Mara Frascarelli and Roland Hinterhölzl (henceforth F&H) in a series of works, based on data from interpretation, intonation and co-occurrence in mainly Italian and German. F&H demonstrate that the topic types occupy distinct positions in the left periphery: S-topic highest, F-topic lowest, and C-topic in the middle, and that there can be only one S-topic and C-topic per clause, but several F-topics. These properties hold for the NHA topics as well, where they are overtly marked by particles. Topic particles are known from other languages, too, including Japanese, Korean, and Quechua, but no language that we are aware of has a set of topic particles as rich as that found in NHA. A further interesting property of NHA particles is that while some of them mark their associated topic by movement or external merge with the projection of the particle, as familiar from other languages, other particles mark their associated topic by means of spelled-out φ-feature agreement between the particle in the C-domain and the associated topic within TP.

The particles are exemplified in (1-4). The topic is marked by underlining, the particle is in bold type. The object DP *l-kurah* 'the ball' is feminine gender, the subject DP *Firas* is masculine. Object agreement shows on the verb as well as on the particle in (2) and (3). In (1) the topic is externally merged in the 'spec of the particle'. In (2) and (3), the topic is marked by agreement with the particle. In (4) the topic has moved to the spec of the particle.

(1)   l-<u>kurah</u>, **mar** Firas   ʃaf-ah   (S-topic; external merge in C-domain)
        the-ball PRT   Firas   saw.3SM-3SF
        'As for the ball, Firas saw it.'

(2)   **tara**-ah   ʃaf-ah   L-<u>KURAH</u> Firas   (C-topic; agreement)
        PRT-3SF   saw.3SM-3SF the-ball.F   Firas
        'THE BALL, Firas saw it.'

(3).   **ʁedɪ**-ah   ʃaf-ah   l-<u>kurah</u>   Firas   (F-topic; agreement)
        PRT-3SF   saw.3SM-3SF   the-ball   Firas
        'The ball, Firas saw it.'

(4)   l-<u>kurah</u> **tigil** ʃaf-ah   Firas   (F-topic; movement)
        the-ball   PRT   saw.3SM-3SF Firas
        'The ball, Firas saw it.'

The S-topic particle *mar* in (1) is typically employed when reintroducing a topic that the conversation has strayed away from. There are several reasons to think that it is derived by external merge with the projection of the particle, one being that it co-occurs with, and c-commands, Focus/Wh. The C-topic particle *tara* in (2) is used when a value is selected from a set of alternative values of a variable, all of which are familiar from the immediately preceding discourse (a topic, not focus, property). It is marked by φ-agreement between the particle and the constituent representing the selected value (the DP *l-kurah* in (2)), and contrastive stress on it. The particles *ʁedɪ* and *tigil* are used when an individual familiar from the immediately preceding discourse is topic, and there is no shift of topic or contrast: this is the F-topic function. With *ʁedɪ* the function is marked by φ-agreement between the particle and the familiar DP, with *tigil* it is marked by movement of the DP to spec of *tigil*.

There are other topic particles as well, but they all fall into these three classes. (5) shows the order of the particles: S-topic>C-topic>F-topic, as predicted by F&H.

(5)   ams   **mar** bi-l-MAKTABAH **tara ʁedɪ**-h   Firas ʃaf   Dilara.
       yesterday STop in-the-library   CTop FTop-3SM Firas saw.3SM Dilara
       'As for yesterday, in the LIBRARY, Firas, he saw Dilara.'

Licensing the C-topic by φ-agreement is excluded here where it is a PP. Instead, it is licensed by the spec-head relation. These particles thus provide striking evidence of the generality of F&H's typology of topics and the associated theory of the structure of the C-domain. They also provide support for the theory of agreement, movement, and locality in Chomsky (2001, 2008) and Miyagawa (2010), with one or two modifications. In this light, the employment of φ-agreement to express topicality is not surprising. What is surprising is rather that it has taken so long to find the empirical evidence that this is actually happening.

The fact that some of the topic particles are φ-marked under long-distance Agree is consistent with a model where the Top head has unvalued φ-features, making it a probe, and an inherently valued Topic feature (S-, C-, or F-topic), while the topicalized XP, the goal, has an unvalued Top/Foc feature (not the other way around, as in, for example, Miyagawa 2010). In the case of *tara* in (2) and *ʁedɪ* in (3), the particular topic interpretation is a result of Agree, valuing the φ-features of the probe (the particle) and the [Top/Foc] of the goal (the object in (2) and (3)). The Agree relation is subject to locality. Note the word order in (2) and (3): the object has moved past the subject, by hypothesis to the edge of vP. If it doesn't, the subject can be probed and have its [Top/Foc] feature valued, the object can't.

(6)   **ʁedɪ**-h   <u>Firas</u>   ʃaf   l-kurah,
       PRT-3SM   Firas   saw.3SM   Def-ball   .
       'Firas, he saw the ball.'

The non-agreeing F-topic particle *tigil* in (4) has a valued [FTop] feature. We assume that it, too, has uφ-features probing for a matching goal, but with no overt exponent of φ marking the relation, the valuation of the goal requires movement to the spec of F-Top. In Miyagawa's (2010) terms, the agreement in (2) and (3) and the movement in (4) are two alternative ways to "keep a record of the topic relation for the interfaces".

As expected, given the findings of F&H, the F-topic is recursive.

(7)   <u>Firas</u> <u>Dilara</u> **ʁedɪ**-h   ʃaf-ah
       Firas   Dilara   PRT-3SM   saw.3S.F
       'Firas, Dilara, he saw her.'

The word order is fixed: subject>object>particle, and the particle agrees with the subject. The construction supports the hypothesis that the topic XP needs valuation by Agree or movement (the F-Top head is φ-valued by the subject, hence doesn't need the object). With the structure

(8)   [$_{TopP}$ Firas$_i$ [$_{TopP}$ Dilara$_j$ [$_{TopP}$ FTop-φ [$_{TP}$ t$_i$ …[$_{vP}$ t$_j$ …]]]]],

(7) meets standard conditions on locality: the subject is valued [FTop] by Agree with *ʁedɪ*, spelled out as φ-agreement. The object is valued [FTop] by movement to 'spec of *ʁedɪ*'. Since the head of the subject chain c-commands the object chain, there is no intervention problem. The configuration poses a challenge, though, for any theory relying on derivation by a sequence of triggered movements observing locality and the extension condition (as in Chomsky 2001); there is no feature triggering the movement of the subject from specTP (see (6)). It can be derived within the model proposed by Chomsky (2008) where operations within a phase take place freely and simultaneously, with the output evaluated by conditions on locality ('Move-α with phases'). The phase in this case is the C-phase, including the object at the edge of vP.

Alshamari, M. 2018. Topic particles in the North Hail dialect of Najdi Arabic. Newcastle U. PhD; Chomsky, N. 2001. Derivation by phase; Chomsky, N. On phases; Frascarelli, M. & Hinterhölzl, R. 2007. Types of topics in German and Italian, in Schwabe & Winkler *On information structure, meaning and form*. Miyagawa, S. 2010. *Why agree? Why move*?