A Transformational- Generative Approach towards Understanding Al-Istifham

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse the formation of interrogative sentences in Arabic through the application of the basic linguistic concepts and to explain the derivation of those sentences with their transformations via the employment of the Transformational-Generative tools and concepts.

This paper attempts to examine the ways and manners which

al-Istifham could be understood through a transformational-generative approach. It begins with an introduction with a sketchy overview of the origin and development of Arabic grammar in the Arab world. Effort is made to explain the theoretical framework used in the paper. Basic terms and concepts are carefully explained. We have been able to show that, Arabic, as a language with VSO word-order, allows a right hand movement. It is discovered that it is categorized mainly into two, viz: (1) al-Istifham al-Lughawi (linguistic question) and (2) al-Istifham al-Adabi (literary question). The formal is characterized by abhathun lughawiyyah (linguistic analysis) but the latter is characterized by aghradun balaghiyyah

(rhetorical objectives). The study shows that where two particles of Istifham Hal and Hamzah are used they both have a syntactic and semantic markers which would be answered by any of Adawatul-Jawab (answer tools).

Introduction

The grammar of any language is as important as the language itself. This is because the study of grammar reveals how language works. Grammar as a branch of linguistics deals with form and structure of words and their interrelation in sentences. According to Yusuf (1997:1), this branch of linguistics has been receiving a great and increasing attention among the linguists formed our motivation to this study. Our syntactic excursion to the study of *al-Istifham* would take Transformative –Generative grammar as a guide.

A language, according to Allerton (1990:68-112) "is basically a system of signs, i.e. of institutionalized sensory patterns that 'stand for' something beyond themselves, so that they 'mean' something. These signs

and words are governed by a set of rules that are referred to as grammar of any language. Liliane Haegeman (1992:121) has submitted that " the totality of all the rules and principles that have been formulated with respect to a language constitutes the grammar of that language". Grammar is also a systematic study and description of a language. In linguistics, grammar is a term for the syntactic and morphological system, which every unimpaired person acquires. Grammar is intended as an aid to the learning and teaching of a language.

The word 'grammar' is most commonly used to mean a description of the structure of the sentences in a language. A grammatical description of Arabic, for instance recognizes and indicates how these elements are related to each other. For example, the subject of an Arabic sentence comes after the verb, and before the predicate if the sentence is verb-less. Grammar also specifies the manner in which the basic elements are combined into larger units. Fu'ad Nu'man (1973:17) describes Arabic *Nahw* (syntax) as

> *Rules and principles that inform, the role and function*
> *of every word, the vowelization of last letters of those*
> *words and their analysis.*

Every language has a way to describe what is considered correct speech. The rules for the correct usage in any language are said to be prescribed and traditional. Hence, it is called traditional or classical grammar. In Arabic, the traditional grammar as opined by Dayf (1992:14) is said to be originated and established by Abul-Aswad ad-Du'ali on the initiation and order of 'Ali b. 'Abi Talib.

However, the interest in the study of language, and, more specifically, in the study of grammar can be traced back to the ancient Greeks. At first, the Greeks' concern for language was rooted in their philosophical studies, and in this connection there arose a number of controversies over the nature of language. One of the best known of these was the *physis-nomos* controversy in BC 200, which according to Lean (1993:95), centred around the question of whether language is a product of nature (*physis*) or a product of convention (*nomos*).

One very significant contribution to the study of language was that of Dionysis Thorax (c.170- 190 BC). It was Thorax who presented one of the first descriptions of what is today called phonology and morphology. The father of modern grammatical theory and of synchronic grammar particularly was the Swiss linguist Ferdinard de Saussuer (1857-1913) followed by Leonard Bloomfield (1887-1949)(Allerton, 1990:115).

The major trend in linguistics in recent time is transformational generative grammar. The year 1957 was a turning point in the history of language in the world. It was an American linguist, Noam Chomsky, who published in his work '*Syntactic Structure*' a new approach to the study of grammar. This approach, according to Chomsky (1965:3), was subsequently known as "Transformational Generative Grammar".

However, the syntactic debate that occurred between the different schools of Arabic grammar, such as *Basrah* and *Kufah* schools of grammar, as opined by Samira (1987:139) can be referred to as a contribution to the study of Arabic grammar.

Theoretical Framework

This study has adopted basically the transformational generative approach as our guide to the syntactic analysis of *al-Istifham*. We shall use the Extended ST model which is one of the revised versions of Chomsky's *Aspects of the theory of syntax* popularly known as ST. We have chosen to use the EST model in order to be able to handle more adequately the description of Yes/No and Who-Questions in Arabic.

According to Katz and Postal, transformations are meaning – preserving since they do not change meaning of sentence as general consensus in Standard Theory as maintained by Banjo (1969:40). Thus, questions are the same as the corresponding declaratives in underlying structure as shown below:

<div dir="rtl">أ-   سرق أحد كتابى</div>

1. a.   Someone stole my book

<div dir="rtl">سرق أحد المال</div>

Someone stole the money

<div dir="rtl">من سرق كتابى ؟</div>

b.   Who stole my book?

<div dir="rtl">من سرق المال ؟</div>

Who stole the money?

To further illuminate their postulation, Katz and Postal proposed that question be marked as such in deep structure and that the constituent being questioned also be marked. They posited the Deep Structure morpheme 'Q' to carry out the first of these functions and Wh- morpheme for the second. Thus, the sentence of 1(a&b) would have the corresponding deep structure represented in 2 (a&b)

<div dir="rtl">سرق أحد كتابى</div>

2. a.   Someone stole my book

<div dir="rtl">لماذا سرق أحد كتابى؟</div>

b.   Why someone stole my book?

At the syntactic level, the Q-morpheme would replace the subject of the verb to become:

<div dir="rtl">سرق من كتابى</div>

3. a.   Who stole my book?

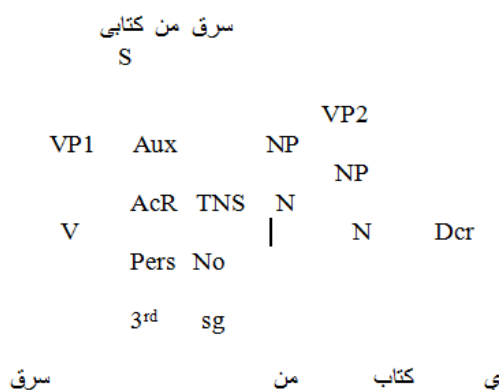Then, the law of Wh-movement which is known in Arabic as *Sadaarah* would be applied. (Wh-movement is the movement of the wh-word or its equivalents from its original position within the declarative sentence to the initial sentence position) and the product would be:
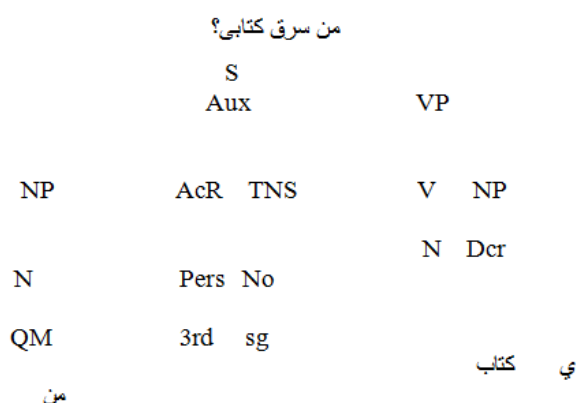
<div dir="rtl">من سرق كتابى؟</div>

b.   Who stole my book?

The analysis is the following in the tree diagram
Basic/Surface Structure

سرق من كتابى
S

VP2
VP1   Aux   NP
                NP
AcR TNS   N
V | N   Dcr
Pers No

3rd   sg

سرق   ي   كتاب   من   سرق

Who stole my book?
من سرق كتابى؟
S
Aux   VP

NP   AcR TNS   V   NP

N   N   Dcr

QM   Pers No

من   3rd   sg   ي   كتاب

Basic Terms and Concepts on Arabic Grammar
The origin of Arabic grammar goes back to the 7th century. The birth of which was exerted by efforts to put an end to prevalent grammatical errors in reading of the Qur'an. The Arabs were known for their eloquence and intelligence. They talk with error-free tongue and lucidity. The grammatical errors were occasioned by the spread of Islam to other nations and the need to use Arabic by the new converts as a language of communication and religion. The prevalent grammatical mistakes were not only common to the non-Arabs but also to the Arabs themselves. This is because of their interaction with speakers of other languages. It has been said that even Hajjaj b. Yusuf, who was known for eloquence and oratory prowess, as maintained by Dayf (1992:12) committed grave grammatical mistakes in his *khutbah* which shows the wide spread and predominance of this linguistic disorder and malady.

It thus became imperative to proscribe the errors and prescribe some grammatical rules in order to improve the language. Hence, the rules and principles of Arabic grammar were codified. This was later known as classical Arabic grammar which is prescriptive in nature because it states the rules that govern Arabic language. According to Dayf (1992:13), the impetus behind the codification of Arabic grammar was mainly religious and social, in order to protect and preserve the language of the Holy Qur'an. The precursors of Arabic grammar were the like of Abul Aswad ad-Duali, Abdullah b. Abi Ishaq and 'Isa b. 'Umar whose views were entrenched in the formulation of Arabic grammar.
Transformational-generative Grammar

In 1957, Noam Chomsky propounded a grammatical theory often referred to as "Transformational-Generative-Grammar". It is a theory of generative syntax which addresses the problem of what language is, and what makes language a specifically human phenomenon as explained by Olateju (1998:140). Transformational grammar is said to be generative because it reflects the 'productive' or 'creative' aspect of human language. Productivity and creativity in human language refer to ability to generate
(construct) and understand an indefinitely large number of sentences in one's first or second language, including sentences that one never heard before.

In other words, Transformational Grammar as opined by Adeyemi (2000:26) is based on what a language user knows about his language, which would be obviously manifested in his ability to recognize utterances that are 'grammatical' and those that are 'ungrammatical'. As an hypothetical example, an Arab or Arabist on

hearing or reading the following sentences:

<div dir="rtl">ذهب الولد إلى المدرسة</div>

4. a.   The boy went to the school

<div dir="rtl">إلى ذهب المدرسة الولد</div>

b.   To go the school the boy

recognizes (4a) as grammatical and well-formed and (4b) as ill-formed and ungrammatical because it is not in the accepted formal structure and word-order.

Competence and Performance

In order to establish the linguistic theory or grammar for a language, transformationists often resort to the native speaker-hearer's intuitive knowledge about different types of sentences in the language. The native speaker-hearer has the ability to decide whether a sentence is accepted or not without being educated. This intuition is what the transformationists call 'competence' while 'performance' refers to the actual (contextual) use of language in the society. For instance, you don't need to tell an Arab or Arabist that the following sentences are paraphrases of each other, that is, they have the same meaning:

<div dir="rtl">أتارك أنت عملك الان ؟ ـ أأنت تترك عملك ؟</div>

5. a. Are you leaving your work now?

<div dir="rtl">يقوم الولد ـ الولد قائم .</div>

b. The boy is standing.

<div dir="rtl">كتبت الرسالة ـ كانت الرسالة مكتوبة</div>

c.   The letter was written.

From these, we can say that someone would be linguistically competent in any language when he is able:

(i)   To recognize grammatical and ungrammatical sentences in that language.
(ii)   To produce (speak) and understand infinite number of sentences in that language.
(iii)   To detect ambiguity
(iv)   To recognize sentences that are paraphrases of each other.

Transformation

A transformation is a tool or device used to change the form of one linguistic structure to another. For instance, an active sentence *al-Jumlatul-Ma'lumat* be change to a passive sentence *al-Jumlatul-Majhulat* while a simple declarative sentence can be changed to a question through the use of transformation. Examples:

<div dir="rtl">كتب زيد رسالة</div>

6. a. Zayd wrote a letter

<div dir="rtl">كتبت رسالة</div>

b.   A letter was written

<div dir="rtl">قرأت كتابا</div>

c.   You read a book

<div dir="rtl">كم كتابا قرأت ؟</div>

d.   How many books did you read?

According to Chomsky, transformation is " a rule that operates on given string with a given constituent structure and converts it into a new string with a new derived constituent structure (Adeyemi, 2000:27). The purpose of transformations contained in the transformational component of Chomsky's grammar as observed by Riemsdjik and Williams (1980:3) is to state explicitly relation that exists between distinct surface structures and deep structure in accordance with the native speaker's intuition about his language. Transformation operates on phrase markers (PMS) as in

```
                         S
QM      VP1       NP       AUX        VP2
          N                  DER     NP
                                      N
```

by performing one or more basic operations i.e. movements, deletion, re-ordering of element etc. in the PMS.

In Transformation Grammar, transformation is of two kinds:

(i.) The obligatory transformation
(ii.) The optional transformation.

In obligatory transformation, application of a set of transformational rules is obligatory if the sentences to be generated are to be grammatical. As for optional transformation, application of such rules is not compulsory but optional. This kind of transformation characterizes Arabic literary output most especially poetry where a poet may regard or disregard the grammatical rules and syntactic order.

Al-Istifham

Al-Istifham means questions in Arabic but in general usage; it is a form of language that invites a reply. In

grammar, according to Johnson (1996:227)   a term in the classification of sentences, referring to types distinguished by form and function from such other sentence types as statement and command. Nu'mah (1973:17) defines *al-Istifham* thus:

<div dir="rtl">

"هو طلب العلم بشيئ لم يكن معلوما من قبل ويجاب عنه

بتعيين المستفهم عنه، أو بإحدى أدوات الجواب"

</div>

        Seeking for an information on something that is not

        Known before and always answered by specifying

        the information required or by using one of the answer

        tools.

However, the term 'question' could be regarded as a genetic term for several constructions that require information from addressee. It differs in form and function.

    In Arabic language, *Istifham* is categorized mainly into two, viz: (1) *al-Istifham al-Lughawi* (linguistic question) and (2) *al-Istifham al-Adabi*

(literary question). The formal is characterized by *abhathun lughawiyyah* (linguistic analysis) but the latter is characterized by *aghradun balaghiyyah*

(rhetorical objectives). The two are sub-divided into different classes according to the type of answers they elicit as postulated by Radford (1988:49). Major typological divisions of *al-Istifham* are as follows:

    (1) *al-Istifham at-Tamm* (Yes/No question)

    (2) *al-Istifham al-Juz'i* (wh-question)

    (3) *al-Istifham al-Adabi* (Rhetorical question)

    (4) *al-Istifham al-Ikhtiyari* (Alternative question)

    (5) *al-Istifham at-Takriri* (Echo question)

    (6) *al-Istifham ghayr takriri* (Non-Echo question)

    (7) *al-Istifham at-Tasrihi* (Direct question)

    (8) *al-Istifham ghayr at-Tasrihi* (Indirect question).

Al-Istifham at-Tamm (Yes/No Question)

    This is a kind of question in which the interrogation refers to the whole sentence hence it is named '*tamm*' (complete). In English, according to Radford (1988:49) it is called Yes/No because they can be appropriately responded to by the use of either a positive (Yes) or negative (No) values or their formal equivalents in other languages like *na'm* (yes) or la (no) in Arabic language. Such questions indicate an uncertainty in the part of the speaker and require a clarification- affirmative or negative – on the part of the addressee. Formally, in Arabic this type of question is characterized by two particles *Hal* and *Hamzah*. These two particles are always initially-positioned. The two particles of *Istifham Hal* and *Hamzah* are both a syntactic and semantic markers. Any sentence that starts with any of the 'question particles' and would be answered by any of *Adawatul-Jawab* (answer tools). These answer tools are:

<div dir="rtl">

نعم، بلى ، أي ، لآ ، جير ، أجل ، كلا

</div>

This does not mean that *al-Istifham at-Tamm* (Yes/No) cannot be circumvented by other answers, as the examples show below:

<div dir="rtl">

أأنت تذهب إلى المدرسة ؟

</div>

        7.   Are you going to school?

This would be appropriately answered by (*na'm*) 'Yes' or (la) 'No' but there are other possibilities as given below:

<div dir="rtl">

لا أدرى

</div>

        8. a.   I don't know ?

<div dir="rtl">

ربما

</div>

        b.   Perhaps, may be

<div dir="rtl">

لماذا تسألنى ؟

</div>

        c.Why are you asking me?

al-Istifham at-Tamm (Yes/No Question) is sub-categorized into two:

(1) *Hal* question (2) *Hamzah* question.

Hamzah Question

    This is a kind of interrogative sentence that starts with *hamzah*. This morpheme is a question marker in any sentence it starts. Examples are:

<div dir="rtl">

أقرأت الكتاب ؟

</div>

        9. a. Did you read the book?

<div dir="rtl">أتذهب إلى المدرسة ؟</div>

b. Will you go to the school?

<div dir="rtl">أتبيع الصابون ؟</div>

c.Do you sell soap?

Their corresponding declarative will be the above mentioned sentences without morpheme *Hamzah* at the beginning. All examples given above are positive-oriented, because what succeed *hamzah* are positive, and response for this would be (Yes) *na'm* or (No) *la* but when negative tools succeed the question particle *hamzah* the negative response would be *na'm* while the positive response would be *bala*.

Formation of *Hamzah* Question

In Arabic, *hamzah* question is formed by addition of *hamzah* as question maker to the initial part of the sentence. Furthermore, the *hamzah* question is not a prefix-restricted to any of the noun (*ism*) or verb (*fi'l*), it does appear before the two. *Hamzah* can appear before the noun or verb as the course may be. For example:

<div dir="rtl">أسرق الولد ؟</div>

10. a. Did the boy steal?

<div dir="rtl">أيغضب الأستاذ ؟</div>

b.   Does the teacher angry?

<div dir="rtl">أأنت مسافر ؟</div>

c.   Are you traveling?

In the first example, the question maker (*hamzah*) is followed by verb (*saraqa*). The *hamzah* would be analysed grammatically as *harful-Istifham*

while *saraqa* and *al-Walad* would be grammatically explained as verb and subject. In the example No. 10c, *hamzah* would be analysed as *harful-Istifham* while *anta musafirun* are subject and predicate (*Mubtada' wa Khabar*)

Transformation of *Hamzah*

In linguistics, the transformation needed to derive *hamzah* question from their underlying representations. In English, the transformation is to move auxiliary to the sentence-initially. Example: Tola can write ------- Can Tola write?

For the data available in Arabic, we argue that there is no auxiliary movement. What is needed to derive the question is to move the abstract Q- constituent to the first position of the sentence and replace it with the Q morpheme. For example:

<div dir="rtl">أيذهب زيد ؟</div>

Surface structure: (11.a.) Will Zayd go?

<div dir="rtl">يذهب زيد أ</div>

Deep structure: (11.b.) Zayd will go (Qm)

<div dir="rtl">أذهب عمر إلى المدرسة ؟</div>

Surface structure: (11.c.) Did 'Umar go to the school?

<div dir="rtl">ذهب عمر إلى المدرسة</div>

Deep structure: (11.d.) 'Umar went to the school

Move Qm to the sentence initial position and replace it with the Qm *hamzah* will arrive at the surface structure. This can be phase-marked as follows:

Surface Structure

<div dir="rtl">أيذهب زيد ؟</div>

		S	
NP	VP	AUX	QM
N	V	M	QM
زيد	ذهب	ي	أ

Deep Structure

<div dir="rtl">يذهب زيد أ</div>

		S	
Q	NP	AUX	VP
Q	N	M	V
أ	زيد	ي	ذهب

Surface Structure

ج-   أذهب عمر إلى المدرسة ؟

S

INF   VP1   QM
أ

AGR   TNS   ASP   V
ذهب
VP2
NP   Pers   No   Past   Perf

PP

NP   P

N   Def   3rd   sg.

عمر   إلى   ال   مدرسة

Deep Structure

د-   ذهب عمر إلى المدرسة أ

S

INF   VP1

AGR   TNS   ASP   V
VP2
ذهب
QM   PP   NP   Pers.   No.   Past Perfect

NP   P
أ
N   DEF   N   3rd   sg.

عمر   إلى   ال   مدرسة

To derive No.(11.a.) from No. (11.b.), the following operations are needed: Move the Qm at the final sentence in no. b to the sentence initial position and replace it with Qm *hamzah* giving the surface structure in (11.a.). The same thing applies to (c.) and (d.).

Conclusion
Our approach in this paper has been basically descriptive. We have used the transformational generative grammar as a tool to analyse a type of Arabic question, *hamzah* question. The question particle of *hamzah* question is seen to occur in sentence initially. We have been able to show that, Arabic, as a language with VSO word-order, allows a right hand movement. It is discovered that it is categorized mainly into two, viz: (1) *al-Istifham al-Lughawi* (linguistic question) and (2) *al-Istifham al-Adabi* (literary question). The formal is characterized by *abhathun lughawiyyah* (linguistic analysis) but the latter is characterized by *aghradun balaghiyyah* (rhetorical objectives). The study shows that where two particles of *Istifham Hal* and *Hamzah* are used they both have a syntactic and semantic markers which would be answered by any of *Adawatul-Jawab* (answer tools).

From the foregoing, it becomes evident that the study has given clear meaning to the functions of *Istifham* which elucidate grammatical rules that would be of immense benefits to the following categories of people:
   i.   Any student of Arabic who may wish to have a concise but encompassing knowledge about the usage of Interrogative particles.
   ii.   English grammarians will also find it useful especially in comparative analysis of the niceties of the

particles.

iii.   It is very inspiring to a potential Arabic writer who may wish to use interrogative particles in disseminating ideas, thoughts and information as grammarian.

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