Topic particles, agreement, and movement in an Arabic dialect

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North Hail Arabic (Saudi Arabia) has Topic particles in the C-domain.
- Some particles φ-agree with a Topic DP in situ.
- Other particles trigger movement of the Topic to the C-domain.
- Implications for agreement, locality, discourse function marking.

ams   **mar** bi-l-MAKTABAH **tara** **ʁedɪ**-h   Firas ʃaf   l-bint.
yesterday **S-Top** in-the-library **C-Top** **F-Top**-3SM Firas saw.3SM the-girl
'As for yesterday, in the LIBRARY, Firas, he saw the girl.'

Mara Frascarelli & Roland Hinterhölzl (2007): Three kinds of Topic in the C-domain, in a universal hierarchy

Shift-topic (S-Top): Re-introduces a Topic.

Contrastive Topic (C-Top): Selects a Topic from a range of understood alternatives.

Familiar Topic (F-Top): A Topic familiar from the discourse, not shifted, not contrastive.

Evidence in F&H: Interpretation, co-occurrence, and intonation, mainly in Italian and German.

In North Hail Arabic there are C-particles encoding the Topic types.

S-Top particle: l-bint, **mar** Firas ʃaf   -ah   (Topic externally merged with S-TopP)
        the-girl PRT   Firas saw.3SM-3SF
        'As for the girl, Firas saw her.'

C-Top particle: **tara-ah** ʃaf   -ah L-BINT   Firas   (Agreement between the particle and the Topic object)
        PRT-3SF saw.3SM-3SF the-girl.F Firas
        'THE GIRL, Firas saw her.'

F-Top particle: **ʁedɪ-ah** ʃaf   -ah l-bint Firas   (Agreement between the particle and the Topic object)
        PRT-3SF   saw.3SM-3SF the-girl Firas
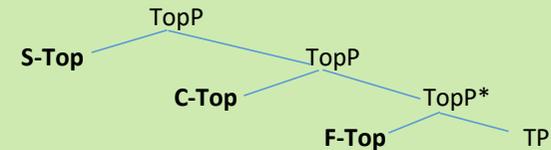   'The girl, Firas saw her.'

F-Top particle: l-bint **tigil** ʃaf   -ah Firas   (Movement of the Topic object to C-domain)
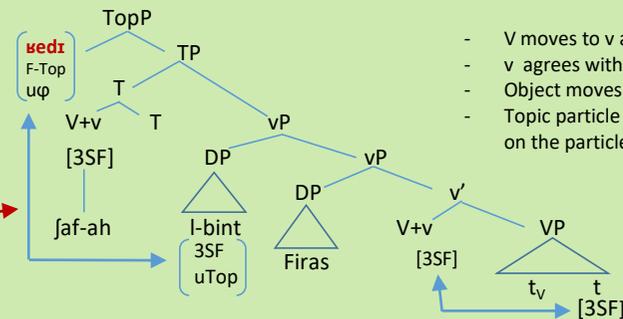   the-girl PRT saw.3SM-3SF Firas
        'The girl, Firas saw her.'

- All C-Topic and F-Topic heads are probes, either by virtue of uφ-features or an EPP-feature.
- The Topic head has a valued Topic feature. By virtue of Agree, a DP is marked as Topic either by valueing the φ-features of the relevant Topic head/particle or by movement to spec of Topic.
- Topics other than DPs can only be marked by movement to spec of the relevant Topic head.
- Some Topic particles have no uφ-features, only an EPP-feature, always triggering movement.
- Two F-topics can co-occur, combining agreement and movement, with interesting theoretical consequences.

The particles are evidence that the Arabic object clitics are not cliticized pronouns but agreement markers. The same clitics/markers show up on the verb and the particle in the same sentence. This analysis of object clitics was proposed already by Shlonsky (1997) for Arabic in general, but has remained controversial.

- V moves to v and T
- v agrees with the object, spelled out as a clitic on the verb.
- Object moves to edge of vP.
- Topic particle agrees with the object, spelled out as a clitic on the particle.

More than one F-topic :

Firas l-bint **ʁedɪ-h** ʃaf-ah
Firas the-girl PRT-3SM saw.3SF
'Firas, the girl, he saw her.'

[TopP Firasi [TopP l-bintj [TopP F-Top-φ [TP ti …[vP tj …]]]]

- v agrees with the object, spelled out as a clitic on the verb.
- The Topic particle agrees with the subject; see clitic on the particle.
- The object can't then be topicalised by agreement, but only by movement.
- Not to be an intervener, the subject has to move higher, where it c-commands the object chain.
- Movement of the subject is not triggered by any feature
  → Operations within a phase take place simultaneously, with the result evaluated at phase level (Chomsky 2008).

References:
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