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Exploring Variation in Semitic Languages:

Form-Meaning Interfaces across Arabic Varieties

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Spoken in an immense and virtually unbroken expanse, with important diasporas in Europe and the Americas, and counting about 380 million speakers worldwide, Arabic offers a hugely rich empirical base for the study of linguistic variation, dialectology, bilingualism, language contact and change (cf. Hachimi 2012).

Arabic linguistics has contributed invaluable to our understanding of syntactic variation by exploring fundamental issues such as the interaction between constituent order and subject-verb agreement – which can be full or partial, depending on the position of the subject. While these subjects still spark interest and continue to be fully relevant, another broad array of other morphosyntactic phenomena, including coordination (Al Khalaf et al. 2024), subordination (Taine-Cheikh 2022), temporal interpretation (Karawani 2019), binding, indexical shift, negation (Wilmsen 2014), case-marking, cross-phrasal dependencies in interrogative structures, or their interaction, among others, instantiate challenging issues, despite the fact that they are largely understudied.

For instance, Arabic has been shown to display a wide variety of strategies for expressing interrogatives (Aoun et al. 2010). It differs in this from many other languages which use a single strategy (cf. English), but it converges with languages such as French, which have a rich set of strategies (cf. Larrivé & Alexander 2021). Many varieties also appeal to resumption in contexts of syntactic displacement (with pronouns or clitics). Arabic interrogatives thus offer a promising domain to approach the question of (apparent) variation or optionality within a language (Wahba 1991 a.o). Moreover, multiple interrogatives have not yet received much attention in the literature. Variation in the domain of interrogatives has been observed among different varieties of Arabic. Yet, there is no clear general picture of the distribution of the different strategies across the different dialects.

Moreover, relatively little attention has also been given to the study of non-root (subordinated) contexts in Arabic, and much remains to be done on the topics relevant to root vs. non-root phenomena, but also beyond. For instance, interrogatives in subordinate contexts display a more transparent structure through which to observe the behaviour of *wh*-phrases, since they can indicate unambiguously if and how they undergo overt displacement. Similarly, temporal relations across clauses, indexical shift-type phenomena, and other phenomena involving subordination –such as adverbial subordination by coordination (namely, *converbs*)– have yet to be thoroughly investigated in Arabic and its varieties.

Another interesting case is coordination. Although coordinated structures have unvarying properties cross-linguistically (Zhang 2009), Naim (2006) observes that the traditional view of coordination '*joining constituents of the same role*' (Creissel 2005 a.o.) does not hold for sub-phrasal constituents in Arabic. Furthermore, in the context of interrogatives, coordinated *wh*-questions create a particularly challenging case for standard analyses of coordination, since they violate the traditional definition of coordination also known as Law of Coordination of Likes (Williams 1981 o.a.).

The objective of this workshop is to provide a forum of discussion for cross-linguistic (Benmamoun 2000) and cross-framework research on understudied phenomena in Arabic syntax and semantics, with the general goal of exploring linguistic diversity through the prism of Arabic (or more broadly, Semitic languages). It aims to bring together linguists working on Semitic languages or on Arabic and its varieties, from different approaches, disciplines, or perspectives, in order to exchange and discuss

the ways in which Arabic or more generally semitic language varieties converge with or diverge from other languages or language families. It also aims to serve as a forum for promoting exchanges among linguists -both established and emerging- with diverse expertise in Arabic and its varieties, fostering new interdisciplinary and international collaborations. More precisely, for establishing the future avenues of research for Arabic syntax-semantics and for exploring how research on the morphosyntax and semantics of Arabic can contribute to the study of language variation.

We welcome contributions adopting different frameworks and/or approaches, be it descriptive, theoretical, typological, or experimental, investigating issues at the morphology, syntax, or semantics interfaces across Arabic varieties and other Semitic languages, bearing on issues such as:

- Micro/macro-variation
- Dialectal, geographical, sociolectal variation
- Variation across child vs. adult grammars.
- New perspectives on (non-)root phenomena and/or their interaction with other independent syntactic or semantic phenomena (movement, temporal interpretation, quantification, binding, etc.).
- Implications of variation for linguistic theory.

Invited Keynote speaker: Hadil Karawani (University of Konstanz). Title: TBA

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