

Pragmatic Functions in a Functional Grammar of Arabic

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Pragmatic Functions in a Functional Grammar of Arabic

Ahmed Moutaouakil



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Contents

Foreword	vii
List of Abbreviations and Symbols	ix
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Focus	17
1.1 Definition of the Focus Function	17
1.2 Focus Assignment	33
1.3 From Functional Structure to Constituent Structure: The Expression Rules	51
1.4 Conclusions	66
Chapter 2: Topic	69
2.0 Introduction and Overview of the Data	69
2.1 Definition of Topic	71
2.2 Topic Assignment	72
2.3 The Nature of the Topic Term	74
2.4 Positioning of the Topic	76
2.5 Topic and Anaphora	96
Chapter 3: Theme	101
3.1 Properties of Theme in Arabic	102
3.2 Theme versus other Functions	113
3.3 Conclusions	121
Chapter 4: Tail	123
4.1 Definition of the Tail Function	124
4.2 Tail: 'External' or 'Internal' Function?	126
4.3 Tail and Reference	129
4.4 Constituency of Tail	131
4.5 Tail and Anaphora	133
4.6 Conclusions	136

Chapter 5:	Vocative	139
	5.1 Definition of Vocative	140
	5.2 Assignment of Vocative	141
	5.3 Constituency of Vocative Terms	143
	5.4 Conclusions	151
Conclusion		153
References		155

Foreword

This book represents a critical application of Functional Grammar, as set out by Dik (1978), to the analysis of pragmatic functions in Modern Standard Arabic. Taking as his data a large number of sentential constructions, Prof. Moutaouakil puts forward a coherent set of proposals for the assignment of pragmatic functions to particular constituents of those constructions. This work will provide fundamental insights for readers interested in the syntax of Modern Standard Arabic and will also form a valuable basis for the study of textual relations in Arabic discourse. Prof. Moutaouakil indeed repeatedly stresses the relation between the pragmatic functions he recognizes and the discourse setting of the utterances to which they apply. The book derives added interest from the attempt to integrate, in a manner that will be mutually enriching, the views of the Arabic grammatical tradition and the claims of Functional Grammar.

The transcription employed is 'morphemic' rather than 'phonetic'; for example, the preposition *fī* has always been transcribed with length-mark, even though the vowel is short before a consonant. Each data sentence has been provided with a partial morphemic gloss, which has been made no more detailed than necessary, and a translation into English. The gloss indicates at least the case of the nominal constituents (nom, acc or gen), and that of the clitic pronouns (A = accusative; G = genitive; no indication = nominative). All the data, also the ungrammatical and unacceptable sentences, have been translated; the translations are designed to give not only the meaning but also an idea of the structure and use of the data sentences.

We wish to thank Drs. W. Raven, of the Department of Arabic, Free University of Amsterdam, for checking the transcriptions.

The editors, FGS

List of abbreviations and symbols

Semantic functions

Ag	= Agent
Go	= Goal
Rec	= Recipient
Ø	= Zero
Loc	= Location
Ben	= Beneficiary
Instr	= Instrument
Po	= Positioner

Syntactic functions

Subj	= Subject
Obj	= Object

Pragmatic functions

Top	= Topic
Foc	= Focus
N-Foc	= New Focus
C-Foc	= Contrastive Focus
Voc	= Vocative
Voc-H	= Vocative of hailing

Categories

V	= Verb
N	= Noun
A	= Adjective
CO	= Clause operator
Q	= Question marker

Term operators

d	= definite
i	= indefinite
DEM	= demonstrative

x

Positions

S	= Subject position
O	= Object position
V	= Verb position
X	= non-designated position
cop	= copula position
P $\emptyset$	= Top/Foc position
P1	= CO position
P2	= Theme position
P3	= Tail position
P4	= Vocative position

Cases

nom	
NOM	= nominative

gen	
GEN	= genitive
G	

acc	
ACC	= accusative
A	

Number

s	= singular
dl	= dual
pl	= plural

Person

(p)1	= first person
(p)2	= second person
(p)3	= third person

General

$x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n$	= argument variables
$y_1, y_2, \dots, y_n$	= satellite variables
φ	= arbitrary predicate
ω	= arbitrary term operator
SFH	= Semantic Function Hierarchy
HCD	= Hierarchy of Case Determination
TWH	= Topic-worthiness Hierarchy
CON	= class of contexts

A = addressee
S = speaker

Theories

FG = Functional Grammar
TGG = Transformational Generative Grammar

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to describe the properties of constituents in Modern Standard Arabic which bear one of the following pragmatic functions: Focus, Topic, Theme, Tail and Vocative. Modern Standard Arabic, essentially a written language, is the vehicle of culture in the Arab world: it is the language of contemporary Arabic literature, of the press and of education. Although Modern Standard Arabic is markedly different from 'Classical' Arabic, it continues to display the same fundamental structure, for largely cultural reasons. Indeed, the constructions to be discussed in this study will, for the greater part, be constructions common to both 'états de langue'. Those that no longer belong to Modern Standard Arabic or which survive only with a marked status will on each occasion be indicated as such. Although the specific object of this study is one 'état' of one language, it will also seek to account for the 'universal' aspects of the relevant constructions. In other words, this book is designed to capture the properties of such constructions in Natural Language generally.

The constructions involving the pragmatic functions listed above have been described in various theoretical frameworks. The five functions, and indeed others, have been investigated in the framework of traditional Arabic linguistic thought, notably in the works on 'balāġa' (approx. 'rhetoric'). The Arabic rhetoricians studied the interaction between the 'maqāl' (utterance) and the 'maqām' (discourse environment) by considering the pragmatic functions of the constituents of utterances in different situational contexts and the structural (i.e. syntactic) properties that stemmed from these pragmatic functions. Thus, the constituent with the pragmatic function of 't-tahṣīṣ' (equivalent to 'Contrastive Focus') was seen generally to occupy initial position, as in the following sentence:

- (1) *qaṣīḍatan* ʔallaftu (lā kitāban)
 poem_{acc} wrote-1s not book_{acc}
 'It was a poem I wrote (not a book)'

In contemporary linguistic theorizing, it has become standard practice to distinguish between a 'formal' and a 'functional' (or 'pragmatic') paradigm. To the former belong those linguistic theories (such as TGG) in which

2 *Pragmatic Functions in Functional Grammar of Arabic*

natural language is considered to be an abstract system describable independently of its communicative function, while the latter paradigm covers those theories in which natural language is conceived of as a structure whose properties are at least partially determined by the conditions under which it is used. Exponents of the functional paradigm include 'pragmatics', one development of generative semantics; the 'functionalism' of the Harvard school; and the European functionalist theories, such as the 'systemics' of the London school, 'Functional Sentence Perspective', and 'Functional Grammar' as proposed in recent years by Simon C. Dik and his co-workers.

In the linguistic theories flowing from the formal paradigm, pragmatic functions are either ignored, as one might expect, or are considered to be semantic or syntactic notions and are thus given a purely formal treatment.¹ In the functional paradigm, however, pragmatic functions are viewed as being associated with constituents in accordance with given situational conditions. Of the pragmatic theories currently available, Functional Grammar is theoretically the most satisfactory (see below) and is organized in such a way as to provide not only the best account of pragmatic functions but also the clearest statement of their interactions with semantic and syntactic functions and with formal expression.

This study of pragmatic functions in Arabic will therefore be cast in the framework of Functional Grammar (henceforth FG). Nevertheless, since the five functions that we intend to investigate have been the object of interesting descriptions in the Arabic grammatical tradition (henceforth the Tradition), I will often have occasion to borrow certain specific analyses, and where necessary even certain concepts from the traditional Arabic linguists. In Moutaouakil (1982), I set out in broad outline a methodology for re-reading these linguists, integrating the theoretical system they employed into contemporary linguistic thinking and exploiting their work in the description of not only Arabic and related languages but also natural language as a whole. I was able to show that the theory underlying traditional Arabic linguistic thinking, despite the apparent disparity of the disciplines ('grammar', 'rhetoric', 'lexicology', 'exegesis', ...), is a pragmatic theory worthy of consideration in the form of a mutual exchange of analyses and possibly also concepts with contemporary pragmatic theories, including FG.

The analyses that I shall have occasion to borrow from the Arabic grammatical tradition will enrich FG without affecting the methodological principles of the theory or the organization of the grammar. On the other hand, the comparison of FG and traditional Arabic linguistic thought will permit a re-examination and re-evaluation of certain analyses that have remained unquestioned. Thus, a number of analyses of relevant constructions will be challenged, either partially or in their entirety.

The fundamental methodological principles of FG² are as follows:

- a) The basic function of language is that of an instrument of communication;
- b) The purpose of linguistics is the description of the speaker's 'communicative competence';
- c) Linguistic description should achieve pragmatic, psychological and typological adequacy;

It follows from principle a) that FG seeks to describe natural languages from a functional viewpoint, i.e. in such a way that their structural properties are at least partially explicable – both synchronically and diachronically – in terms of the various communicative tasks that language is called upon to carry out in verbal interaction.

Principle b) entails a redefinition of the classical dichotomy between competence and performance. The speaker's competence (his knowledge of his language) is a 'communicative competence' in that it is seen as knowledge not only of the linguistic rules but also of the pragmatic rules allowing the speaker to 'perform' in given situation-types with a view to specific communicative goals.

Principle c) requires of FG that it should aim for three types of adequacy. In order to meet the requirement of 'pragmatic adequacy', FG provides for an autonomous level of representation for pragmatic functions (Theme, Topic, Focus, ...) alongside levels for syntactic functions (Subject, Object) and semantic functions (Agent, Goal, Instrument, ...). 'Psychological adequacy' is achieved by conforming as closely as possible to psychological models, both of production and of comprehension. As a result, rules adjudged to lack 'psychological reality' are banned³; thus, grammars written in an FG framework will lack any transformational rules⁴. 'Typological adequacy', finally, is a requirement placed upon the grammatical description of an individual language to accord as closely as possible with what is known of the universal properties of natural language.

The functions relating to the three levels (semantic, syntactic and pragmatic) are in FG considered to be 'primitive' notions in the sense that they are not derived from pre-existent configurational structures⁵. They play a fundamental part in the organization of the grammar. In contrast to generative grammars of a 'configurational' type – but in parallel to Relational Grammar or Lexical-Functional Theory – the rules 'building' constituent structure operate on the basis of information provided by functional structure and not *vice versa*.

The organization of a Functional Grammar is built around three structures: *predicational structure*, *functional structure* and *constituent structure*;⁶ these three structures are constructed by three systems of rules: the

4 Pragmatic Functions in Functional Grammar of Arabic

rules in the fund, the function assignment rules and the expression rules.

The fund subsumes two subsystems which work together to create the predication structure represented as a 'predicate frame': these are the *lexicon* and the *predicate- and term-formation rules*. On the hypothesis that the lexical items of every natural language are either *basic* (i.e. learnt as such by speakers before they can be used) or *derived* (i.e. formed by 'synchronically productive' rule from basic lexical items)⁷, the lexicon contains the basic predicate frames and the basic terms, while the formation rules create the derived predicate frames and the derived terms (cf. Figure 1 below).

A predicate frame is represented as a structure comprising a predicate (an expression designating a property or relation) and its argument(s). Each predicate frame specifies (i) the form of the predicate; (ii) its syntactic category (V(erb), N(oun) or A(djective)); (iii) the argument positions associated with the predicate, indicated by variables ($x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n$); (iv) the semantic functions associated with each argument position (Agent, Goal, Instrument, ...); (v) the selection restrictions imposed by the predicate on these positions.

For instance, the predicate ?a^cṭā 'gave' (see note 9) is specified in predicate frame (2) as a verbal predicate (subscript V) taking three argument positions with the semantic functions Agent, Goal and Recipient and the selection restrictions 'animate', 'non-human' and 'animate' respectively:

$$(2) \quad ?a^c\dot{\tau}\ddot{a}_V (x_1: \text{animate}(x_1))_{Ag} (x_2: \text{non-human}(x_2))_{Go} (x_3: \text{animate}(x_3))_{Rec}$$

The predicate fariḥ 'merry' is specified as an adjectival predicate (subscript A) taking one argument position with the selection restriction 'animate' and the semantic function Zero ($\emptyset$), which generally indicates the role of the primary participant in a predicate frame designating a State:

$$(3) \quad \text{fariḥ}_A (x_1: \text{animate}(x_1))_{\emptyset}$$

Predicate frames are held to designate a 'state of affairs' in which the participants play various roles (reflected in the semantic functions). The state of affairs may be an Action, Process, Position or State⁸. The participants, depending on how essential they are for the definition of the state of affairs, are represented either as *arguments* or *satellites*. Thus, positions (x_1), (x_2) and (x_3) in predicate frame (4) are argument positions, since they are necessary for the definition of the Action designated by the predicate ?a^cṭā, whereas positions (y_1) and (y_2) are satellite positions, since they serve merely to specify the circumstances of the Action, namely the time and the place:

$$(4) \quad ?a^c\tilde{t}\tilde{a}_v (x_1: \text{animate}(x_1))_{Ag} (x_2: \text{non-human}(x_2))_{Go} (x_3: \text{animate}(x_3))_{Rec} \\ (y_1)_{Time} (y_2)_{Loc}$$

As mentioned above, there are also derived predicate frames, created by predicate formation rules.⁹ I will adopt the hypothesis that the basic predicates are those formed on one of the patterns *fa'āl*, *fa'īl*, *fa'ul* or *fa'āl*, plus what the Arabic grammatical tradition refers to as 'jāmid' (i.e. lexical forms that are neither derived nor can be a source for the derivation of other forms). All other predicates will be regarded as derived, either directly (e.g. the patterns *ʔaf'āl*, *fā'āl* and *fta'āl* or indirectly (e.g. *tafā'āl* and *tafa'āl*, which are derived from *fā'āl* and *fa'āl* predicates which are themselves derived).

Like predicates, terms may be either basic or derived. Basic terms are those expressions which can only be used as terms, such as personal pronouns, interrogative pronouns, proper names, etc. Accordingly, they are listed as such in the lexicon. The majority of terms are derived, i.e. formed by means of term formation rules which create the following structure:¹⁰

$$(5) \quad (\omega x_i: \varphi_1(x_i): \varphi_2(x_i): \dots : \varphi_n(x_i))$$

where x_i is the term variable designating the referent of the term, ω indicates the term operator(s) (articles, demonstratives, ...), and each $\varphi(x_i)$ is a 'restrictor'.

Both basic and derived predicate frames are said to be 'nuclear' in the sense that they only contain arguments of the predicate. So-called *predicate frame extension rules* are therefore required to insert satellite positions into the nuclear predicate frames. The resultant frames are said to be 'extended': thus (4) is an extension of (2).

Once predicate frame extension has taken place (if appropriate), the terms are inserted by means of *term insertion rules* into both the argument and the satellite positions, yielding a *predicational structure*. The extended predicate frame (4), for example, becomes a 'full' predicational structure through the insertion of the terms (°Amr) '°Amr', (majallat) 'magazine', (Zayd) 'Zayd', (bāriḥat) 'yesterday' and (maktabat) 'library' into positions (x_1), (x_2), (x_3), (y_1) and (y_2) respectively:

$$(6) \quad ?a^c\tilde{t}\tilde{a}_v (dx_1: ^\circ\text{Amr}(x_1))_{Ag} (dx_2: \text{majallat}(x_2))_{Go} (dx_3: \text{Zayd}(x_3))_{Rec} \\ (dy_1: \text{bāriḥat}(y_1))_{Time} (dy_2: \text{maktabat}(y_2))_{Loc}$$

Functional structure is constructed through the application of two sets of assignment rules: syntactic function assignment rules and pragmatic function assignment rules; the former apply before the latter¹¹.