In favour of microparameterization of the Activity Condition: Evidence from Arabic varieties

Jordanian Arabic (JA) provides evidence that a category with deletion-marked Case (following Carstens' 2003 terminology) remains syntactically active.

(1) Ɂabuu-j   fakkar   Ɂinn-ha
     father-my   believed.3SG.M   COMP-3SG.F
     sijjaarah   Ɂiz-zulum   sarag-u
     car.F   DEF-men.M   stole-3PL.M
     'My father believed that it was a car that the men stole.'

The complementizer *Ɂinn* agrees with the fronted focused object *sijjaarah* although the latter is already assigned structural Case (by little v/V) in the v*P. Note that the fronted focalized object is associated with a gap, rather than a resumptive clitic, a strong indication of its base-generation in v*P and further movement to CP; see Ouhalla 1997). Sentence (1) demonstrates that JA is different from West Flemish where elements (including the direct object) which are assigned structural Case by a head in a different (lower) phase become inactive (for further agreement relations), i.e. they do not reenter into any new Agree relations (Carstens 2003). This is shown in the following pair taken from Carstens (2013: 392 and 399, respectively):

(2) a. Kvinden   *dan*   die   boeken   te   diere   zyn.
        I-find   COMP.PL   DEF   books   too   expensive are
        'I find those books too expensive.'
    b. Ik   déénke dat/*datte   oons   zolfs Jan   nie   mag.
        I   think COMP/COMP.1PL   us   even   Jan   not   likes
        'I don't think even Jan likes us (lit. I think that us, even Jan doesn't like).'

On the other hand, an alternative approach to sentence (1) would be that JA has v*P phases, hence, hence the fronted focalized object would be a category with no deletion-marked Case. It remains active as the head of the higher phase (which is here the head of the matrix CP) does not yet enter the derivation. However, with the increasingly cross-linguistic evidence of the presence of v*P phases, even in passives and unaccusatives (see Legate 2003), the possibility that JA does not maintain v*P is largely undermined. In this paper, we argue that sentence (1) can be accounted for following Oxford's (2017) microparametric proposal where the Activity Condition is a property of a particular functional head, rather than a property of the language as a whole. This is to say, the head of Force Phrase (but not, e.g., the head of TP) can agree with elements, irrespective of their activity status. In JA, *Ɂinn* (a complementizer that introduces embedded clauses) appears to agree with the preverbal subject (when there is no preceding object) (see 3a) or the direct object when the latter is fronted (as a focused element) (see 1 above) or base-generated (as a CLLD entity) (see 3b).

(3) a. Ɂabuu-i   fakkar   Ɂinn-ha
        father-my   believed.3SG.M   COMP-3SG.F
        Ɂil-binit   Ɂaχazˤ-t   Ɂil-mafatiiħ.
        DEF-girl.F   took-3SG.F   DEF-keys.M
        'My father believed that the girl took the keys.'
    b. Ɂabuu-i   fakkar   Ɂinn-ha
        father-my   believed.3SG.M   COMP-3SG.F
        Ɂis-sijjaarah   Ɂiz-zulum   sarag-u-ha.
        DEF-car.F   DEF-men.M   stole-3PL.M-3SG.F
        'My father believed that the car, the men stole it.'

Examples in (1 and 3) demonstrate that *Ɂinn* agrees with any element, irrespective of its Case being already assigned or not. This is not the case with T in JA nonetheless, where verbs (widely argued to adjoin to T; see Jarrah 2017) or a tense copula (i.e. *kaan*) that lexicalizes T (see Alqassas 2015) only agree with the subject. Consider the following pair.

(4) a. l-iwlaad   ʔakal-u   ʔil-tuffaaħa
       DEF-boys.M   ate-3PL.M   DEF-apple.F
       'The boys ate the apple.'

   b. l-iwlaad   kaan-u   bijookl-u   ʔil-tuffaaħa
       DEF-boys.M   was-3PL.M   eating-3PL.M   DEF-apple.F
       'The boys ate the apple.'

On the other hand, a recent paper by Al-Balushi (2018) shows that verbs in Omani Arabic agree with the subject and the object, as shown in (5):

(5) katb-in-ha   l-banāt   r-rəsālah.
    PST.write-3.PL.F-3.SG.F   DEF-girls.NOM   DEF-letter.F.ACC
   'The girls wrote the letter.'

Following our approach, T in Omani Arabic is like C in Jordanian Arabic; it agrees with elements regardless of their Case being assigned or not (considering Chung 2013 that agreement relationships are insensitive to phase boundaries). Given the order of the subject and object inflections on the verb (the subject agreement inflection precedes the object agreement inflection), it would not be the case (given Baker's 1985 Mirror Principle) that the verb agrees with the object, whereas T only agrees with the subject. T agrees with the subject and the object (and the surface form is resulted when v adjoins to T). According to Al-Balushi (2018), C in Omani Arabic is an agreeing element. Al-Balushi (2018) argues that the subject in (6) is a topic and ʔinn agrees with fronted topic elements:

(6) nə-ʕraf   ʔinn-hum   ṭ-ṭəllāb   məgtihd-īn
    PL-know   COMP-3.PL.M   DEF-students.ACC   hardworking-PL.NOM
    'We know that the male students are hardworking.'

On the other hand, a native Omani Speaker informs us that *ʔinn* cannot agree with a fronted focused element:

(7) nə-ʕraf   ʔinn-(*hin)   mdarrs-ā-t
    PL-know   COMP-3.PL.M   DEF-teachers.F
    qābl-ū-hin   lə-mdarrs-īn
    PST.meet-3.PL.M-3.PL.F   DEF-teacher-PL.NOM
    'We know that it was female teachers that male teachers met.'

With the assumption that fronted topics are base-generated in the left periphery (so their case is not yet deletion-marked), while fronted focused elements are moved categories (their case is already deletion-marked), it turns out that unlike T, C in Omani Arabic only agrees with active elements. These facts indicate that the Activity Condition is a property of C in Omani Arabic but T in JA, whereas this does not hold true with respect to T in Omani Arabic or C in JA. Additionally, this difference between JA and Omani Arabic reveals that Carstens' (2010) proposal of grammatical gender as the main factor of activation of elements does not extend to Arabic varieties, given that JA and OA both have grammatical gender, however, DPs in the two Arabic dialects do not share the same behavior of being always active. As we have shown above, activation depends on heads (probes) rather than DPs (goals).

Al-Balushi, R. (2018). The Relationship between Agreement and Morphological Case: Evidence from Arabic. *Concentric: Studies in Linguistics*, *44*. Alqassas, A. (2015). Negation, tense and NPIs in Jordanian Arabic. *Lingua*, *156*. Carstens, V. (2003). Rethinking complementizer agreement: Agree with a Case-checked goal. Linguistic inquiry, 34. Carstens, V. 2010. Implications of grammatical gender for the theory of uninterpretable features. Chung, S. 2013. The syntactic relations behind agreement. Jarrah, M. (2017). A Criterial Freezing approach to subject extraction in Jordanian Arabic. *Canadian Journal of Linguistics*. Legate, J. "Some interface properties of the phase." *Linguistic inquiry* 34.3 (2003): 506-515. Ouhalla, J. (1997). Remarks on focus in Standard Arabic. Oxford, W. (2017). The Activity Condition as a microparameter. *Linguistic Inquiry*, *48*(4), 711-722.