

A Syntactic Contrastive Analysis of Relative Clauses in Arabic and English in the Government and Binding Framework with Relevance to Translators and Foreign Learners of Arabic

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Abstract

We try in this paper a syntactic contrastive analysis of the relative structures in both Arabic and English in the Government and Binding framework.

The syntactic framework we adopt is that of Chomsky, N. (1981), Bouchard, D. (1984), Radford, A. (1988), Lasnik, H. & Uriagereka, J. (1988), and Haegeman, L. (1993). Since any syntactic analysis takes the sentence as its unit of analysis, we did not move in our analysis beyond this level. Any attempt to try an analysis on the textual or rhetorical level can not be sustained in any formal or even proper syntactic analysis.

We believe that this paper is of prime interest to those interested in deep syntactic analysis of relative structures in both Arabic and English in the Government and Binding theory and to academic translators as well as foreign learners of Arabic.

1. Theoretical Framework

The analysis adopted, in this paper, assumes a fair knowledge of the main properties of the Government and Binding framework. (henceforth, GB) developed in Chomsky, N. (1981), Bouchard, D. (1984), Radford, A. (1988); Lasnik, H. & Uriagereka, J. (1988), and Haegeman, L. (1993).

Some vital concepts to our argument are the following:

- (1) (i) Case assignment takes place at S-structure only:
"We assume that case assignment takes place at S-structure"¹
- (ii) Adjacency is a condition for case assignment at the syntactic level only:
"We assume that case-marking takes place at the syntactic level only... Therefore, the notion of adjacency is that of S-structure (Chomsky 94).
- (iii) The basic word-order in Arabic is VOS. "In conclusion, the basic word-order in Modern Standard Arabic is VOS where the verb inflects for gender only as language specific property, while it inflects for person, number and gender if the sentence starts with an NP in the nominative, in which case we have a movement into COMP².
For a comprehensive analysis of this issue, see Homeidi: (1991); (1994).

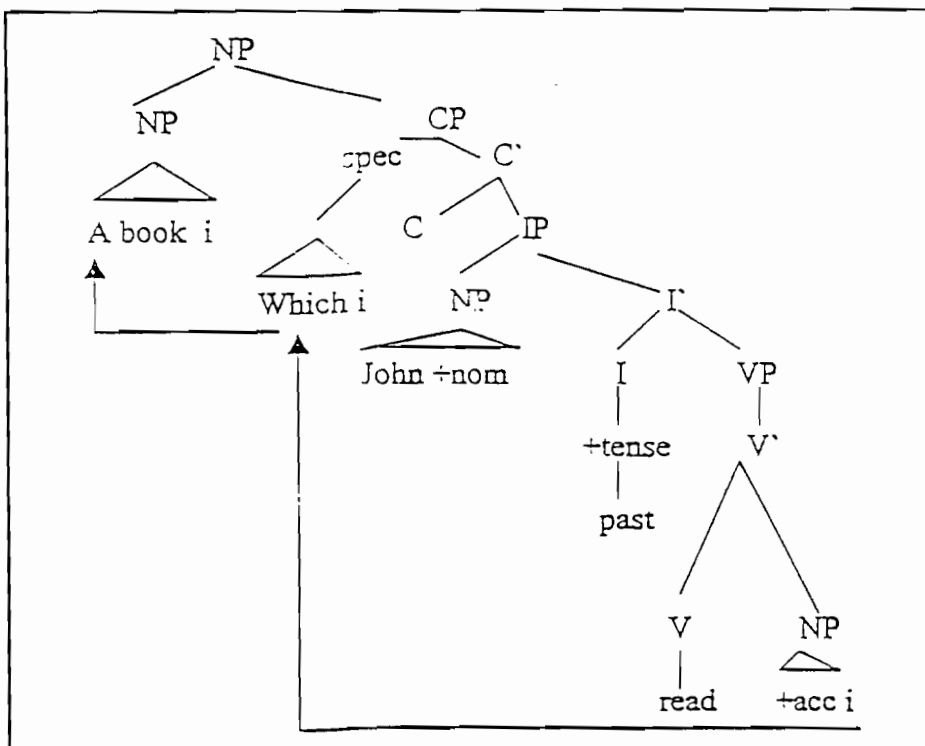
2. Relative Clauses in English

The structure of relative clauses in English has been the subject of much debate; See amongst others: Kuroda (1959), Partee (1975), Jackendoff (1977), Emonds (1979), McCloskey (1979), and Cinque (1982).

However, a typical example would be the following:

- (2) A book which John read.
From a syntactic point of view (2) would have the following S-structure according to Haegeman's (1993) framework.

(3)



Case assignment and θ - roles marking are done within the GB framework quite properly. We notice that the NP-trace in the embedded clause is co-indexed with *which* and with the head NP *a book* which means that the three form one chain with one θ -role.

In fact, the translation of (2) into Arabic will give the following:

(4) كتاب () قرأه أحمد

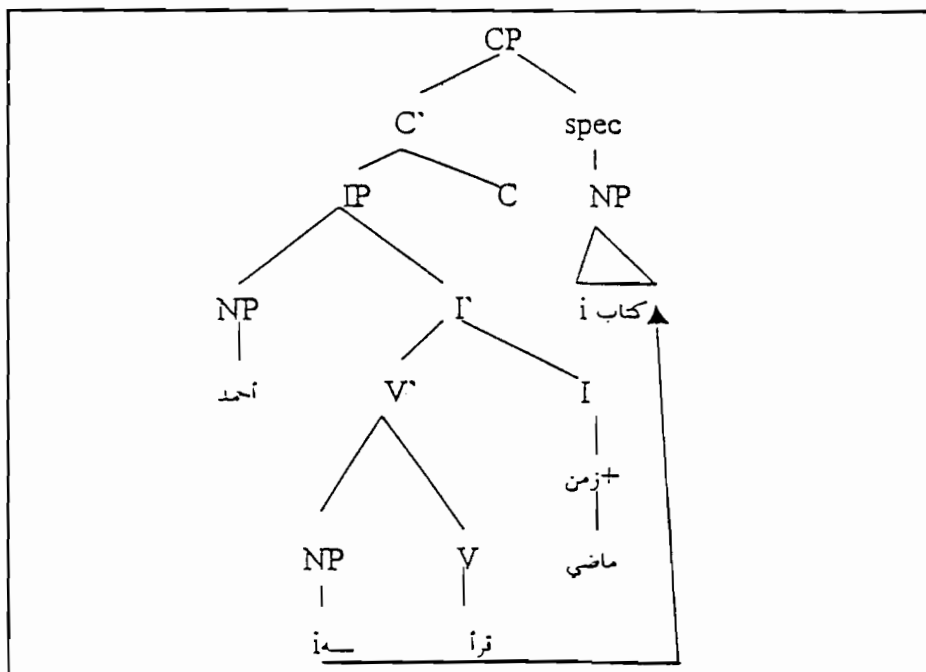
Ahmad qara?-a-past it-acc kitaab-un-nom

A book which/that Ahmad read

What is striking is the absence of the relative pronoun (*which*) from the Arabic equivalent though we have a resumptive pronoun co-indexed with the preceding NP for reference. This pronoun should be added by the translator.

The S-structure of (4) might be the following:

(5)



So we notice that although the NP كتاب is co indexed with هـ, we do not have a relative clause structure. More than that (5) does not allow the insertion of a relative pronoun.

(6)

*كتاب الذي قرأه أحمد

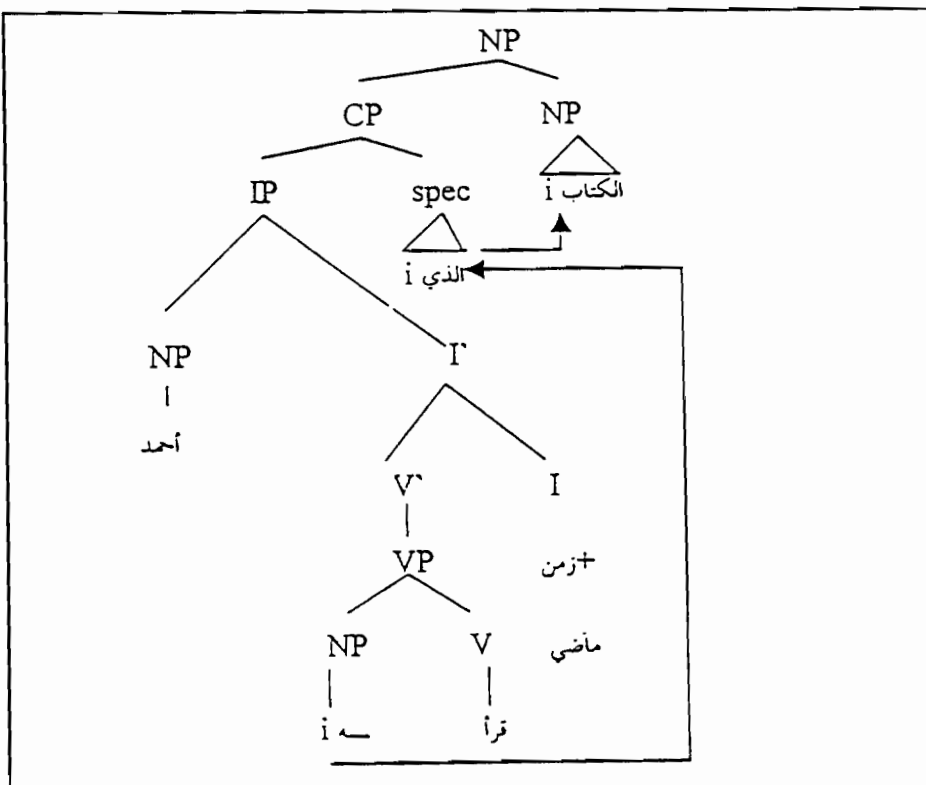
In fact (6) is not allowed either in Modern Standard Arabic or classical Arabic. (6) can be grammaticalized if the head NP كتاب is made definite by adding the definite article *al* (the), then we get:

(7)

أحمد	قرأه	الذي	الكتاب
Ahmad	qara?-a- hu-acc	?al laoli	?al-kitaab-u
Ahmad	read-past it-acc	which	the book-nom
The book which/that Ahmad read			

(7) would have the following S-structure (C' level is deleted for ease of presentation):

(8)



What is noticeable is that Arabic does not allow the deletion of the relative pronoun in (8) i.e. (9) does not have a relative clause meaning although it is quite grammatical in Arabic:

(9) الكتاب قرأه أحمد

However, (9) is a relative clause in English with the option of Zero relative pronoun:

(10) The book (zero relative pronoun) Ahmad read.

We have a crucial difference between Arabic and English in this respect. This difference can be formulated as follows:

(11) (i) Whereas the relative clause in English can start with an indefinite NP, Arabic can start with a definite NP. (some exceptions are found in the glorious Quran as in the following from Suurat ?al-Humaza, ?al-?ayataan: 1,2:

1. ويل لكل همزة لمزة 2. الذي جمع مالا وعدده. the meaning of which can be translated as follows: 1. *We to every (kind of) scandalmonger and*

backbiter 2. Who pileth up welth and layth it by. The translation is taken from: *The Holy Quran, English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary*, The Presidency of Islamic Researchs, Ifta, Call and Guidance, 1990.

- (ii) The chain of indices in Arabic is marked for θ - role only. L.e. The NP الكتاب, the relative pronoun الذي, and the resumptive pronoun هـ from a chain that is marked for θ - role only i.e. they all have one θ -role as patient of the verb *qaraʔa*; whereas their cases are different:

hu: accusative.

?al-laoii: nominative.

?al-kitaabu: nominative.

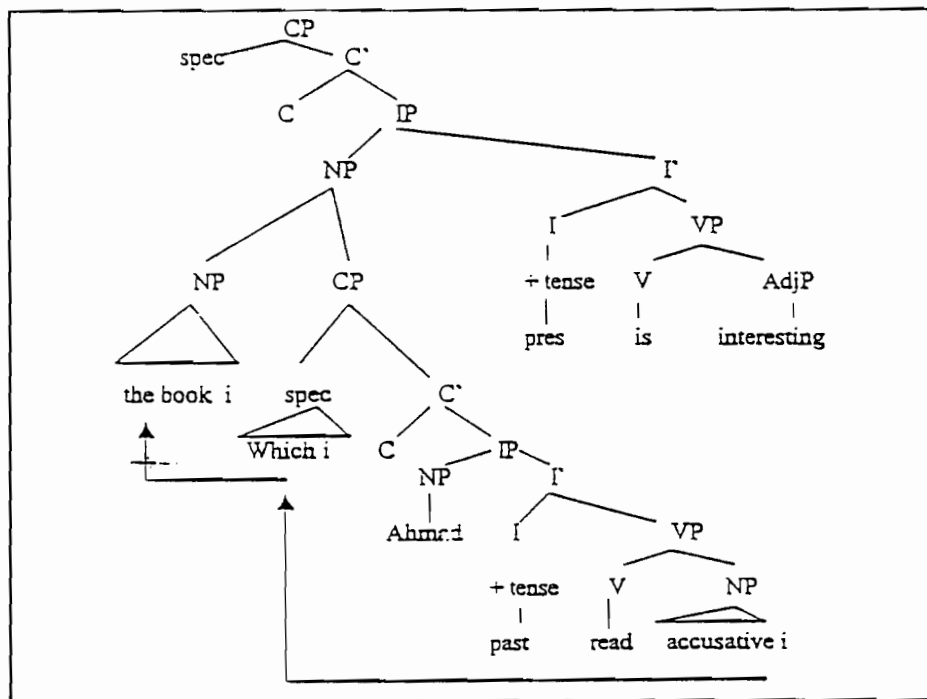
- (iii) Arabic has a resumptive pronoun which is co-indexed with the relative pronoun and the head NP; whereas English has a coindexed trace only.

In fact the case in (ii) above is in English. In (2) the embedded empty NP is in the accusative whereas the Np *a book* with which it is coindexed is in the nominative. This is clear from the following:

(12) the book which Ahmad read is interesting.

(12) could be assigned the following S-structure:

(13)



However, the linguistic tradition in English distinguishes between three types of relative clauses:

- (14) (a) Restrictive Relative Clauses.
(b) Appositive Relative Clauses.
(c) Free Relative Clauses.

Let us discuss the syntactic properties of each type briefly and see how it is translated into Arabic.

2.1 Restrictive Relative Clauses

This type of clauses can best be clarified by the following examples:

- (15) (a) I met the man [*who lives next door*] in town.
(b) The book [*that you lent me*] was interesting.
(c) I enjoyed the meal [*you made us*]³

All the bracketed clauses are called Restrictive because they restrict the class of men in (a) to the one [*who lives next door*] and the books in (b) to [*the one you lent me*] and the meals in (c) to [*the one you made*].

The main properties of this type are characterized as follows (radfond 480):

- (16) (i) Can be introduced by a wh-pronoun like *who* in (a).
(ii) Can be introduced by a complementizer like *that* in (b).
(iii) Contain no overt wh-pronoun or complementizer in (c).
(iv) Can sometimes be extraposed and separated from their antecedent (the expression they modify) like:

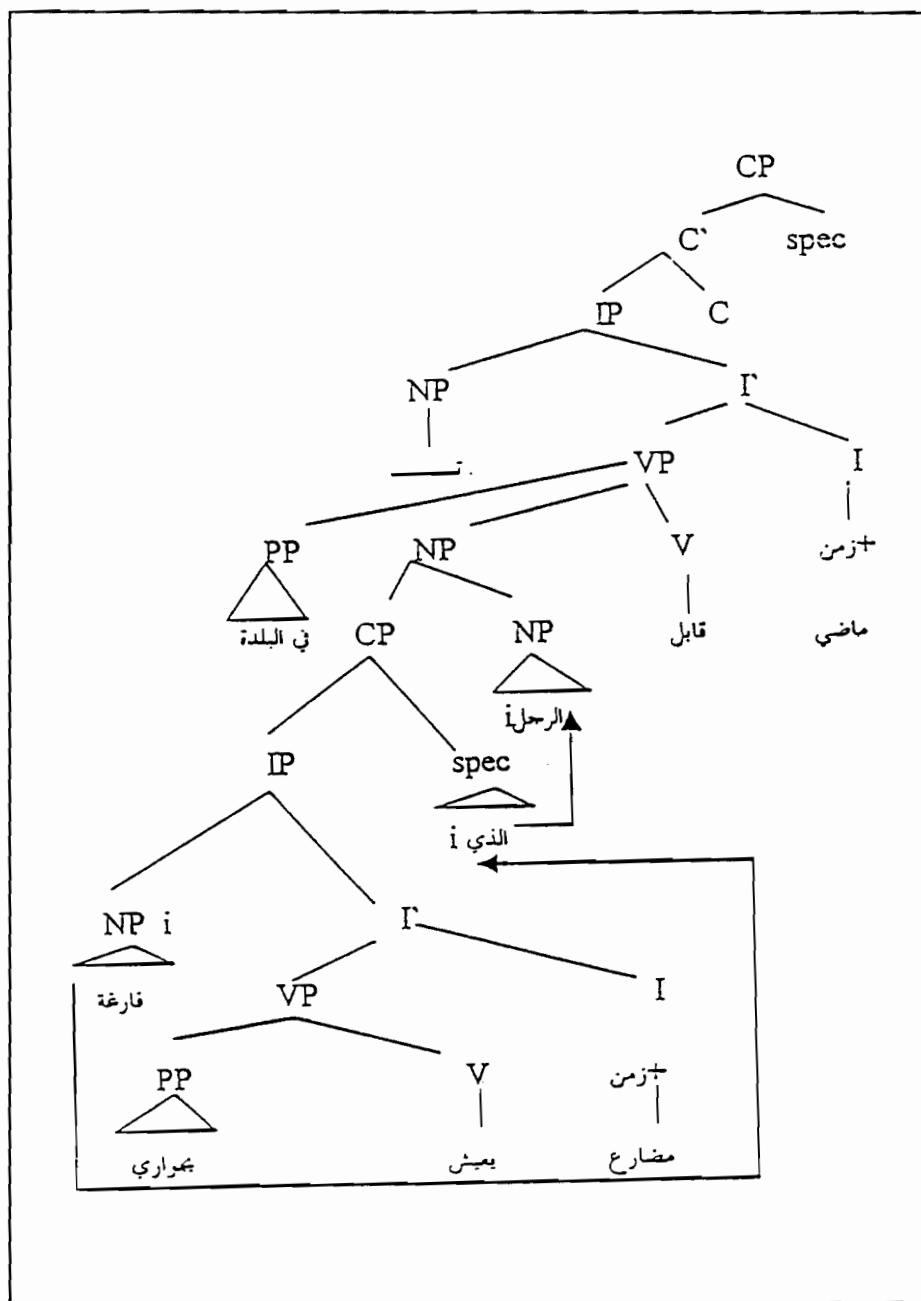
- (17) Someone came to see me [*who said he was from the bank*] Let us see whether the examples in (15) and the properties in (15) can be found in the Arabic translation of (15).

- (18) I met the man
tu-nom qaabala-past ?al-radjula-acc
[who lives next door] in town.
[?allaoii-acc ya ? ii fu bi jiwari-obliq] fii ?al-baldati-obliq.

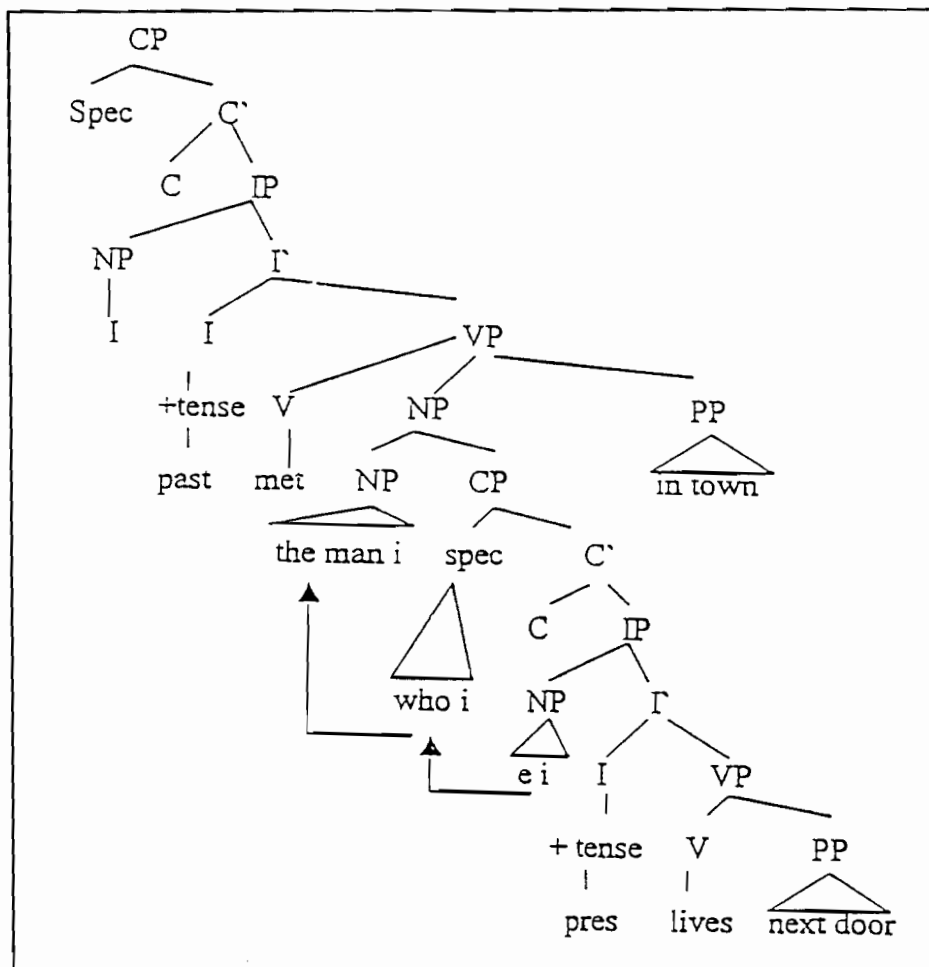
قابلت الرجل [الذي يعيش بجواري] في البلدة.

The S-structure of (18) is (19) Which is identical to the one underlying (15.a) represented in (20) if we drop word order differences between the two languages from our discussion.

(19)



(20)



In fact Arabic and English are identical syntactically and semantically as far as (15.a) is concerned.

The tutor of translation can draw upon this fact as well as the teacher of Arabic as a foreign language. Can the same conclusion be gained in (15.b) and (15.c)?

- (21) the book [that you lent me]
 ?al-kitaabu-nom [?alaoii ta-nom ?ar? nii-acc]
 was interesting.
 kanna mumti?an-acc

الكتاب الذي أعرتني إياه كان ممتعاً

The only difference is that Arabic does not have a complementizer form different from the relative pronoun form. In both cases Arabic uses the same relative pronoun [ʔallaoui] meaning "who/which". The tutor of translation and the teacher of Arabic as a foreign language should be aware of this fact.

Now what about (15.c), modified slightly for easier transliteration froms:

- (22) I liked the book
 tu-nom ʔa hhabab-past ʔal-kitaab-acc
 [(zero relative) you lent me].
 [(zero relative) ta-nom ʔaʔr nii-acc].
 *أحببت الكتاب أعرتني

The Arabic equivalent of (22) is obviously ungrammatical. In fact Arabic Restrictive Relative Clauses do not drop their relative pronouns. This is a fact the tutor of translation should keep in mind.

Let us move to the last property in (16), namely that restrictive relative clauses in English can be extraposed. We repeat (17) as (23) for convenience:

- (23) some one came to see me
 shaxsun maa-nom ʔatta li mushahadatii-oblig
 [who said he was from the bank]
 [ʔalloaii qaala ʔinna-hu-acc min ʔal-bank - obliq]
 شخص ما أتى لمشاهدتي [الذي قال إنه من البنك]

In fact the Arabic translation of (23) is highly ungrammatical. The reason is the presence of the relative pronoun (ʔallaoui). The sentence could be grammatical if the relative pronoun is dropped:

- (24) أنا لمقابلتي شخص ما قال إنه من البنك
 We have, here, a very interesting difference which deserves precise formulation:

- (25) *Arabic extraposed Restrictive Relative Clauses do not allow the presence of the relative pronoun.*

In conclusion to this section, we can characterize the similarities and the differences between English Restrictive Relative Clauses and the Arabic ones as follows:

- (26) (i) Syntactically, the structure of this type of relative clauses is identical in both languages, (regardless of word order differences).
 (ii) Whereas English enjoys the merit of using a *relative pronoun*, a *complementizer*, or a *zero relative pronoun form* only.
 (iii) Whereas both languages allow the extraposition of restrictive relative clauses, Arabic does not permit the insertion of the relative pronoun if the restrictive clause is extraposed.

The tutor of translation and the teacher of Arabic as a foreign language should take (26) into account.

2.2 Appositive Relative clauses

Appositive Relative Clauses in English are exemplified by the following:

- (27) (a) John (*who was at Cambridge with me*) is a good friend of mine.
 (b) Yesterday I met your bank manager, *who was in a filthy mood*.
 (c) Mary has left home - *which must be very upsetting for her parents* (Radford 480).

The semantic properties of Appositive Relative Clauses are briefly characterized in Radford (481) as follows:

"They generally serve as 'parenthetical comments' or 'afterthoughts' set off in a separate intonation group from the rest of the sentence (this being marked by a comma, or hyphen, or brackets in writing); unlike Restrictives, they can be used to qualify unmodified proper nouns i.e. proper nouns not introduced by a Determiner like *the*). They are always introduced by an overt *wh*-phrase (i.e. neither *that*-relatives, nor 'zero relatives' can be used appositively).

The above properties are crucial to the appositives; this seen from the ungrammaticality of the following:

- (28) (a) John - whom you saw in town - is a good friend of mine.
 (b) *John - that you saw in town - is a good friend of mine. (that complementizer).
 (d) *John - you saw in town - is a good friend of mine. (zero relative).

Appositives can not be extraposed; i.e. they can not be separated from their antecedent:

- (29) (a) *John came to see me - who you met last week.
 (b) *Mary is living at home - who is very nice.

Syntactically, the structure of Appositives does not differ from that of Restrictives; i.e. the base rule is the same as in:

- (30) CP spec C'
 C' C IP
 spec relative pronoun
 IP I' (clause)

Let us see whether Arabic has the same type of appositives with the same properties. For convenience, we repeat the sentences in (27):

Let us see whether Arabic has the same type of appositives with the same properties. For convenience, we repeat the sentences in (27):

- (31) John (*who was at Cambridge with me*)
 joun - nom (?allaoui kaana fil kaambridj - oblig ma?ii - obliq) is a good friend

of mine.

sadiiqun - nom jayyidun - nom min? asdiqq?ii-obliq.

جون (الذي كان معي في كامبردج) صديق جيد من أصدقائي.

The Arabic version of (31) does not have any unpredictable properties, syntactic or semantic with the exception of the deletion of the main verb in the main clause i.e. *is*. This is a language specific property; for more about this point see Homeidi (1987, 1998, forthcoming).

- (32) Yesterday I met your bank manager,

?al-barrihata-acc tu-nom qabal-past ika-obliq masfi-obliq mudira-acc
who was in a filthy mood.

?allaDii kaana fii sayyi?n-obliq mizaajin-obliq

قابلت البارحة مدير مصرفك، الذي كان سيء المزاج

- (33) Mary has left home - which must

mary qad yaadarat ?al-bayta-acc ?al-?amru-nom ?allaoii yajibu

be very upsetting for her parents.

?an yakuuna qad ?aqlaqa ha waaliday

لقد غادرت ماري البيت - الأمر الذي يجب أن يكون قد أقلق والدتها.

The Arabic translation of (33) shows a slight difference; whereas the relative pronoun does not modify any single word in the English clause, Arabic does not use a relative pronoun only but an NP in apposition of the whole sentence *Mary has left home*, followed by the proper relative pronoun *?allaoii* and then the appositive relative clause.

Semantically, English and Arabic are identical. Syntactically, they are different in the sense that Arabic needs an NP in apposition of the antecedent (the whole sentence) followed by the proper relative pronoun. In fact Arabic appositive relative clauses can not be extraposed;

- (34) (a) أحمد - الذي قابلته الأسبوع الماضي - جاء لمشاهدتي

(b) جاء أحمد لمشاهدتي - الذي قابلته الأسبوع الماضي *

This brings us to the last type of English relative clauses.

2.3 Free Relative Clauses

Free Relative Clauses are those such as the italicised in the following:

- (35) (a) *What (ever)* he says is generally true.

(b) You can have *whichever one you want*.

(c) I will go *where (ver)* you go.

(d) *Whatever* happens, *I'll stand with you* (Redford 481).

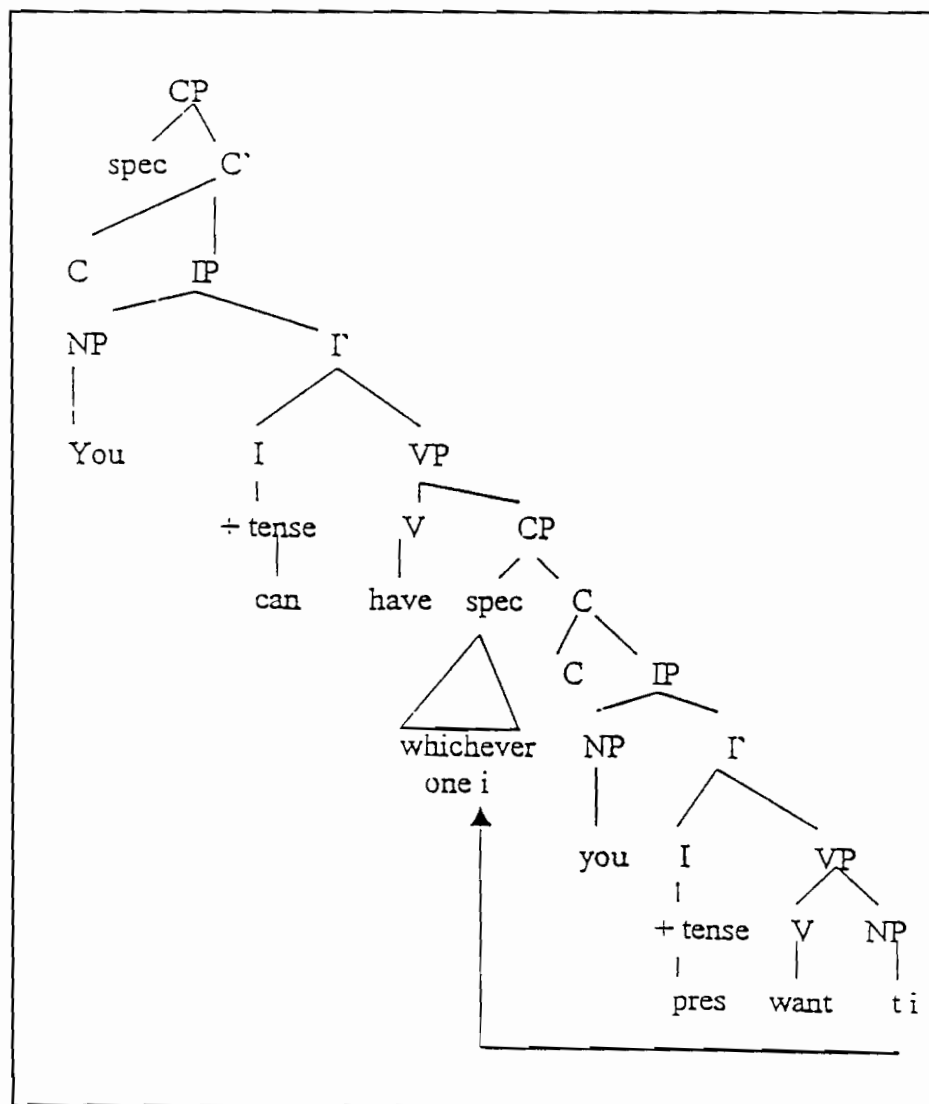
Semantically, Free Relative clauses are characterized as follows:

"...they are apparently antecedentless-i.e. the Wh-expression they contain does not appear to refer back to any other constituent in the sentence

containing them. As in the case of Appositives, they are always introduced by an overt-wh phrase (i.e. neither *that* relatives nor 'zero relatives' can function as free relative clauses) (Radford 481)

Syntactically, Free relatives do not differ from the other two types. They include a movement from the embedded IP into *spec* as can be seen from the S-structure of (35.b).

(36)



What is interesting, however, is their semantic behaviour and the fact the they do not allow *that* complementizer of 'zero relative'. These two points should be kept in mind especially when translating or teaching Arabic as a foreign language.

Let us see whether Arabic has the same conclusions. I will repeat (35) for convenience:

- (37) What (ever) he says is generally true.

Maa hu-acc yaquulu ?aadatan-acc sahiihun-nom

ما يقوله صحيح عادة

In fact (maa) in the Arabic translation could be an antecedent to the whole sentence and does not refer to any single word in itself or the object of the verb as might be thought. Moreover, it can not be deleted, i.e. (38) is ungrammatical:

- (38) *yaquulu-hu ?aadatan sahiihun

says-he-it general true

*يقوله عادة صحيح

It seems to me that Arabic and English are identical in this respect.

- (39) I will go wherever you go

?aa sa ohabu hayiθumaa ta ohabu

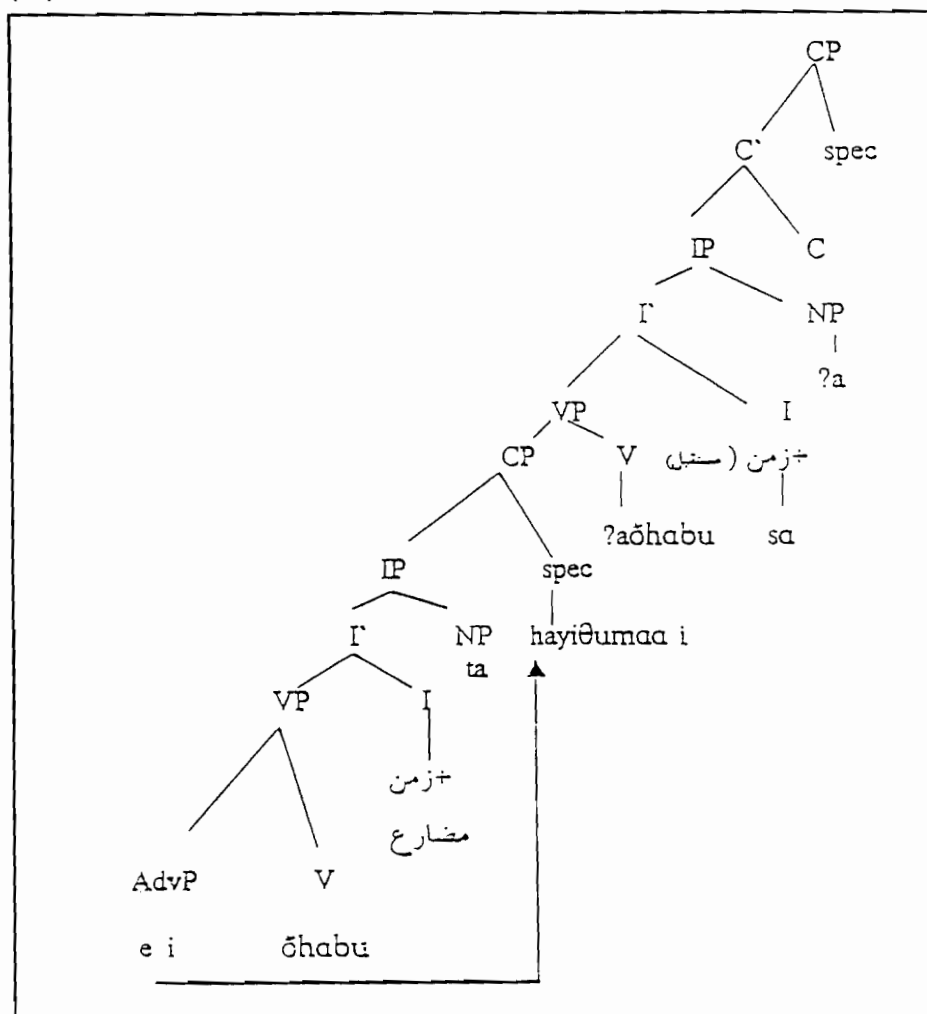
سأذهب حيثما تذهب

Arabic and English are identical in this respect also. Deletion of (hayiθumaa) will render the sentence ungrammatical:

- (40) سأذهب تذهب
go you will I go
* I'll go you go

The structure of (39) is the following:

(41)



The last sentence I would like to discuss is the relative clause that expresses possession, i.e as in:

- (42) (a) I saw the girl whose father is dead.
 tu-nom shaahad-past ?al-fataata-acc ?allatii ha-obliq ?abuu
 mayyitun-nom شاهدت الفتاة التي مات أبوها (أبوها ميت)
- (b) I saw the girl whose
 tu-nom shaahd-past ?al-faatata-acc ?allatii ha-obliq
 house is on sale
 manzilu nom llbyyi?i-oblig

شاهدت الفتاة التي عرض مترلها للبيع (مترلها للبيع)

We notice that the translation of *whose* in Arabic takes the form of the proper relative pronoun at the start of the relative clause and a resumptive possessive pronoun that appears on the inflectional ending of the NP that immediately precedes the relative pronoun.

3. conclusions

It seems that Arabic and English relative clauses share many identical semantic and syntactic properties. In both languages, we have a movement of a constituent from the embedded clause into the higher clause; the use of a *relative pronoun*, a *zero relative* or *that* complementizer in English and only a *relative pronoun* in Arabic. These similar properties between the two languages should be known to the translator who translates between the two languages as well as the teacher of Arabic as a foreign language.

This paper has clarified some points of difference between the two languages which need be stressed for the translator trainee as well as the syntactician who is interested in a contrastive analysis which can be summarized in the following:

- (43) (i) Whereas English has three distinct relative forms (i.e. *relative pronoun*, *that* complementizer or *zero relative*), Arabic has only one, in the sense it uses the proper form of the relative pronoun (i.e. Arabic does not have a form equivalent to *that* complementizer or *zero relative*)
- (ii) Whereas English drops the relative pronoun or *that* complementizer optionally, Arabic does not allow that.
- (iii) Whereas both languages allow the extraposition of restrictive relative clauses, Arabic drops the relative pronoun obligatorily in these structures.
- (iv) Arabic adas, in its translation of some kinds of Appositive relative clauses, an NP that functions as an antecedent of the whole clause followed by the proper relative pronoun (i.e.34).
- (v) Whose is translated into Arabic as a relative pronoun + a possessive pronoun that appears on the inflectional ending of the NP that immediately precedes the relative pronoun.

We believe that these points should be taken into account in any syntactic contrastive analysis between the two languages - both when translating from one into the other and when teaching Arabic as a foreign language.

NOTES

1. N. Chomsky *Lectures on Government and Binding* (Foris Publication, 1981): 94.
2. M. Homeidi, *Government and Binding and Word order in Modern Standard Arabic Abhath Al-Yarmouk*, 9.1.199: 26.
3. A. Radford, *Transformational Grammar* (Cambridge University Press, 1998) 480.