

# **Subject positions in Arabic once more: evidence from subject doubling**

Mohamed Jlassi: Newcastle University

[mohamed.jlassi@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:mohamed.jlassi@ncl.ac.uk)

Handout

- **Two types of subject doubling in Tunisian Arabic (TA)**
- Type 1: Contrastive Topic subject doubling
- Type 2: Non-topic subject (thetic) doubling

- **Type1: Contrastive Topic subject doubling**
- **Lexical-pronominal doubling**
- 1a.le-wled HUWWA msh-a:      l- el-masrah, mush  
     the-boy he      go-PER-3SM    to-the-theatre, not  
     e-ṭufla  
     the-girl  
     “THE BOY went to the theatre, and not the girl.”
- **Pronominal doubling**
- b.’inti HUWWA el-mas’u:l,      mush huma  
     you    he      the-responsible not    them  
     “YOU are the responsible, and not them.”

## Difference from Cleft constructions

2a. **Le-wled huwwa illi:** msh-a: l-el masraḥ, mush  
the-boy he that go-PER-3SM to-the-theatre not  
e-ṭufla  
the-girl

“The boy is the one who went to the theatre, but  
not the girl.”

b. **\*’inti huwwa illi:** el- mas’u:l, mush huma  
you he that the-responsible, not them

“Intended: It is YOU who is the responsible, but not them.”

- **Differences from cleft constructions**
- 1: the cleft is a bi-clausal construction. *huwwa* in the cleft is not a doubling pronoun, but a copula; compare (1b,2b).
- 1: *le-wled* = contrastive topic
- 2: *LE-WLED* = exhaustive focus
- 1: *HUWWA* = subject doubling pronoun
- 2: *huwwa* = copula

- **Type 2: Non-topic subject (thetic) doubling**

- **Lexical-Pronominal doubling**

- huwwa le-wled msh-a: l- el-masrah  
he the-boy go-PER-3SM to the-theatre

“The boy went to the theatre.”

- **Pronominal doubling:**

- huwwa □inti ji: -t  
he-3SM you come-PER-2 SM/F

“You came.”

*huwwa* = expletive pronoun

*le-wled/□inti* = informational focus

- **Syntax of subject doubling:**
- The higher subject is in [Spec, TopP].
- The lower subject is in [Spec, FinP].
- Top has EPP feature.
- Fin has a contrast feature.
- TA clause structure: motivating the Multiple Subject Construction (MSC): [Spec, TopP] and [Spec, FinP] in TA.

- **Diagnostics**

- 1. Placement of CP adverb *birrasmi*: ‘truly’ and TP adverb *za:da* ‘also’.
- 2. Movement of *ke:n* ‘was’ auxiliary to Fin.
- [CP[TopP **birrasmi**:[TopP mahbu:l[FinP ke:n+Fin [TP Ali[TP **za:da** [VP *ṣaddaq-hum*]]]]]]]
- “Truly a crazy person if Ali believed them.”
- 3. Movement of contrastive Focus Ali to value contrast feature in [Spec, FinP]
- [CP[TopP **birrasmi**:[TopP mahbu:l [FinPalike:n+Fin [TP[TP **za:da** [VP *ṣaddaq-hum*]]]]]]]
- “Truly a crazy person ALI if he believed them.”



- **Syntax of subject doubling:**
- **\*[CP **za:da** [CP [TopP le-wled/ □inti [FinP HUWWA [TP **birrasmi:**[TP [VP msh-a: l-el-masraḥ]]]]]]]**
- **[CP **birrasmi:**[CP[TopP huwwa [FinP le-wled /□inti [TP [VP msh-a: l-el-masraḥ]]]]]]]**

- **Findings and conclusions**
- Subject doubling is not a cleft structure
- MSC : [Spec, TopP] & [Spec,FinP]
- EPP in [Spec,TopP]
- Focus features in [Spec,FinP]
- FinP=Focus domain in Arabic

- **Selected references**
- **Holmberg, A & U. Nikanne (2008).** Subject doubling in Finnish: the role of deficient Pronouns. In *Microvariation in syntactic doubling* (Syntax and Semantics 36) Barbiers et al. (eds.). Bingley: Emerald.