

IN FAVOR OF CONTRASTIVE TOPIC PHRASE IN NORTH HAIL ARABIC LEFT PERIPHERY: EVIDENCE FROM THE DISCOURSE PARTICLE TARA

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Abstract

This research investigates one discourse-related particle, namely *tara* in North Hail Arabic. It argues that *tara* is a C-related particle heading the Contrastive Topic Phrase in the sense of Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl (2007). *tara* enters the derivation endowed with an interpretable/unvalued [TOP] feature in the sense of Pesetsky and Torrego (2007) in addition to a set of uninterpretable/unvalued ϕ -features. These features are valued by the element that expresses the contrastive topic of the clause, which, as a result of maintaining an Agree relation with *tara*, it bears a contrastive stress. Evidence for this assumption comes from the fact that where the entity expressing contrastive topic is a DP, a clitic with the ϕ -features of this DP is spelled out on *tara*. The significant point the study advocates is that such valuation occurs while the entity expressing contrastive topic is in situ, through a probe-goal configuration (Chomsky 2000, 2001, 2008). As such, the relevant entity is not triggered to move to the Spec position of Contrastive Topic Phrase.

1 Introduction

The issue of C-particles in general and their role in determining the inner structure has recently been one of the main concerns of the current syntactic investigation (Rizzi 1997, Cinque 1999, 2002, 2006, Belletti 2004, and Cinque and Rizzi 2008; Biberauer and Sheehan 2011; Struckmeier 2014; Hack 2014; Biberauer *et al.* 2014). Hence, research in this specific domain, which has largely been enriched from works on natural languages, has made available in-depth insights into the structure of the left periphery and the interaction between C-domain and T/V-domains. The present paper is seen as a continuation of this debate on the syntax of discourse domain by exploring one C-particle used in North Hail Arabic (henceforth, NHA) within the recent assumptions of the minimalist framework (Chomsky 2000, 2001, 2008).² To this end, I first introduce the relevant theoretical assumptions, namely Rizzi's (1997) fine structure of the left periphery and the topics typology of Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl (2007). Next, I introduce some basic facts on *tara*'s syntactic behavior. Then, I analyze these facts within Chomsky's (2000, 2001, 2008) probe-goal mechanism of Agree. The major assumption is that *tara* is a particle heading the Contrastive Topic Phrase and agrees with the element expressing a contrastive topic while both are in situ.

2 Theoretical background

In this section, I introduce the basic theoretical assumptions my analysis for *tara* is based on. These are Rizzi's (1997) fine structure of the left periphery and Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl's (2007) topics typology.

2.1 Rizzi's (1997) fine structure of the left periphery

Since the seminal work of Rizzi (1997) on the fine structure of the left periphery, many works have addressed the inner structure of CP-domain in natural languages. One main advancement

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² NHA is spoken in Saudi Arabia. See Alshamari and Jarrah (2016) and Alshamari (2015a,b,c) for works on this dialect.

of such studies is the appreciation of discourse role in sentence derivation. For Rizzi (1997), what was already known as a CP is a fertile domain with several inner layers; each of them is dedicated for a specific function. These projections include the following: Force Phrase, which is the highest projection, Topic Phrase, Focus Phrase, and Finiteness Phrase which is, in turn, the lowest projection in this hierarchy. See Figure 1.³

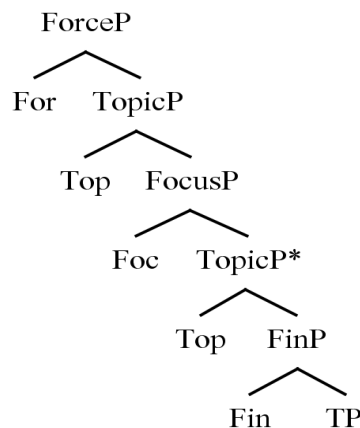


Figure 1: CP's articulated inner structure

The main difference raised by Rizzi (1997) between the higher TopicP and the lower one is that the former is not recursive, while the latter is recursive, giving multiple realizations of Topics. On the other hand, although predicting that the new articulated CP includes several Topic Phrases, Rizzi (1997) failed to consider the fact that topics encode different interpretive properties, the matter I discuss in the next subsection.

2.2 Topics typology: Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl (2007)

Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl (2007) argue convincingly that there are at least three types of topics which must be distinguished, namely Aboutness Topic, Contrastive Topic and Familiar Topic. They propose that each type of Topic Phrase is associated with a distinct interpretive meaning. Evidence for these three topics is adduced from both syntax and specific intonational contours. The current study argues that these topics, with emphasis on the contrastive topic, can also be detected through a set of discourse particles, merged in the left periphery. Let us first introduce definition for these three topics. Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl (2007) define the three topics as follows:

- i. *Shifting Topic* (or Aboutness-shift Topic, in the sense of Frascarelli 2008) (henceforth, S-topic): The constituent referring to an entity which a sentence is about, and which is newly introduced into the ongoing conversation (i.e., a new topic distinct from the preceding topic which the ongoing conversation was about). Similarly, in situations where the ongoing discussion is about one topic, but, for some reason, the conversation digresses from this topic to a different one, the speaker may return to the original topic by means of an S-Topic. To appreciate this point, consider the following dialogue:

- (1) A: ʔafdʕal waqt li-l-qiraʔah ʔi-sʕubuħ
 best time for-Def-reading Def-morning
 The best time for reading is morning.³

³ * is recursive.

B: bus mumkin ma juku:n ʔal-waqt ʔal-ʔafdʕal ʔiða kint sahran
 but migh Neg be.it Def-time Def-best if be.PST stayed.up
 xusʕu:sʕan ʔiða kint laʕib mubarat qadam raḥ tku:n
 especially if be.PST played game football FUT be.FUT
 taʕban min bukra
 tired from tomorrow

‘But it might not be the best time if you stayed up the night, especially if you had already played a football game. You will be tired the following day.’

C: laʔabt mubarat qabul ʔams w li-l-ḥi:n taʕban ʔal-muʕkilah
 Played.I game before yesterday and till-Def-now tired.I Def-problem
 in-i kil ʕisbu:ʕ ʔalʕab ʕalaθ mubarayāt
 that-I every week play.I three games

‘I played a game the day before yesterday, and I am still tired. The problem is that I play three games a week.’

A: binisbah li-ʔafdʕal waqt ʔil-qiraʔah ʔadʕin kil waḥid l-uh
 As for- best time for-Def-reading think.I everyone to-him
 barnamadʒ-uh ʔal-muafadʕal
 schedule-his Def-favorite

‘As for the best time for reading, I think everyone has his own favorite time.’

As clear in (1), the conversation was about the best time for reading, being the morning time. As the conversation proceeded, the speakers diverted away from the main topic of the conversation. As seen in Speaker A’s last utterance, the speaker shifted the conversation to the main topic again, by means of the particle *binisbali*, the point at which the Arabic DP ‘the time of reading’ expresses an S-Topic.

- ii. *Contrastive Topic* (henceforth, C-topic): The entity which signals other topics with which this topic creates oppositional pairs; this topic needs to be opposed to some other topics. This type of topic is phonologically distinct with contrastive stress.⁴ Consider the following dialogue:

(2) A: ʃlaon maharat Firas bi-l-malʕab
 How skills Firas in-Def-field

‘How skillful is Firas on the (football) field.’

B: MUNAWALAT-UH mumtazah
 Passes-his great

‘HIS PASSES are great.’

(3) A: ʃ-rayak ib-di:n Salim
 Q-opinion-you in-religious commitments Salim

‘How do you see Salim’s commitments to religious principles?’

B: SʕALAT-UH zi:nah
 Prayer-his good

‘HIS PRAYER is good.’

⁴ Krifka (2007) argues that C-Topics are conceptually licensed through the fact that some utterances do not deliver all the information that is expected by the speaker but rather deliver a limited or incomplete information that diverges from the expectations of the speaker.

Speaker A in both dialogues asks about a particular entity related to some person. Upon this, Speaker B creates a conversational common ground from which he selects one entity, something that he considers the most relevant aspect of Speaker A's inquiry. In (2B), for instance, *passing* is selected out of a closed set of skills, all of which are familiar to both speakers. Speaker B, then, could have selected *dribbling*, *heading* or even *running*, and Speaker A would accept each because they are all members of a closed set of alternatives that are implicitly understood, i.e., football skills.

iii. *Familiar Topic* (henceforth, F-topic): The entity which is textually given and d(iscourse)-linked with the S-topic established in the conversation. Of note here is that F-topics are typically realized as pronouns, given that they are so accessible through the dialogue (cf. Givon 1983, Chafe 1987, and Pesetsky 1987). Unlike S-topics and C-topics, F-Topics are recursive with a possibility thus to have many realizations of F-topic per clause. Consider the following dialogues:

(4) A: Firas jihib Barcelona w muʕdzab ib-Messi w Nymar
 Firas love.he Barcelona and like.he in-Messi and Nymar
 'Firas loves Barcelona and he likes Messi and Nymar the most.'

B: jae dzami:l mumkin jiktisib min maharathum xusʕu:sʕan
 Thing good might aquire.he from skills.thier especially
 w in-uh sʕi:ri:r ʕ
 and that-he young
 'Such a good thing. He might acquire some of their skills, as he is so young.'

C: jtabiʕ-hum kil yaum ib-adzizt-uh hata w hu bi-l- gatʕar
 Watch.3SG.M-them every day in-gadgets even and he on-metro
 'He watches them every day with his gadgets; even while on metro.'

The conversation is about two entities, Firas and the two players: Messi and Neymar, both expressing the F-Topics of the sentence. As we can see, both entities are mentioned in the tail of the conversation and are accessible via an (non-contrastive) pronoun, for neither was selected out of a set of members (a C-Topic), nor was returned to due to conversation divergence (S-Topic).

Examining Italian and German left periphery, Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl (2007) point out that these different types of topics are hierarchically ordered in a fixed fashion, as seen in Figure 3 (adapted from Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl 2007: 89):

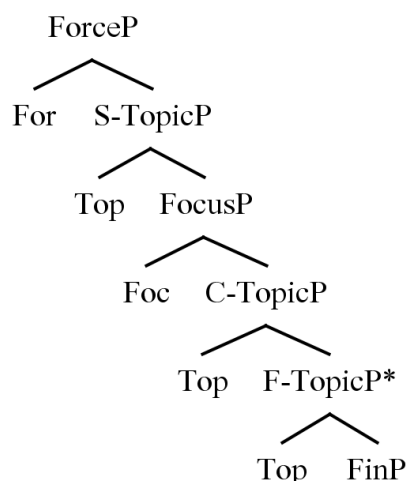


Figure 2: Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl's (2007) topics typology

Further investigation on topic typology reveals certain restrictions on their occurrence in some contexts. For instance, it has been argued that an S-topic can only be allowed in root clauses, while C-topic and F-topic can occur in root and embedded clauses (Bianchi and Frascarelli 2010).

Having introduced the main theoretical assumptions the current research is based on, let us now introduce the basic descriptive facts on the C-particle *tara* in NHA.

3 Descriptive facts about the C-related particle *tara*.

Recent proposals view discourse particles as functional heads that are merged in fixed positions and have the effect that they change the interpretation of the proposition expressed by the clause (Biberauer et al 2014; Coniglio 2008; Zimmermann 2004). As for *tara*, I argue that this particle is merged in the C-domain of the associated clause, colouring it with a topic-comment interpretation. For this assumption, let's look into conceptual and empirical evidence.

In the first place, *tara* occurs clause-initially, taking wide scope over the whole clause,⁵ as in (5) below.

(5)	tara	Ali	ʃAF	as-sayarah
	Prt	Ali	see.PST.3SG.M	Def-car
	'Ali SAW the car.'			

In (5), *tara* appears clause-initially and takes wide scope over the whole clause, having some discourse interpretive effects over the proposition expressed by the clause. The contribution of *tara* to the clause it is merged with is determined by the interpretation of the element that *tara* marks. In this respect in (5), what *tara* (marks/ singles out/ stresses/ selects) is the verb *ʃaf* 'saw', which, as can be clearly seen, is the entity that bears the contrastive stress. With *tara* as part of the numeration of (5), (5) is predicated about the action expressed. In syntax, this is achieved by *tara*'s discharging its contrastive stress to the verb. Hence, the verb is the C-Topic of the sentence. The interpretation of (5), then, can be conceived of as *Ali saw the car (he didn't imagine it)*, where both the acts of *seeing* and *imagining* are entities that are available in the

⁵ The unmarked clause following *tara* can also be VSO. In both cases, the interpretation of the clause depends on what element of the clause bears the contrastive stress *tara* assigns. In (5) it is the verb, where the topicalized element of the clause is the action expressed by the verb.

conversational common ground (Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010; Büring 2003) of the given discourse, and are accessible to the conversation interlocutors, but the former is selected over the latter.

Moreover, in cases where the element that expresses C-Topic is a DP, it bears a contrastive stress, and a clitic with the ϕ -features of this element is spelled out on *tara*.⁶ Consider the following sentences:

- (6) a. **tara-ah** ?AL-BINT ʃaf-at ?al-walad
 Prt-3SG.F Def-girl see.PST.3SG-F Def-boy
 ‘THE GIRL saw the boy.’
- b. **tara-ah** ʃaf-at ?AL-BINT ?al-walad
 Prt-3SG.F see.PST.3SG-F Def-girl Def-boy
 ‘THE GIRL saw the boy.’
- c. **tara-h** ?AL-WALAD ʃaf ?al-bint
 Prt-3SG.M Def-boy see.PST.3SG.M Def-girl
 ‘THE BOY saw the girl.’
- d. **tara-h** ʃaf ?AL-WALAD ?al-bint
 Prt-3SG.M see.PST.3SG.M Def-boy Def-girl
 ‘THE BOY saw the girl.’

In (6), a clitic agreeing with the subject is spelled out on *tara*, regardless of the position of the subject in relation to the verb (compare (6a,c) with (6b,d)). A possible context in which (6a,b), for instance, occur is where the speaker emphasises that the girl not, say, her father, mother, or sister, who are all available in the conversational common ground of the given discourse, saw the boy. Hence, creating a set of alternatives (Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl 2007). In addition to the contrastive stress that must accompany the element that *tara* marks, this element agrees with the clitic appearing on *tara*. For instance, the subject in (6a,b), *?al-bint* ‘the girl’ agrees with the clitic *ah*, which is specified as [3SG.F], for which an initial observation is that the clitic *h* spelled out on *tara* in (6c,d), is specified as [3SG.M] and agrees with the subject *?alwalad* ‘the boy’. Under these characteristics of *tara* with respect to the associated clause and clause arguments, I propose that the clitic appearing on *tara* is a spell out of the unvalued ϕ -features of *tara*, as a result of an Agree relation being established between *tara* and the (DP) element expressing a C-Topic. What supports this thesis can be captured by (7) below, where the clitic spelled out on *tara* agrees with the direct object (in such cases, the direct object must be positioned to the left of the subject):

- (7) a. **tara-h** ʃaf-at-uh ?AL-WALAD ?al-bint
 Prt-3SG.M see.PST.3SG-F-3SG.M Def-boy Def-girl
 ‘THE BOY, the girl saw him.’
- b. **tara-ah** ʃaf-ah ?AL-BINT ?al-walad
 Prt-3SG.F see.PST.3SG.M-3SG.F Def-girl Def-boy
 ‘THE GIRL, the boy saw her.’

⁶ It must be pointed out that in all cases where *tara* is merged, in addition to the fact that *tara* is endowed with contrastive stress and has to discharge it to one and only one element, be it a DP, V, PP, Adv, in case this entity is a DP, *tara* is suffixed by a clitic that agrees with this DP.

In (7a), the direct object *ʔalwalad* ‘the boy’ is the C-Topic; it is the element that is being selected out of a set of alternative entities all of which are available in the given discourse, on the grounds that the speaker asserts that who the girl saw was the boy, rather than the lady, the man, the child, each of which is an entity established in the relevant discourse and is a part of the common ground of the sentence constituting a closed set. The same analysis extends to (7b), where the direct object is *ʔalbint* ‘the girl’.

The last syntactic property of *tara* here is that, in addition to (5) above where *tara* appears without any clitic spelled out on it, in which the C-Topic is the verb of the clause, *tara* marks adjuncts (as in (8) below), with the interpretation that what is being C-Topicalized is the temporal adverb *taw* ‘just now’, whose referent is being selected over any otherwise proposed time referents at which Ali performed the act of seeing the car.

- (8) *tara* TAW ʃaf Ali as-sayarah
 Prt just now see.PST.3SG.M Ali Def-car
 ‘Ali JUST saw the car (not long before).’

The discussion thus far gives rise to the status of *tara*. With its morpho-syntactic properties on the one hand and its semantic and discourse contribution to the interpretation of the associated clause on the other hand, I argue that this C-particle is a head. Two pieces of evidence support this contention. Firstly, as we have seen, *tara* hosts clitics, a property well-known of heads (Chomsky 1995; Aoun et al. 2010). Another piece of evidence for this contention comes from the fact that the verb is barred from appearing to the left of *tara*. Consider the following ungrammatical sentence, followed by its schematic representation:

- (9) a. *ʃaf **tara** Ali as-sayarah
 see.PST.3SG.M Prt Ali Def-car
 Intended meaning: ‘SEEING THE CAR, Ali did.’



The ungrammaticality of (9) is straightforwardly accounted for if *tara* is taken as a head, causing an intervention effect against verb movement to a position to the left of *tara*. The verb (or actually T° in this case) being blocked from moving to the left of *tara* is captured by the assumption that *tara* blocks T movement to any position to the left of it by virtue of the Relativized Minimality Principle (cf. Rizzi 1990; see also Rizzi 2004, Friedmann et al 2009 and Boeckx 2009). T being a head cannot move across *tara* where this blockage is attributed to the fact that the C-Topic head position is filled by *tara*, and, if T needs to move across it, T has to first land in C-Top head position.

The interim conclusion is that *tara* is a C-Topic particle, heading the C-TopicP. All the discussion below is dedicated to defend this hypothesis. One relevant point here is the account of the clitic spelled out on *tara* when the entity expressing C-Topic is either the subject DP or the direct object DP. I argue that this clitic is a reflex of an Agree relation being established between *tara* and the element expressing C-Topic. Let us here make recourse to the recent approach to Agree, the Probe-Goal approach of Chomsky (2000, 2001 and 2008), where agreement is held when a probe, carrying some semantically uninterpretable and lexically unvalued formal features, searches in its visible c-command domain for a matching active goal carrying a semantically matching interpretable and lexically valued feature. Chomsky (2001:122) set forth specific conditions on the Agree relation between the searching probe and the matching goal. These conditions are mentioned below:

- (10) The probe α agrees with the goal β provided that:
- a- α has uninterpretable ϕ -features.
 - b- β has matchiinterpretable ϕ features.
 - c- β is active by virtue of having an unvalued Case feature.
 - d- α c-commands β .
 - e- There is no potential goal γ intervening between α and β .

Let us now show clearly how this valuation occurs.

4 Analysis

In this section, I argue that *tara* is a C-Topic particle, heading C-TopicP, positioned above F-TopicP and below S-TopicP, following Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl (2007). I propose that the element which *tara* agrees with functions as the C-Topic, expressing the entity selected from an exhaustive set of entities which are all familiar and available in the common ground. In order to determine the existence and the position of the C-Topic Phrase in the left periphery of NHA, it is imperative to highlight the main properties of *tara* (morphological, phonological and syntactic), taking them as evidence of *tara* being a C-Topic particle, heading C-TopicP. First and foremost, we need to provide evidence that *tara* is not a focus particle, despite the fact that the element with which the clitic appearing on *tara* agrees has contrastive stress.

4.1 *tara* is not a Focus particle

An initial observation in support of the assumption that *tara* is not a focus particle is that, in the first place, it cannot bear a clitic agreeing with an indefinite entity.⁷ *tara* only bears a clitic agreeing with an entity that is specific, discourse-given and familiar to all the conversation interlocutors, as seen above. Consider the following sentence:

- (11) ***tara** walad ʃaf as-sayarah
 Prt boy see.PST.3SG.M Def-car
 Intended meaning: ‘A BOY saw the car.’

Another piece of evidence in favour of the claim that *tara* is not a Focus particle comes from cliticization. In clauses containing focalized elements, *tara* does not bear a clitic with the same ϕ -features of the focalized element. Hence, *tara* does not agree with it (12b). Rather, it is cliticized with that of a non-focalized element (12a):

- (12) a. wɪʃ^t **tara-h** Ali ʃaf as-sayarah^t
 what prt-3SG.M Ali see.PST.3SG.M Def-car
 ‘What did ALI see?’
- b. *wɪʃ^t **tara-ah** Ali ʃaf as-sayarah^t
 what prt-3SG.F Ali see.PST.3SG.M Def-car
 Intended meaning: ‘WHAT did Ali see?’

Sentence (12a) is grammatical because the clitic on *tara* agrees with the subject DP *Ali* (which is not being focalized), where this agreement is captured by the realization of the clitic *h* being spelled out on *tara*, specified as [3SG.M] and agrees with *Ali*. In (12b), then, it follows that the

⁷ See Elghamry (2004), Danon (2008), Fassi Fehri (2012), and Jarrah & Zibin (2016) on definiteness in Arabic.

ungrammaticality is attributed to the fact that the clitic on *tara* agrees with the focalized object, *assayarah* ‘the car’ where the clitic is *ah*, being specified as [3SG.F]. The same logic holds true of cleft-constructions, as in (13) below, where *tara* agrees with the DP *Ali*, resulting in the ungrammaticality of the sentence:

- (13) *Aliⁱ illi **tara-hⁱ** ʃaf as-sayarah
 Ali COMP prt-3SG.M see.PST.3SG.M Def-car
 ‘It’s ALI who saw the car.’

All these facts militate against the assumption that *tara* is a focus particle. This leaves us with the other concept of discourse partitioning, Topic.

4.2 *tara* is a Topic particle

Having argued that *tara* cannot be counted as a focus particle and seems to behave as a topic particle, let’s see the category of topic under which *tara* falls.

4.2.1 *tara* is not an S-Topic particle

Being a Topic particle, and occurring clause-initially after all, one might suggest that *tara* serves as an S-Topic particle. However, when using *tara*, the speaker selects an entity out of a set of entities, all of which are familiar to the speakers. In this way, the element marked by *tara* exhibits a membership set, and it is singled out of a group of entities to which it is opposed (Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl 2007; Frascarelli 2008; Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010; Büring 2003). Consider the following dialogue:

- (14)
- | | | | | | |
|------------|--|---------------|---------------|----------|-----|
| Speaker A: | ʔaxu:-i | qal | ʔinn-uh | wahid | min |
| | brother-my | say.PST.3SG.M | that-3SG | one | of |
| | ʔahal-i | ʃaf | | l-bint | |
| | Family-my | see.PST.3SG.M | | DEF-girl | |
| | ’My brother said that one of my family members had seen the girl.’ | | | | |
| Speaker B: | tara-h | OMAR | ʃaf | l-bint. | |
| | Prt-3SGM | OMAR | see.PST.3SG.M | Def-girl | |
| | ‘OMAR saw the girl.’ | | | | |

Speaker A creates a set of members belonging to one closed group, his family. Having created this closed set of entities, all of which are familiar to Speaker A and Speaker B, the latter selects one member (from the closed set, i.e., his family members) who has seen the woman, and the entity expressing the selected member, *Omar*, is marked by *tara* (i.e., having a clitic spelled out on *tara*). Moreover, a common characteristic that S-Topic and C-Topic share is that they do not allow multiple realizations; they are non-recursive (Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl 2007 and Bianchi & Frascarelli 2010). Reasoning along these lines, *tara* can be preceded by a constituent, which might suggest that this element is an S-Topic, hence, *tara* is not an S-Topic particle. Evidence corroborating this hypothesis comes from clauses containing S-Topic particles (like *binisbali* ‘as for’) that co-occurs with *tara*. In such clauses, the element preceding *tara* is introduced by the S-Topic particle, rather than by *tara*. Consider the following sentences:

- (15) a. binisba-li- Ali, tara-ah ʔAL-MUSABAGAH ʔintahat.
 Prt- Ali Prt-3SG.F DEF-COMPETITION.3SG.F ended.it
 ‘As for Ali, the COMPETITION has ended.’

- b. *binisba-li- Ali, **tara-h** ʔAL-MUSABAGAH ʔintahat.
 Prt- Ali Prt-3SG.M DEF-COMPETITION.3SG.F ended.it
 Intended meaning: ‘As for Ali, THE COMPETITION has ended.’
- c. *binisba-li- ALI, **tara-h** ʔal-musabagah ʔintahat.
 Prt- ALI Prt-3SG.M DEF-competition.3SG.F ended.it
 Intended meaning: ‘As for ALI, the competition has ended.’

It is evident from (15a,b) that *tara* agrees with the DP following it; *tara* marks the DP *ʔal musabagah* ‘the competition’ carrying a clitic with the same ϕ -features as the DP *ʔal musabagah*. Moreover, the contrastive stress *tara* is endowed with, which *tara* needs to discharge to one and only one element, is assigned to the the DP *ʔal musabagah* rather than *Ali*, which here expresses an S-Topic, hence, the ungrammaticality of (15c). Further evidence in favour of the assumption that *tara* is not an S-Topic particle comes from the fact that, unlike C-Topics, S-Topics are root phenomena in the sense that S-Topics cannot occur in embedded contexts (Bianchi and Frascarelli 2010). In this regard, *binisba-li* doesn’t occur in embedded clauses (16a), while *tara* can do (16b), a fact militating against the assumption that *tara* is an S-Topic, as illustrated in the following sentence:

- (16) a. *Firas sʔarah ʔin
 Friras declaired.he COMP
binisba-li- Ali, ʔal- musabagah ʔintahat.
 Prt- Ali Def- competition ended.it
 Intended meaning: ‘Firas declared that, as for Ali, the competition is over
- b. Friras sʔarah ʔin
 Friras declaired.he Comp
tara-ah ʔAL- MUSABAGAH ʔintahat.
 Prt-3SG.F DEF-COMPETITION ended.it
 ‘Firas declared that THE COMPETITION has ended.’

Armed with these facts, I claim that *tara* is not an S-Topic. let’s now see if *tara* displays any properties related to F-Topic, as will be dealt with in the next subsection.

4.2.2 *tara* is not an F-Topic particle

The entity marked by *tara*, as shown above, must bear a contrastive stress, where this entity is interpreted as being selected out of a set of discourse-given entities with which all the conversation interlocutors are familiar. Arguing that *tara* is an F-Topic, we must scrutinize the main properties that distinguish F-Topic from S-Topic and C-Topic. As a first approximation, though contextually given and available in the common ground of discourse (Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl 2007), an F-Topic is inherently non-contrastive, for it is not being selected and contrasted to a set of entities within the conversational common ground.

Related to this fact is that F-Topics are typically realized as non-contrastive pronouns, given the ability to access them throughout the dialogue (cf. Givon 1983, Chafe 1987, and Pesetsky 1987). Consider the following dialogue:

- (17)
 A1: binisba-li- Friras ʔal-mubarat intahat w Barcelona fazau
 As for- Friras Def-match ended and Barcelona won
 bi-l-but²u:lah ʔal-aham

in-the-championship the most important
 ‘As for Firas, the game is over. Barcelona have won the most important
 championship.’

B: bus ma fazau bi-ʔal-dauliyah
 But Neg won in-Def-international
 ‘But they didn’t win the international championship.’

A2: (***tara-h**) hu miktifi bi-l-maḥaliyah
 Prt-him he satisfied.he in-local
 ‘He is happy with the local championship.’

A3: (***tara-hum**) hum miktifin bi-l-maḥaliyah
 Prt-them they satisfied.they in-local
 ‘They are happy with the local championship.’

A4: ***tara-h** HU miktifi bi-l-maḥaliyah
 Prt HE satisfied with-Def-local
 ‘HE is satisfied with the local championship.’

A5: ***tara-hum** HUM miktifin bi-l-maḥaliyah
 Prt THEY satisfied with-Def-local
 ‘THEY are happy with the local championship.’

In (17 A1), the DP *Firas* serves as an S-Topic, being marked by *binisbali* while the familiar topic is the DP *Barcelona*. As the conversation proceeds, *Firas* falls into the domain of F-Topic, being pre-established by the S-Topic. It is now available and familiar, as can be captured by its referent being expressed via the pronoun *hu* in (15 A2). This also extends to the other F-Topic, the DP *Barcelona*, now being also accessible and expressed via the pronoun *hum* (15 A3). Given this reasoning, their incompatibility with *tara* (15 A2, A3) and their non-contractiveness property (15 A4, A 5) appears plausible. Under this analysis, it can be postulated that the DP marked by *tara* is not an F-Topic, and that *tara*, as a result, is not an F-Topic particle.

4.2.3 Tara is a C-Topic particle

Having argued that *tara* cannot be categorised as S-Topic or F-Topic, and that *tara* displays the properties of a C-Topic particle, let’s explore evidence in favour of this argument. For this, I analyse the derivation underlying the role *tara* has in the sentence interpretation and the C-Topicalization reading of the element *tara* marks. In this regard, consider the following sentences:

(18) a. **tara-h** ALI ʃaf as-sayarah
 Prt-3SG.M ALI see.PST.3SG.M Def-car
 ‘ALI saw the car.’

 b. **tara-hin** ʔAL-BANAT ʃaf-an as-sayarah
 Prt-3PL.F DEF-GIRLS see.PST.3PL.F Def-car
 ‘THE GIRLS saw the car.’

As discussed above, *tara* marks one element in the clause. This element can be identified by the contrastive stress *tara* assigns it, and, in cases this entity is a DP, a clitic with

the same ϕ -features is spelled out on *tara*. For instance, in ((18a) and (18b)), the clitic on *tara* carries the same ϕ -features of the subject *Ali* being specified as [3SG.M] and *ʔalbanat* ‘the girls’ specified as [3PL.F], respectively. Put another way, *tara* agrees with the element it marks. It follows, then, that when *tara* marks an element, it agrees with it in order to identify it as the C-Topic of the sentence, while the latter is in situ. This now raises the question as to how this clitic is spelled out on *tara*.

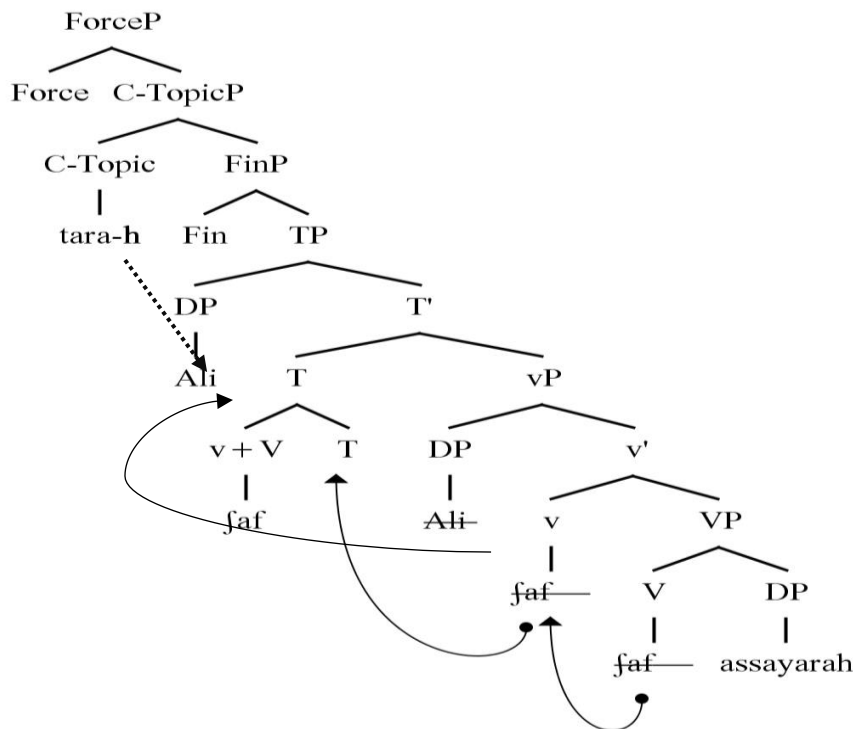
Under the syntactic assumptions so far outlined and following Biberauer et al. (2014) in that discourse particles affect the interpretation of the clause in which they merge, I argue that *tara* has uninterpretable unvalued ϕ -features and an interpretable but unvalued [TOP] feature in the sense of Pesetsky and Torrego (2007).⁸ Having an unvalued [TOP] feature, *tara* operates as a probe for the assumption that unvalued, interpretable features must be valued before LF, due to the principle of full interpretation. Thus, in (18a), for instance, once merged, *tara* begins searching for a goal with a matching valued [TOP] feature within its visible c-command domain. The DP *Ali* has an uninterpretable but valued [TOP] feature as well as interpretable/valued ϕ -features, making it an active goal located within the visible c-command domain of *tara*. As a result, a probe-goal relationship is established between *tara* and *Ali*. Following this, the unvalued [TOP] feature of *tara* is valued by the matching valued counterpart on the DP *Ali*. At the same time, the uninterpretable valued [TOP] feature on the DP *Ali* is deleted while being in situ (in Spec-TP).⁹ Hence, the topicalized element is not triggered to move. Similarly, the interpretable/valued ϕ -features of the DP *Ali* value the uninterpretable/unvalued ϕ -features of *tara*, resulting in the spell out of the ϕ -features of *tara*, i.e. the realization of the clitic on *tara*. The same analysis extends to sentence (18b) where a probe-goal configuration is established between *tara* and the subject *ʔalbanat* ‘the girls’, resulting in spelling out the ϕ -features of *tara*, the clitic *ah*, which is specified as [3PLF].

The derivation (18a) is schematically represented in (19) below (the dotted arrow indicates *tara*’s probing the subject).

⁸ For Pesetsky and Torrego (2007), (un)interpretability and (un)valuedness must be conceived of as independent notions.

⁹ This also occurs while the subject is in its thematic post-verbal position, Spec-vP as in (6b,d).

(19)



The question we should ask now is what about the cases where *tara* appears bare (without a clitic appearing on it), as in (8) above (repeated below in (20))?

(20) a. **tara** \int AF Ali as-sayarah
 Prt see.PST.3SG.M Ali Def-car
 ‘Ali SAW the car (he didn’t just imagine it).’

b. **tara** TAW \int af Ali as-sayarah
 Prt just now see.PST.3SG.M Ali Def-car
 ‘Ali JUST saw the car (not long before).’

As we have seen, when *tara* agrees with a DP, the latter values the ϕ -features of the former resulting in the occurrence of the clitic being spelled out on *tara*. However, in (20), no clitic is spelled out on *tara*, a fact which follows if we assume that *tara*’s ϕ -features are not valued. This immediately raises the question as to what accounts for the convergent derivation of the sentence, given that uninterpretable features (whether unvalued in the sense of Chomsky 2000, 2001 or valued in the sense Pesetsky & Torrego 2007), must, eventually, be deleted during the course of the derivation, or the derivation would otherwise crash. Remedy to this question lies in the assumption that *tara* in such cases agrees with the element that is not endowed with interpretable ϕ -features. In (20a), for instance, *tara* agrees with the verb *faf* ‘saw’, the C-Topic, as explained above. Lack of clitic on *tara* when agreeing with the verb, then, follows from the fact that verbs have uninterpretable ϕ -features, which, by the time *tara* is merged, would have already been valued and, more crucially, deleted, a fact which consequently results in the ϕ -features of *tara* being unvalued and undeleted. Hence, unlike the cases with DP’s, this results in lack of clitic spellout on *tara*. The same analogue is extended to cases where the C-Topic is an adjunct, *taw* ‘just now’ (20b). Under such cases, I propose that, following Epstein *et al.* (2010), uninterpretable ϕ -features of discourse related elements, rather than lexical items, like *tara* are ignored at LF (and PF), since the interface levels

recognize only elements that contribute to the interpretation of the sentence, hence, those with interpretable features; uninterpretable features need not be deleted. What is crucial for the convergence of the given sentence containing *tara* is the valuation of the interpretable unvalued [TOP] feature of *tara*.

With this conclusion, there are still several issues to be explored as far as *tara* is concerned. Here, I single out two issues, namely the cases when *tara* agrees with the direct object (where a clitic agreeing with the object is spelled out on *tara*) and the obligatory remerge of the C-Topic when *tara* is not part of the numeration. As for the first issue, the interesting matter here is that the direct object must be in a position c-commanding the subject. When *tara* agrees with the direct object, the latter must move to a position which is closer to *tara*, unlike the cases with the subject which can appear postverbally (in its thematic position) while agreeing with *tara*. Regarding the second issue, it is evident that when *tara* is not part of the sentence, the C-Topic must be dislocated to the left periphery even if the C-Topic is the subject. It seems that there is a co-relation of some kind between the use of a probe-goal configuration and the existence of an overt [TOP] head. However, I leave these issues open pending further research.

5 Conclusion:

This research tackles the discourse-related particle *tara* in North Hail Arabic. The main assumption of the current paper is that *tara* is a head instantiating the Contrastive Topic Phrase in the sense of Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl (2007). The study argues that *tara* enters the derivation endowed with an interpretable unvalued [TOP] feature in addition to a set of uninterpretable ϕ -features which are valued by the element that serves as a Contrastive Topic. This valuation is conducted through a probe-goal configuration (Chomsky 2000, 2001, 2008). Additionally, the study shows that the clitic appearing on *tara* when *tara* agrees with the subject or the direct object DP's is in fact a by-product (epiphenomenal) of the Agree relation established between *tara* and the C-Topic. It is a spell out of the ϕ -features of *tara* as a result of maintaining agreement relation between *tara* and the C-Topic, when the C-Topic has ϕ -features, a DP. However, in case the C-Topic does not have ϕ -features, no clitic is realized on *tara*, in which case the uninterpretable ϕ -features of *tara* are ignored at LF (and PF).

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