

A STUDY OF YES, NO, QUESTIONS IN ENGLISH AND ARABIC

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1. Introduction

The central goal of this study is to present the yes-no questions in transformational grammar. Furthermore, the study aims at contrasting the transformation of yes, no questions in English with their counterparts in standard Arabic in an attempt to clarify the areas of possible difficulties that may face Arabic learners in learning the formation of this kind of questions .

This study has made a comparison of the yes-no question in English and Arabic. Since the movement of the auxiliary is more familiar in English than in Arabic. It was natural that the focus of this paper is on the English part of the subject. It is hoped that such a contrastive study will achieve, even little good presentation to simplify the areas of difficulty of learning this grammatical element. Consequently, we come to reduce that the Arabic system of the yes-no question is different from the English one. Therefore, a native speaker of Arabic why is learning English will transfer his native speaker habits and results in interference .Roughly speaking, the pedagogical considerations are not the main purpose of such comparison. The yes, no question transformation, we have mainly addition and rearrangement. Although this kind of transformation may lead us to their kinds of questions such as tag questions. The researcher is going to limit this paper to the ordinary yes-no questions in English and Arabic, taking into account other important yes-no questions (i.e., the passive question transformation).

2. Yes-No Questions in English

As you might guess, a yes-no question is a question that anticipates 'yes' or 'no' as its answer. The yes-no questions are formed from the underlying statement by moving the first verb (transform ally speaking) to the front position in the sentence, mainly in front of the subject noun phrase:

Your name is Ali. \longrightarrow Is your name Ali?

Of course, this is not the final rule to be applied in yes-no question transformation, for example the verb is not always 'be' .Sometimes, the first verb is an ordinary verb like: The boy runs. In this case, we cannot move the main verb in front of the subject noun phrase and say: * Runs the boy?

From the transformational point of view, it is something different. The transformation lists look at this sentence as that linguistic element having an auxiliary. The auxiliary may be one of the following: (1) a modal: may, might, can, could, shall, should, will, would, must. (2) a form of 'have': have, has, had. (3) a form of 'be': am, is, are, was, were, be, been, being. Or it may be a combination of these as:

Should we have answered the question?

Since there is more than one auxiliary after the tense in many sentences, we are going to move the first one with tense to the first position in the sentence to be transformed into a yes-no question. Mark Lester (1971; 27) states that "The auxiliary in the clause that governs the tense of the sentence and which, if any, auxiliary and helping verb occurs before the main verb." It is noteworthy to mention here that the first verb in any sentence could be moved to the first position

Know you where you are?

Speak you very gently?

While in modern English, these yes-no questions would be said this way:

Do you know where you are?

Do you speak so gently?

Lester believes that for most questions in Modern English, the verb which contains tense is placed before the subject noun phrase: Were you playing? " (Lester; 1971, 19)

It should be clear that this kind of questions contains one and only one auxiliary verb to the left. Thus, this auxiliary is in the same order relative to the others, as if it were in its usual place, for instance: Salem will be a teacher. Will Salem be a teacher? Fatima has been singing. Has Fatima been singing?

In fact, "The yes-no question transformation permits us to derive all auxiliaries from the common node, auxiliary instead of forcing us to generate each one separately in questions" (Fowler; 1977; 88). Basically, the simple yes-no questions are realized by a change of word-order, rather than, as with negative by insertion a special morpheme.

Generally speaking, the interrogative sentence is known as that sentence which contains Q in its deep structure. Concerning this fact Huddleston believes that "the syntactic argument is that yes-no interrogatives are like disjunctive (i.e., these where the second clause is retained at least in part, in surface structure." Huddleston (1979; 130). He declares that the sentence: 'Did you give John the key?' "May be interpreted as: "Did you give John the key or did you not give John the key?" . Therefore, he thinks that "the only special rule needs deletes or does

not. There is both syntactic and semantic evidence supporting this proposal.”(Ibid: 136)

As a matter of fact , the yes-no questions are distinguished according to the following points : (1) when there is more than one auxiliary after tense ,(2)when tense is the only element of the auxiliary and the verb is ‘be’ ,and (3) when the main verb is an ordinary verb . (Lester; 1971:51)

2.1.1 When there is more than one auxiliary after tense

Most linguists agree that each of the sentences : Jack will be working hard . Will Jack be working hard? Leila will have been studying French . Will Leila have been studying French? , contains more than one auxiliary after tense ;therefore these sentences can be written as follows : Q + NP + Aux + X tense + Aux + NP + X . This transformation involves a rearrangement of elements. (Lester; 1971). In fact, some writers use a new technique to formalize the transformational rules that they have suggested for dealing with yes-no questions They call the rule which fits this sentence like : Alice might sing . Alice past may sing past may Alice sing? This function:

If a model like (can , will , might) is involved , this morpheme is transferred to the beginning , the sentence with the tense element , the same is true with the interrogative sentence combining with perfect or progressive aspect : have or be moved to the beginning of the string performs : The pupils are reading Arabic \Rightarrow Are the pupils reading Arabic ? Q + NP + tense + Aux + X \Rightarrow tense + Aux. + NP + X .

2.1.2 When tense is the only element of the auxiliary and the main verb is ‘be’

When tense is the only element of the auxiliary and the main is ‘be’ , the yes-no question needs to be modified to permit ‘be’ to be moved with tense to the first position of the sentence ... (Lester;1971;109) . This modification results in the following transformational rule: Q + NP + tense + be + X tense + be + NP + X . Let’s illustrate the example: Tom is ~~happy~~ happy. Is Tom happy? Q + NP + tense + be + X \Rightarrow tense + be + NP + X . Notice how the subject exchanges position with tense, and ‘be’ meanwhile the SM Q is deleted.

However, when ‘be’ is used as a main verb, we can never have a form of to do in the indicative mood. Thus, we cannot have: * Tom does be happy. * Does Tom be happy? Owen (1965; 133) believes that “It is not necessary to use ‘to do’ in these cases when the main verb is also one that can be used as auxiliary ; that is when the main verb is some form of have ‘have’ or ‘be’ . Notice the sentences suggested below: Ban is a nurse. Is Ban a nurse? John has a cold. Has John a cold? It is abundantly clear that, when ‘have’ is used as a main verb, we

can also optionally have the verb 'to do': Does John have a cold? In this case we can consider 'to do' when used as an obligatory auxiliary to be a pro-form of the verb (Ibid: 134).

2.1.3 When the main verb is an ordinary verb

This kind of yes-no questions is slightly different from the previous yes-no questions. For it has neither verb 'to be' as a main verb nor has it more than one auxiliary after tense. Hence, we cannot transfer the verb with the tense to the front of the subject NP. This is because the tense cannot attach to the subject NP: Ban reads a letter. Therefore, we must utilize the present or past form of the special auxiliary verb 'to do' (Thomas, 1970:132). It comes to be called later the Do-Insertion rule: Ban reads a letter. Does Ban read a letter? $Q \text{ NP} + \text{tense} + V + X \implies \text{tense (present)} + \text{do} + \text{NP} + V + X$.

In fact, most of the writers believe that the do-insertion rule is very general rule that applies any time that the tense either present or past, has been separated from a verb. "Do' is a verb substitute that unconnected tenses are attached to, but that has no particular meaning of its own. For this reason it is often called a 'dummy verb'. (Fowler, 1977:41)

2.2 The passive Questions Transformation

The yes-no questions are clearly shown in the passive sentences. This is so because these sentences contain more than one auxiliary. Thus, the only thing we have to do is to have the first auxiliary with tense to the left of the subject noun phrase. Of course, the idea of the yes-no question will take place after the passive transformation. Notice this example: The hunter killed the wolf. The wolf was killed by the hunter. $NP^1 + \text{Aux} + V + NP^2 + X \implies NP^2 + \text{Aux} + \text{be} + \text{en} + V + \text{by} + Np^1 + X$. Then, by the yes-no question transformation, we have: Was the wolf killed by the hunter?

3. Yes-No Questions in Arabic

Having stated earlier what the yes-no questions in English are, and examined briefly different features of yes-no questions. The researcher comes now to deal

with the same topic in Arabic. Roughly speaking, the semantic aspect of the implication of this type of question in Arabic is as that of English (i.e., they both require a reply with yes-no ones). The major transformation concerning this type of questions in Arabic is the addition of either the interrogative particle 'hal' or '?' which is called *ʔalhamza*. In SA, those particles are often used at the beginning of the sentence. Let us illustrate the following sentence: *kataba*

?ahmad ? al darsa Ahmad wrote the lesson . hal kataba ?ahmad aldarsa Did Ahmad write the lesson ? . Here, the sentence is converted into yes-no question. In order to put Arabic within the universal framework of the phrase rules that underlie the sentence in all languages, we have to change the verbal sentence into nominal one (a sentence rewritten as NP + VP). Thus, the yes, no question in Arabic is a matter of addition (i.e., add 'hal' and 'alhamza').(Matthews,1979)

4. Conclusion

The first conclusion that strikes one's attention is that the movement of the first auxiliary verb with tense is much more frequent in English than the auxiliary. Consequently, this movement obligatory if the English sentence has more than the auxiliary. In English, it is sometimes the nature of the verb phrase that determines whether there could be one part of the auxiliary or more to be transferred in front of the NP.

According to transformational grammar, the term 'auxiliary' is not the item stands by itself while in Arabic the auxiliary stands for one item and that is the tense. The yes-no question in English is a matter of conversation, while in Arabic, it is a matter of addition (i.e., we add 'hal' and 'alhamza ').

5. Summary

This paper has made a comparison of the yes-no question in English and Arabic. Since the movement of the auxiliary is more familiar in English than in Arabic; therefore it was natural that the focus of this brief study is on the English side of the subject. it is hoped that such a contrastive study will achieve ,even little good representation to simplify the areas of difficulty of learning this grammatical element. Consequently, we come to deduce that the Arabic system of the yes-no question is different from the English one. Therefore, a native speaker of Arabic who is learning English will transfer his native speech habits and results in interference.

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