The Syntax of Sudden Particles in Arabic

Saleem Abdelhady

Memorial University of Newfoundland

Abstract

Arabic language forms conditional structures using particles such *ʔɪða* ‘if’ and *law* ‘if’. At their surface level, these particles seem to form conditional structures.

1. **ʔɪða** ʤaʔ-a ʔalj-un qul l-i

if came Ali-NOM tell-me

‘If Ali comes, tell me.’

1. ***law*** ʤaʔ-a ʔalj-un l-raʔajtu-hu

if came Ali-NOM to-see-him

‘If Ali came, I should have seen him.’

At the morphosyntactic level, the use of these particles involves a level of opacity. The particlesmay depart from their conditional function; speakers may deploy them to indicate a sudden realization of an action. Consider the following examples.

1. laqj-tu zajd-an w **ʔɪða** ʕab-du ʔallah-i jaᴅrɪbu-hu

met-I Zaid-ACC and if Abdullah-GEN hit-him

‘I met Zaid and suddenly, I saw that Abdullah is hitting him.’

1. f-ʔaqa-ha f-**ʔɪða**  hɪja ħaja-tun tasʕa

drop-it f-if it-3SG.F snak-NOM PROG-live

‘he dropped it and suddenly it became a living snake’.

1. naᴅar-tu ʔɪla ʔs-samʔ f-**ʔɪða** ʔal-qamar-u muᴅiʔ

look-I to the-sky f-if the-moon-NOM light

‘I looked up to the sky, and suddenly I realized that the moon is lighting,’

From a semantic perspective, two syncretic forms emerge, and they have different interpretations. The former indicates that *if* is used as an element for building complex structures. The later indicates that *if* is used as an element to reflect the attitude of the speaker toward the sudden realization of what comes after *if*. This study examines the syntactic conditions that license the use of conditional particles as markers of expressing speakers' attitudes.