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# On Strategies of Question-Formation and the Grammatical Status of the Q-particle *huwwa* in Egyptian Arabic Wh-Questions

Usama Soltan

*Middlebury College*, [usoltan@middlebury.edu](mailto:usoltan@middlebury.edu)

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## **Abstract**

This paper addresses two salient properties of wh-interrogatives in EA: First, the utilization of the in-situ and ex-situ strategies to form wh-questions, and second, the optional occurrence of the (Q)uestion-particle *huwwa* in the initial position of such structures. In the first half of the paper, I argue that scope in wh-questions in EA is licensed via unselective binding by an interrogative operator, which may either bind a wh-phrase in the lexical domain, thereby giving rise to an in-situ wh-question, or a wh-phrase in SpecFocP, thereby giving rise to an ex-situ wh-question. In the second half of the paper, I turn to the discussion of the grammatical status of the Q-particle *huwwa*, arguing, on the basis of theoretical and empirical evidence, against both Wahba's (1984) claim that *huwwa* is obligatorily needed to define the scope of in-situ wh-phrases, as well as Eid's (1992) analysis of *huwwa* as derived from an underlying pronominal copula. Instead, I argue that *huwwa* is a clause-typing Q-morpheme that occupies a head position in an articulated left-periphery of the clause, has *f*-features, and induces (a degree of) presupposition. Diagnostics such as felicity of negative answers and suspension of the associated proposition underlying a question suggest that different degrees of presupposition underlie different types of wh-questions in EA, hence lending support to a fine-grained approach to the interpretation of questions, as has been argued recently in Romero and Han 2004, Tomioka 2009, and Eilam and Lai 2009.

# On Strategies of Question-Formation and the Grammatical Status of the Q-particle *huwwa* in Egyptian Arabic Wh-Questions

Usama Soltan\*

## 1 Introduction

Egyptian Arabic (EA, henceforward) exhibits an interesting variation with regard to the syntactic structures of wh-interrogatives, due in part to the utilization of multiple question-formation strategies, and in part to the occurrence of an optional question-particle with the various forms of interrogative structures. The goal of this paper is twofold: (i) to provide a description of the main strategies of question-formation in EA, and the syntactic representations associated with each; and (ii) to determine the grammatical status of the question-particle *huwwa* in wh-questions, account for its morphosyntactic properties, and explore its implications for the semantics and pragmatics of questions.

The paper is organized as follows: In Section 2, I introduce the two main strategies of question-formation in EA, pointing out how argument and adjunct wh-questions differ in this regard, and proposing to derive the argument-adjunct asymmetry from a general constraint on A'-positions in the language. I then discuss the syntactic representations associated with these different question-formation strategies, adopting an unselective binding approach to wh-scope licensing, as argued for in Soltan (to appear). Section 3 deals with the grammatical status of the Q-particle *huwwa*, arguing that it is neither a scope-defining element, as claimed in Wahba 1984, nor syntactically derived from a copular element, as argued in Eid 1992. Rather, I provide evidence that the Q-particle should be treated as an interrogative morpheme heading a projection in the left-periphery of the clause. In Section 4, I turn to the discussion of the grammatical properties of *huwwa*, with particular focus on the subtle semantic/pragmatic differences between different types of EA wh-questions, with and without *huwwa*, relying on diagnostics such as felicity of negative answers and suspension of the associated proposition of a question within a fine-grained approach to the interpretation of questions, as has been argued recently in Romero and Han 2004, Tomioka 2009, and Eilam and Lai 2009. Section 5 sums up the conclusions of the paper.

## 2 The Syntax of Question-formation in EA: In-situ vs. Ex-situ Wh-Questions

As first discussed in Wahba 1984, EA utilizes two main strategies for wh-question-formation: the in-situ strategy and the ex-situ strategy. Wh-arguments may appear either in-situ in their argument position, as in (1a), or in a left-peripheral position in a cleft structure with an optional pronominal copula *huwwa* and a relative clause headed by the complementizer *?illi*, as in (1b):<sup>1</sup>

- (1) a. ?inta šuft miin ?imbaarih?  
you saw.2SGM who yesterday  
'Who did you see yesterday?'
- b. miin (huwwa) ?illi ?inta šuft-u-h ?imbaarih?  
who COP.3SGM COMP you saw.2SGM-EV-him yesterday  
'Who is it that you saw yesterday?'

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<sup>1</sup>The following abbreviations are used in the glosses of Egyptian Arabic data in the paper: 1, 2, 3 for first, second, and third person, respectively; SG = singular; PL = plural; M = masculine; F = feminine; COP = copula; COMP = complementizer; FUT = future; IPFV = imperfective; PTCP = participial; Q = question-particle; DECL = declarative particle; VOC = vocative particle; EV = epenthetic vowel.

Wh-adjuncts, on the other hand, may appear either in-situ in the lexical domain, as in (2a), or, rather markedly, in a left-peripheral position, as in (2b), though crucially not via clefting, as shown by the ungrammaticality of (2c):

- (2) a. ?ahmad ha-yi-saafir fein/?imtaa/?izzaay/leih?  
 Ahmad FUT-IPFV-travel.3SGM where/when/how/why  
 ‘Where/When/How/Why will Ahmad travel?’
- b. ?? fein/?imtaa/?izzaay/leih ?ahmad ha-yi-saafir?  
 where/when/how/why Ahmad FUT-IPFV-travel.3SGM  
 ‘Where/When/How/Why will Ahmad travel?’
- c. \*fein/?imtaa/?izzaay/leih (huwwa) ?illi ?ahmad ha-yi-saafir?  
 where/when/how/why COP.3SGM COMP Ahmad FUT-IPFV-travel.3SGM  
 ‘Where/When/How/Why is it that Ahmad will travel?’

The uncleftability of wh-adjuncts is not specific to wh-interrogatives. Adjuncts, in general, are not amenable to clefting in EA (and other Arabic dialects for that matter), as shown by the ungrammaticality of (3b). They may, however, appear fronted, though again rather marginally:

- (3) a. ?ahmad ha-yi-saafir li-Masr/bukrah/bi-l-?arabiyyah/li-l-diraasah  
 Ahmad FUT-IPFV-travel.3SGM to Egypt/tomorrow/by car/for studying  
 ‘Ahmad will travel to Egypt/tomorrow/by car/for studying.’
- b. \*li-Masr/bukrah/bi-l-?arabiyyah/li-l-diraasah (huwwa) ?illi ?ahmad  
 to Egypt/tomorrow/by car/for studying COP.3SGM COMP Ahmad  
 ha-yi-saafir  
 FUT-IPFV-travel.3SGM  
 ‘It is to Egypt/tomorrow/by car/for studying that Ahmad will travel.’
- c. ?? li-Masr/bukrah/bi-l-?arabiyyah/li-l-diraasah ?ahmad ha-yi-saafir  
 to Egypt/tomorrow/by car/for studying Ahmad FUT-IPFV-travel.3SGM  
 ‘To Egypt/tomorrow/by car/for studying Ahmad will travel.’

The inability of adjuncts to appear in clefts seems due to “categorical,” not “adjunctual” reasons, i.e., it is not the adjunct function of an XP that prevents it from being clefted; it is its adverbialness. So, while a whole adjunct cannot be clefted, a nominal inside the adjunct can, as in (4b):

- (4) a. ?ahmad ?itxaani? ma?a ?il-mudiiir dah  
 Ahmad had.a.fight.3SGM with the-manager this  
 ‘Ahmad had a fight with this manager.’
- b. ?il-mudiiir dah huwwa ?illi ?ahmad ?itxaani? ma?aa-h  
 the-manager this COP.3SGM COMP Ahmad had.a.fight.3SGM with-him  
 ‘It is this manager that Ahmad had a fight with.’

The same holds in wh-questions with what we may call “nominal” adjuncts, e.g., PP adjuncts that include a nominal, (as opposed to monomorphemic adjuncts like those in (2a)).<sup>2</sup>

- (5) a. ?ahmad ha-yi-dris fii ?anhi balad?  
 Ahmad FUT-IPFV-study.3SGM in which country  
 ‘In which country will Ahmad study?’
- b. ?anhi balad ?illi ?ahmad ha-yi-dris fii-haa?  
 which country COMP Ahmad FUT-IPFV-study.3SGM in-it  
 ‘In which country is it that Ahmad will study?’

<sup>2</sup>In this paper, I do not discuss the behavior of D(iscourse)-linked wh-phrases of the *?anhi+N* (*which+N*) type. While their behavior is comparable to non-D-linked wh-phrases discussed here, they also exhibit particular properties of their own. For data and discussion, see Wahba 1984 for Egyptian Arabic, and Aoun and Choueiri 1998 for Lebanese Arabic.

We may hypothesize, then, that the restriction against clefting of non-nominal adjuncts is due to a resumption constraint on A'-positions in EA, along the lines of (6):

- (6) A'-positions must be resumed.

The constraint in (6) is inviolable for nominals in A'-positions, and leads to ungrammaticality if violated. That is why the gap-strategy is not a possible mechanism for either wh-question formation or topicalization in the language ( $\emptyset$  indicates the gap site):

- (7) a. \*miin ʔinta ʃuft  $\emptyset$  ʔimbaarih?  
 who you saw.2SGM yesterday  
 'Who did you see yesterday?'  
 b. \*ʔel-kitaab dah ʔanaa ʔištareit  $\emptyset$  ʔimbaarih  
 the-book this I bought.1SG yesterday  
 'This book I bought yesterday.'

Adverbials, by contrast, seem to incur a weaker violation of the constraint in (6), thereby leading to marginality rather than to full ungrammaticality.

To sum up the discussion so far, there are two main strategies for wh-question-formation in EA: (i) an in-situ strategy, whereby a wh-argument or adjunct surfaces in its first-Merge position in the lexical domain; and (ii) an ex-situ strategy, whereby the wh-phrase appears in a left-peripheral position, while being obligatorily associated with a resumptive pronoun in the case of nominal wh-phrases (typically arguments), or with a gap in the case of non-nominal wh-phrases (typically monomorphemic adjuncts), with this latter sub-strategy resulting in marginality. Having described the strategies of question-formation, two questions arise: First, what is the syntactic structure associated with each strategy? Second, how is wh-scope licensed in each case?

Contra Wahba 1984, I argue in Soltan (to appear), on the basis of empirical evidence from island-insensitivity and lack of intervention effects of the Beck-1996-type in both types of question-formation, for a uniform syntactic analysis of in-situ and ex-situ argument wh-questions, whereby wh-scope is licensed via an interrogative null operator in C that unselectively binds a wh-phrase either in argument position (giving rise to the in-situ strategy, as in (8a)) or in a focused position of a cleft structure (giving rise to the ex-situ strategy, as in (8b)):

- (8) a. [<sub>CP</sub> Op<sub>i</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> ... [<sub>VP</sub> ... wh-phrase<sub>i</sub>]]]  
 b. [<sub>CP</sub> Op<sub>i</sub> [<sub>FocP</sub> wh-phrase<sub>i</sub> [<sub>CopulaP</sub> Copula [<sub>CP</sub> ʔilli [<sub>TP</sub> ... [<sub>VP</sub> ... pronoun<sub>i</sub>]]]]]]]

This analysis can now be readily extended to wh-adjuncts as well: In-situ wh-adjuncts are licensed in the same way in-situ wh-arguments are licensed (i.e., as in (8a)). Ex-situ wh-adjuncts, however, are licensed as focused elements in SpecFocP, as in (9) below:

- (9) [<sub>CP</sub> Op<sub>i</sub> [<sub>FocP</sub> wh-adjunct<sub>i</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> ... [<sub>VP</sub> ... t<sub>i</sub>]]]]]

In sum, EA has two strategies to form wh-questions: First, an in-situ strategy, whereby a null operator unselectively binds a wh-phrase in the lexical domain; second, an ex-situ strategy, whereby a null operator unselectively binds a wh-phrase in SpecFocP, subject to the resumption constraint on A'-positions in (6).

### 3 The Grammatical Status of the Q-particle *huwwa* in EA Wh-Questions

In addition to the types of wh-question structures illustrated above, any EA wh-question (argument or adjunct, in-situ or ex-situ) can be optionally introduced by the (Q)uestion-particle *huwwa*, a morpheme that occurs initial in root clauses, shows gender and number agreement with the closest nominal, and seems to induce some subtle semantic/pragmatic effects in questions. It is homophonous with both the third person pronoun and the pronominal copula. In addition, *huwwa*

may introduce yes-no questions and alternative questions. Illustrating data are given in (10a-e):

- (10) a. huwwa ʔinta ʃuft miin ʔimbaarih?  
Q.3SGM you saw.2SGM who yesterday  
'Who did you see yesterday?'
- b. huwwa miin ʔilli ʔinta ʃuft-u-h ʔimbaarih?  
Q.3SGM who COMP you saw.2SGM-EV-him yesterday  
'Who is it that you saw yesterday?'
- c. hiyya Huda ha-ti-saafir fein/ʔimtaa/ʔizzaay/leih?  
Q.3SGF Huda FUT-IPFV-travel.3SGF where/when/how/why  
'Where/When/How/Why will Huda travel?'
- d. humma ʔil-wilaad saafir-uu (walla lissah)?  
Q.3PL the-boys traveled.3PLM (or yet)  
'Did the boys travel (or not yet)?'
- e. huwwa ʔahmad saafir Masr walla Lebnaan?  
Q.3SGM Ahmad traveled.3SGM Egypt or Lebanon  
'Did Ahmad travel to Egypt or Lebanon?'

Wahba (1984) argues that the Q-particle *huwwa* is used for two functions: (i) to mark a sentence as a yes-no question, and (ii) to define the scope of an in-situ wh-phrase when that wh-phrase is separated from matrix C by more than one tensed clause, to satisfy what she calls the *tense locality requirement* on the interpretation of in-situ wh-phrases. This characterization of the Q-particle is, however, problematic on both theoretical as well as empirical grounds.

For one thing, her analysis suggests that *huwwa* should be treated differently in different types of questions. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, a uniform analysis of *huwwa* in all interrogative structures is more preferable. At the same time, her tense locality requirement on wh-in-situ is highly questionable. As pointed out in Soltan (to appear), sentences such as (11) below are perfectly grammatical with or without the Q-particle *huwwa*. While there may be some preference for the use of *huwwa* in these so-called "tense locality" contexts, the questions can still receive a matrix wh-question interpretation in the absence of an overt Q-particle.

- (11) a. (huwwa) ʔahmad ʔaal-la-k ʔin Mona ʔiʃtar-it ʔeih?  
Q.3SGM Ahmad said.3SGM-to-you that Mona bought-3SGF what  
'What did Ahmad tell you that Mona bought?'
- b. (huwwa) ʔahmad ʔaal-la-k ʔin Mona saafir-it fein?  
Q.3SGM Ahmad said.3SGM-to-you that Mona traveled.3SGF where  
'Where did Ahmad tell you that Mona traveled?'

Notice further that Wahba does not make it clear what the function of the Q-particle is when the tense locality requirement is not in effect, as in monoclausal wh-questions (12a), or when the in-situ wh-phrase is inside a non-tensed embedded clause (12b):

- (12) a. (huwwa) ʔinta ʔaabil-t miin?  
Q.3SGM you met.2SGM who  
'Who did you meet?'
- b. (huwwa) ʔinta ʃaayiz ti-ʔaabil miin?  
Q.3SGM you want.PTCP.M IPFV-meet.2SGM who  
'Who do you want to meet?'

If LF movement of the wh-phrase is what defines its scope, as Wahba argues for wh-in-situ, it is not clear what the function of the Q-particle in such constructions is, and Wahba does not address the fact that *huwwa* can occur with ex-situ wh-questions (cf. (10b)), which, according to her, are derived via overt movement, hence should not be in need of a scope-defining particle.<sup>3</sup> I con-

<sup>3</sup>For arguments against Wahba's general analysis of wh-scope in EA, see Soltan (to appear).

clude that Wahba's characterization of the Q-particle is empirically and theoretically inadequate.

A more elaborate discussion of the use of *huwwa* in EA questions is provided by Eid (1992), albeit exclusively with regard to yes-no questions. Eid argues that the Q-particle *huwwa* is actually a pronominal copula that moves from its copular position as the head of the predicate phrase to interrogative C. So, for the yes-no question in (13), Eid proposes the structure in (14):

- (13) hiyya Nadya ʕali ʔaabil-haa?  
 Q.3SGF Nadya Ali met.3SGM-her  
 'Is it the case that Nadya, Ali met her?'  
 (14) [CP<sub>1</sub> C<sub>1[Q]</sub> [IP<sub>1</sub> *pro* [I<sub>AGR/PRES/STATIVE</sub> [NP N<sub>huwwa</sub> [CP<sub>2</sub> Nadya [C' C<sub>2</sub> [IP<sub>2</sub> ʕali ʔaabil-haa]]]]]]]
- 

To account for the *huwwa* agreement facts, Eid assumes a rather complex feature percolation analysis: The target DP in SpecCP<sub>2</sub> (*Nadya*) agrees first with C<sub>2</sub>, and by feature percolation, CP<sub>2</sub> inherits these features, and passes them on to the copular N. The structure is also biclausal, which is probably intended to account for the intuition that such questions have an “*Is it the case ...?*” feel to them. It is not clear, however, if this analysis can be extended to cover the occurrence of the Q-particle in wh-questions. As noted before, the copular nature of argument ex-situ wh-questions is evidently clear from their cleft structure, but it does not seem plausible to postulate the copular structure in (14) on top of the copular structure of a cleft to derive ex-situ wh-questions.

That said, I believe that Eid is correct in her insight about the relationship between the Q-particle and the copula, albeit only at a diachronic, not a synchronic, level. For one thing, if (Q)uestion-*huwwa* is historically derived from (Cop)ular-*huwwa*, their homophony is explained. This development of Q-*huwwa* probably took place first in argument ex-situ wh-questions, where the pronominal copula of the cleft structure optionally moved to interrogative C (cf. (15)). The resulting morpheme was then generalized to all types of interrogatives, whether or not they have an underlying copular structure in the language, i.e., wh-adjunct, yes-no, and alternative questions.

- (15) [C<sub>INTERROGATIVE</sub> [Clefted-wh-phrase<sub>i</sub> (pronominal copula) [C<sub>7ili</sub> [... resumptive pronoun<sub>i</sub> ... ]]]]
- 

In other words, in the synchronic grammar of EA, Q-*huwwa* is not syntactically derived, but rather is an independent interrogative morpheme unrelated to the pronominal copula. One piece of evidence that Q-*huwwa* is now a distinct morpheme from Cop-*huwwa* can be formulated with regard to their morphosyntactic properties. Cop-*huwwa* is specified for gender and number, but not for person. In fact, it cannot be used when the subject of the copular structure is first or second person (cf. 16d)), in which case the copular pronominal has to be null:

- (16) a. ʔahmad huwwa Saahib ʔil-ʕimaarah  
 Ahmad COP.3SGM owner the-building  
 'Ahmad is the owner of the building.'  
 b. Mona hiyya Saahib-it ʔil-ʕimaarah  
 Mona COP.3SGF owner-F the-building  
 'Mona is the owner of the building.'  
 c. ʔil-rigaalah dool humma ʔaShaab ʔil-ʕimaarah  
 the-men those COP.3PL owners the-building  
 'Those men are the owners of the building.'  
 d. ʔanaa/ʔinta (\*huwwa) Saahib ʔil-ʕimaarah  
 I/You(SG) COP.3SGM owner the-building  
 'I am/You are the owner of the building.'

Recall, however, that Q-*huwwa* shows no such opacity to first and second person contexts. When the agreement target is first or second person, the Q-particle surfaces in the *huwwa* default form (cf. (10a) for example), which would be unexpected if Q-*huwwa* is syntactically derived from an underlying Cop-*huwwa*, as Eid suggests.

Another argument in favor of treating Q-*huwwa* as an interrogative morpheme may be made with regard to the fact, pointed out by Eid herself, that EA also has a declarative-sentence-

introducing particle *dah*, glossed below as DECL(arative), which is homophonous to the demonstrative morpheme, shows  $\phi$ -agreement in gender and number, and is felt to be “presuppositional”:

- (17) *dah*                      ʔahmad wasal  
 DECL.3SGM              Ahmad arrived.3SGM  
 ‘(It is the case that) Ahmad arrived.’

Eid suggests that both particles should be treated as in (14), the only difference having to do with the kind of C the N head moves to: *huwwa* is the result of movement to interrogative C, whereas *dah* is the result of movement to declarative C. It is not clear, however, what is “copular” about the “demonstrative,” or “demonstrative” about the “copula” to derive them from the same underlying structure. A more straightforward analysis would treat *dah* as a morpheme that types the clause as declarative, and Q-*huwwa* as a morpheme that types the clause as interrogative.<sup>4</sup>

In sum, while Eid’s analysis seems diachronically correct in the sense that Q-*huwwa* probably developed from Cop-*huwwa* in wh-argument ex-situ questions, synchronically, the grammar of EA treats *huwwa* as a Q-particle, as evidenced by the fact that (i) it occurs in wh-adjunct, yes-no, as well as alternative questions, (ii) it has distinct agreement properties, and (iii) it parallels the behavior of declarative *dah* as a clause-typing head. I conclude then that Q-*huwwa* is indeed a question-particle and as such should be base-generated as a head in the left periphery of the clause. What syntactic head that is, and how we can account for its grammatical features is discussed next.

#### 4 Accounting for the Grammatical Properties of the Q-particle *huwwa*

Having argued that *huwwa* in interrogative structures is indeed a Q-particle and not a pronominal copula, it remains to be determined what kind of head it is, how its features are licensed in the syntax, and what its implications (if any) for the semantics/pragmatics of questions are.

If the null operator analysis of wh-questions presented in Section 2 is correct, then one plausible analysis of Q-*huwwa* is to treat it as an overt instance of the interrogative operator *Op*, with [+wh] as well as  $\phi$ -features:<sup>5</sup>

- (18) *huwwa* = *Op*<sub>[+wh,  $\phi$ ]</sub>

The [+wh] feature of the operator is licensed via unselective binding of an (in-situ or ex-situ) wh-phrase in the structure, whereas the  $\phi$ -features are licensed via Agree with the closest target (which can be the wh-phrase itself), in a Probe-Goal sense, as in Chomsky 2000.<sup>6</sup> I will also assume a fully articulated structure of the left-periphery along the lines of Rizzi 1997, whereby the interrogative operator is under Force:

- (19) [<sub>ForceP</sub> *Op* [<sub>TopicP</sub> [<sub>FocusP</sub> [<sub>FinP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> ...]]]]]

Once we decided on the syntactic status of *huwwa* and how to license its morphosyntactic features, the next question to ask is: In what way (if any) are questions with *huwwa* semantically/pragmatically different from questions without *huwwa*? While a full answer to this question is beyond the scope of this paper, not just due to space considerations, but also due to the wide range of contexts in which *huwwa* occurs, it is still possible to speculate in this regard, with the hope that future research will either verify or falsify some of the claims made here.

<sup>4</sup>Another argument that can be added here is that Q-*huwwa* and Cop-*huwwa* may co-occur in questions.

<sup>5</sup>Alternatively, we may assume that Q-*huwwa* is a different syntactic head that, in turn, selects interrogative C. Bruening and Tran (2006) argue that this is the case with the Vietnamese Q-particle *thê*, which they treat as a realis head selecting the null interrogative operator. Since *huwwa* may occur in irrealis contexts (e.g., future and counterfactual structures), their analysis cannot be extended to EA. I will, therefore, adopt the null assumption that *huwwa* is an overt form of the interrogative operator.

<sup>6</sup>Note that *huwwa* probes only for gender and number features; its person features are always third person by default. Notice also that, for some speakers, including the author, the use of the default third person singular masculine form in all contexts is also allowed.



One thing we can rule out is that the Q-particle is tied to D-linking: The Q-particle is compatible with non-D-linking contexts.<sup>7</sup> Consider a situation where a crowd is gathering in a street, indicating that something has happened. You could approach the crowd, and, out of curiosity, ask a police officer the following question, either with or without the Q-particle:

- (20) (huwwa) ?eih ?illi hasal ya haDrit ?il-Zaabit?  
 Q.3SGM what COMP happened.3SGM VOC Mr. the-police.officer  
 ‘What happened, Mr. Police Officer?’

Since the answer to the question in (20) is not tied to membership in a set, it is obviously a non-D-linking context, thereby indicating that *huwwa* is compatible with such contexts.

Now, consider a situation where you have a guest at your house. Egyptian hospitality dictates that you offer them something to drink. You have juice, tea, and soda to offer. Contrast the felicity of the two questions in (21b,c) in the context of (21a):

- (21) a. fii-h ?aSiir wi-šaay wi-haagah saa?ʕah.  
 in-it juice and-tea and-thing cold  
 ‘There’s juice, tea, and soda.’  
 b. ti-ħibb ti-šrab ?eih?  
 IPFV.like.2SGM IPFV.drink.2SGM what  
 ‘What do you like to drink?’  
 c. # huwwa ?inta ti-ħibb ti-šrab ?eih?  
 Q.3SGM you IPFV.like.2SGM IPFV.drink.2SGM what  
 ‘What do you like to drink?’

The felicity of the question in (21b) confirms that *huwwa* is not tied to D-linked wh-phrases. But it is question (21c) that is interesting: The use of *huwwa* is felt to be rather awkward in that situation, but not because *huwwa* is incompatible with D-linking. *Huwwa* can readily occur with D-linked wh-phrases such as *?anhi+N* (=which+N) quite felicitously. What makes *huwwa* rather infelicitous in (21c) is probably something related to “politeness”: By using *huwwa* when offering something to drink to a guest, the speaker runs the risk of presupposing that the guest has already decided what to drink, which is probably not the case, and seems to run against a simple notion of hospitality: Give your guest a chance to decide.

This last point seems important to figuring out the subtle semantic/pragmatic properties of *huwwa*. Perhaps *huwwa* has a presuppositional feature that makes it incompatible with invitation/offer contexts. The use of *huwwa* indicates that the speaker assumes that the entity designated by the wh-phrase exists. While this can be conducive to discourse in other situations (cf. (20), for instance), it sounds like a face-threatening act, in the sociolinguistic sense, in invitation/offer contexts, since the speaker is not giving their addressee the chance to think about the invitation/offer, or perhaps even to reject it.

There is, however, good evidence that treating *huwwa* as a head with a presuppositional feature cannot be the whole story. In particular, all questions are presuppositional in a sense (e.g., “*Who ate the pizza?*” presupposes that “*Someone ate the pizza*”), whether or not they include a Q-particle. So, the question now can be restated as follows: What is the difference between presupposition in questions with a Q-particle and presupposition in questions without it?

In their discussion of the semantics/pragmatics of questions, Eilam and Lai (2009), following Romero and Han (2004) and Tomioka (2009), argue that not all types of questions are presuppositional, and that, to capture certain differences in syntactic behavior between different types of interrogative structures, a distinction needs to be made between *presupposition* and *epistemic bias*, the latter defined as in (22):

- (22) Bias: a speaker's belief, not necessarily shared by the hearer, that the probability that a proposition is true is greater than the probability that it is false.

To illustrate, Eilam and Lai argue that non-clefted wh-argument questions in English, being associated with bias, allow negative answers and suspension of the associated proposition of a

<sup>7</sup>In fact, as we will see below, *huwwa* can sometimes be infelicitous in some D-linking contexts

question, may occur in rhetorical questions, give rise to intervention effects of the Beck-type, and cannot function as antecedents for *too*. By contrast, clefted *wh*-argument questions, which are associated with presupposition, exhibit the reverse of these syntactic patterns. The approach is interesting because such patterns can be used as diagnostics to determine if a particular type of question involves bias or presupposition. For considerations of space, I cannot apply all diagnostics to EA data. Rather, I choose to focus on testing two of these diagnostics (felicity of negative answers and suspension) in four types of argument *wh*-questions (*wh*-in-situ, *wh*-in-situ introduced by *huwwa*, *wh*-ex-situ, and *wh*-ex-situ introduced by *huwwa*), and discuss their implications for the semantic/pragmatic properties of *huwwa* as well as the different types of *wh*-questions involved.

#### 4.1 Felicity of Negative Answers

The main claim for this diagnostic is that questions involving epistemic bias (e.g., *wh*-argument questions) are compatible with negative answers, whereas presuppositional questions (e.g., clefted *wh*-questions) are not:

- (23) a. Q: Who failed the test?           A: No one.  
       b. Q: Who is it that failed the test? A: #No one.

Replicating the test for EA *wh*-questions, we get the following paradigm of questions and answers:

- (24) a. Q: miin    siʔaT            fii   ʔil-ʕarabii?           A: maħadiš  
           who   failed.3SGM   in   the-Arabic                Nobody  
           ‘Who failed Arabic?’  
       b. Q: huwwa   miin   siʔaT            fii   ʔil-ʕarabii?           A: maħadiš  
           Q.3SGM   who   failed.3SGM   in   the-Arabic                Nobody  
           ‘Who failed Arabic?’  
       c. Q: miin   ʔilli   siʔaT            fii   ʔil-ʕarabii?           A: #maħadiš  
           who   COMP   failed.3SGM   in   the-Arabic                Nobody  
           ‘Who is it that failed Arabic?’  
       d. Q: huwwa   miin   ʔilli   siʔaT            fii   ʔil-ʕarabii?           A: ##maħadiš  
           Q.3SGM   who   COMP   failed.3SGM   in   the-Arabic                Nobody  
           ‘Who is it that failed Arabic?’

As we should expect, the judgments are quite subtle, hence should be taken with caution, but one can notice a contrast between in-situ (24a-b) and ex-situ (24c-d) interrogatives with regard to the felicity of negative answers. There also seems to be a contrast between clefts with the *Q*-particle (24d) and those without (24c), thereby indicating that *huwwa* somehow enhances the presuppositional nature of the question (though probably not enough on its own, as the felicity of a negative answer in (24b) shows). If the gradation in the felicity of negative answers noted here is indeed true, then we have an argument for a finer-grained approach to the interpretation of questions, one that would not only need to make use of a bias-presupposition distinction, but of even subtler distinctions on some sort of a presupposition scale/continuum.

#### 4.2 Felicity of Suspension

Another difference between bias and presupposition is that while the former may be suspended, the latter may not:

- (25) a. Who, if anyone, failed the test?  
       b. #Who is it that failed the test, if anyone?

Replicating again for EA with a conditional clause:

- (26) a. miin   siʔaT            fii   ʔil-ʕarabii   dah           ʔizaa   kaan  
           who   failed.3SGM   in   the-Arabic   DECL.3SGM   if       was.3SGM

- fii-h had siʔaT?  
 in-it someone failed.3SGM  
 ‘Who failed Arabic, if anyone did?’
- b. huwwa miin siʔaT fii ʔil-ʕarabii dah ʔizaa  
 Q.3SGM who failed.3SGM in the-Arabic DECL.3SGM if  
 kaan fii-h had siʔaT?  
 was.3SGM in-it someone failed.3SGM  
 ‘Who failed Arabic, if anyone did?’
- c. #miin ʔilli siʔaT fii ʔil-ʕarabii dah ʔizaa  
 who COMP failed.3SGM in the-Arabic DECL.3SGM if  
 kaan fii-h had siʔaT?  
 was.3SGM in-it someone failed.3SGM  
 ‘Who is it that failed Arabic, if anyone did?’
- d. ## huwwa miin ʔilli siʔaT fii ʔil-ʕarabii  
 Q.3SGM who COMP failed.3SGM in the-Arabic  
 dah ʔizaa kaan fii-h had siʔaT?  
 DECL.3SGM if was in-it someone failed.3SGM  
 ‘Who is it that failed Arabic, if anyone did?’

Once again, there seems to be a subtle gradation of felicity when it comes to suspension of the implied proposition due to the presence of the conditional clause.

What the contrast in behavior between the different types of wh-questions with regard to felicity of negative answers and suspension suggests is something along the lines of a presupposition scale for how much information the questioner presupposes, ranging from epistemic bias at one end to the highest degree of presupposition at the other end, with varying degrees of presupposition in between. The four types of EA wh-questions discussed here would thus fall at different points on such a scale, as shown in Figure 1:

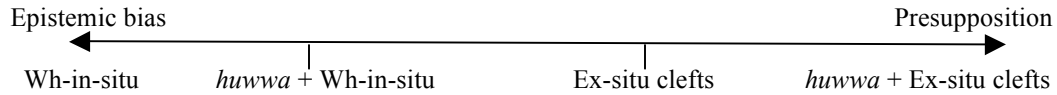


Figure 1: A presupposition scale for argument wh-questions in EA.

The obvious advantage of this approach is that it allows us to capture subtle distinctions in the semantics/pragmatics between multiple structures that seem to have the same function in the language. Under this proposal, the Q-particle *huwwa* is an Operator that has a general presuppositional feature, call it *Presup*, in addition to its interrogative and  $\phi$ -features. We can also characterize the demonstrative declarative operator *dah* noted earlier along the same lines:

- (27) a. *huwwa* =  $Op_{[+wh, +Presup, \ast]}$   
 b. *dah* =  $Op_{[-wh, +Presup, \ast]}$

Admittedly, more research is still needed to verify if this finer-grained approach is indeed on the right track. For one thing, further diagnostics should be applied to the types of questions discussed here. Also, other types of wh-questions in the language (those with an optional overt pronominal copula, wh-adjunct questions, yes-no questions, and alternative questions) need to be investigated along the same lines, an interesting topic that I leave to future research.<sup>8</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

<sup>8</sup>Notice that if the scale in Figure 1 is on the right track, then it is not surprising that *huwwa* can be used with yes-no questions, which obviously allow negative answers. *Huwwa*-questions are closer to the bias than to the presupposition end of the scale, unless of course they co-occur with clefts. This seems in compliance with the intuition that the probability of a yes-answer is a little higher than the probability of a no-answer when *huwwa* is used with yes-no questions.

In this paper, I have provided an analysis of some salient properties of wh-interrogatives in EA. In particular, I have argued, building on Soltan (to appear), that scope in wh-questions in EA is licensed via unselective binding by an interrogative operator, which can be null or overt, in the latter case surfacing as *huwwa*. If the interrogative operator binds a wh-phrase in the lexical domain, an in-situ wh-question arises; if it binds a wh-phrase in SpecFocP, ex-situ arises. In the second half of the paper, I have discussed the grammatical status of the Q-particle *huwwa*, arguing against Wahba's (1984) claim that *huwwa* is obligatorily needed to define the scope of in-situ wh-phrases. I have also provided empirical and theoretical evidence that an analysis of *huwwa* as derived from an underlying pronominal copula, along the lines of Eid 1992, is also problematic. Instead, I have argued that *huwwa* is a Q-morpheme that occurs in Force, has  $\phi$ -features, and a presuppositional feature. I have finally turned to the question of the semantic/pragmatic import of *huwwa*, arguing in favor of a fine-grained approach to the interpretation of questions. Under this approach, different types of wh-questions are associated with different degrees of presupposition, with epistemic bias at the lowest end of the scale. Evidence from the application of diagnostics such as felicity of negative answers and suspension suggests that this approach is promising, though, admittedly, future research on a wider range of data from EA and other languages will determine if this is indeed on the right track.

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Arabic Program  
 Middlebury College  
 Middlebury, VT 05753  
[usoltan@middlebury.edu](mailto:usoltan@middlebury.edu)