A Proposal for a Dichotomy in the Core of Arabic Syntax

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A Proposal

- Two basic word orders: "verbless sentences" and VSO.

- Verbless sentences have no dropped copula.

- Arabic is not a pro-drop language.

- SVO order is generated by combining V(S)O and the "verbless sentence" type: S+[VO].

- Though similar in some ways to several other analyses, the clausal nature of this proposal is new.

- Consistent with traditional Arabic grammar concepts *jumla fiʕliyya* (verbal clause) and *jumla ismiyya* (nominal clause)

- Also explains many other aspects of Arabic syntax.

1. Word Order in Arabic

- On the surface, Modern Standard Arabic has three word orders: VSX, SVX, and SX, where X stands for other arguments such as objects.

VSO:
Yadrus al-rajul al-ʕarabiya.
 studies the-man the-Arabic
'The man studies Arabic.'

SVO:
Al-rajul yadrus al-ʕarabiya.
the-man studies the-Arabic
'The man studies Arabic.'

TC:
Al-rajul kabiir.
the-man big
'The man is big.'

(TC = Topic-Comment)

1.1 The "null copula"

- Arabic "verbless" sentences are truly verbless.
  (cf. Benmamoun 2005 & 2008; Hazout 2010; Al-balushi 2012)

- Benmamoun & Shalash (forthcoming) show that even when a (new copula) form is available, it is not required; the gap is not accidental.

- Verbal copula *kaana* patterns with transitive verbs

Al-rajul   Taalib-un.   Kaana al-rajul   Taalib-an.
the-man student-NOM   was.3S the-man student-ACC
'The man is a student.'   'The man was a student.'

1.2 Verbless sentence structure

- Following Benmamoun (2008: 110):

```
              TP
            /    \
          NP      T'
                /    \
               T    NP/AP/PP
```
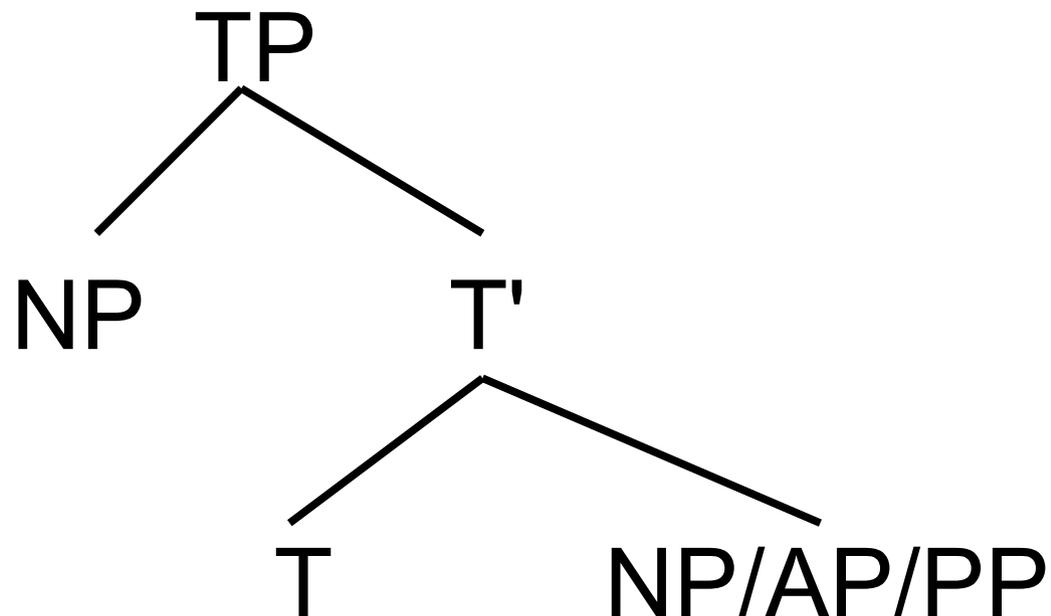
1.3 VSO and SVO asymmetries

- Pronouns

    – Allowed in SVO   <u>ana</u> adrus al-ʕarabiya

    – But not in VSO   *adrus <u>ana</u> al-ʕarabiya

    – Required in verbless sentences: *(<u>ana</u>) Taalib

- WH-movement (Aoun et al. 2010: 205):

    maaða ištrarat zaynab-u   *maaða zaynab-u ištrarat
    what buy.3fs Zaynab-NOM   what Zaynab-NOM buy.3fs
    'What did Zaynab buy?'

1.3 VSO and SVO asymmetries

- Subject-verb agreement

al-Talaab   yadrus-<u>uun</u> al-ʕarabiya
the-students   study.3-PL   the-Arabic
'The students study Arabic.'

*yadrus-<u>uun</u> al-Talaab al-3arabiya

yadrus   al-Talaab   al-ʕarabiya
study.3-Ø   the-students the-Arabic
'The students study Arabic.'

*al-Talaab yadrus al-3arabiya

1.4 Two clausal types

- Now we can add TP as a possible complement:

```
        TP
       /  \
     NP    T'
          /  \
         T    NP/AP/PP/TP
```
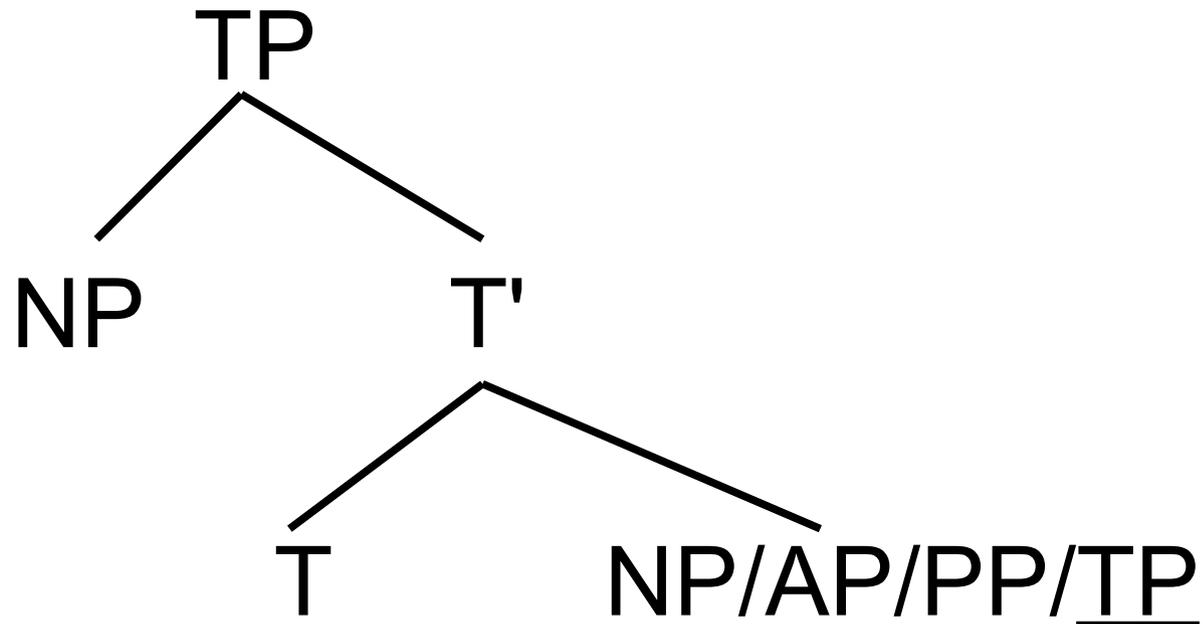
- VSO is a distinct unrelated sentence type.

2. Previous Accounts

- Verbless sentences and multiple-subject clauses in Arabic have received significant attention, especially recently.

- Although there have been strong arguments made that verbless sentences are truly verbless, a clausal analysis of multiple-subject clauses as presented here has not been pursued to my knowledge.

- This section will focus on the reasoning for such a proposal and its consistency with data from other proposals, while the next section will focus on its explanatory power across a range of phenomena.

2.1 Rizzi's Left Periphery

- An appealing first possibility is that these sentence-initial NPs are topics, and the word is often used to describe Arabic. However, they are not topics in the sense of Rizzi (1997).

  - Recursion: compatible, but strange in English:
    ??Mary, John, (he) saw (her)

    ana [ism-ii   Daniel]   'My name is Daniel'
    I   name-MY Daniel

  - Intuitively, this is not adjunction but predication.

  - Embedding:
    *You hope that books I read but newspapers I don't.

- Aoun et al. (2010: 209) argue against Focus.

2.1 Rizzi's Left Periphery

- Hazout (2010) defends the position that verbless sentences are not small clauses, which is compatible with the analysis presented earlier that accounts for SVO and verbless sentences as a single type.

- Based on the fact that verbless sentences require subjects (Alexopoulou et al. 2004; Kenstowicz 1989), it would be strange to think of them as topics.

- Landau (2011) argues for Left Dislocation, while Doron & Heycock (1999; 2003; 2010) argue for Broad Subjects.

2.2 Deriving SVO from S+[V(S)O]

- Soltan (2007) does consider SVO to be a derived word order, without movement from VSO. The argument is that the topic/subject is base generated in one of the functional projections.

- Soltan (2007: 77) proposes a "zone" of attachment for this subject in the functional domain. This is problematic because Heycock & Doron (2003: 98-99) show that conjunction is possible with different kinds of predicates. My clausal analysis offers a unified account for these subjects.

2.3 Broad Subjects

- Doron & Heycock (Doron & Heycock 1999; 2003; 2010; Alexopoulou et al. 2004) argue for "Broad Subjects"

    – Evidence that Broad Subjects are subjects.

    – Multiple subjects in a single clause

    – Attached in multiple Spec,TP nodes

        - Landau (2011: 140): Hebrew (and Arabic) have "no analogue to the Japanese BS construction. Hebrew clauses contain at most a single subject; whatever appears to be a "broad" subject is consistently a left-dislocated phrase."

        - Also, Daily-McCartney et al. (1999) argues against the original proposal in Ura (1994) for multiple subjects in one clause for theoretical reasons.

        - Best to maintain a theory with one subject per clause, as in my clausal layering analysis.

2.4 Spec,TP: how and why?

- Soltan (2007) argues against any A-movement in Arabic. Heycock & Doron (2003: 112) argue the same, though they maintain that Broad Subjects are in A-positions. Thus, they must be base generated.

- Benmamoun (2008) and Hazout (2010) suggest that the subject must be at least at TP. Due to Binding Theory, TP is a better choice than CP because TP creates a Binding Domain, while CP does not. These details will be discussed later.

3. Explanatory Power

- This section will discuss how several phenomena in Arabic grammar can be efficiently accounted for under this analysis.

    - Quantifier scope

    - Idiomatic interpretations

    - Semantic role of the subjects

    - Embedded clause types

    - Word order effects

    - Lack of reflexivity & "resumption"

3.1 Quantifier Scope

- Heycock & Doron (2003: 112) show that inverse scope reading is unavailable with broad subjects:

  A) minna-ga   konpyuta-ga   kowarete simatta (koto)
  everyone-NOM computer-NOM   broke   down (fact)

  B) minna-no   konpyuta-ga   kowarete simatta (koto)
  everyone-GEN computer-NOM   broke   down (fact)

- The "shared computer" reading is only available in (B), not with the Broad Subject in (A).

- Easily accounted for if there is no movement and if they are in separate clauses.

3.2 Idiomatic Interpretations

- Heycock & Doron (2003: 114) show that the same is true for idiomatic interpretations: they are not possible with Broad Subjects.

  šin-av   šel dani kvar   hikhu ot-an   pe'amim rabot
  teeth-his GEN Dani already blunt ACC-them   times   many

- Literal meaning only: 'Dani's teeth have been blunted many times.'

- Idiomatically, "to blunt teeth" would mean 'to scold'

- Likewise this is easily accounted for when the "Broad Subject" is actually in a higher clause.

3.3 Semantic role of the subjects

- Often the semantic relationship between the Broad Subject and predicate is less close than that with a Narrow Subject, for which Heycock & Doron (2003: 117-118) propose that Broad Subjects interact in with a certain type of predicate and create a dichotomy in verbal predicates.

- This is not needed, however: if the Broad Subject is not in the clause, then it is easily explained why it is often apparently in a weaker relationship with the predicate than Narrow Subjects are.

3.4 Embedded Clause Types

- Kenstowicz (1989) looks at the complementizer *innu* and shows that it blocks pro-drop. This is explained if we assume that *innu* requires a certain type of clause, that is: one with a subject, which is now a single type of clause in this account.

- Kenstowicz (1989: 267) also shows double negation patterns reminiscent of Quantifier Scope phenomenon presented earlier. Postverbal negatively quantified subjects (e.g., *no*) cause a double negative with the verb. Preverbal subjects do not, the expected pattern if they are clause-external.

3.5 Word order effects

- VSO and SVO are possible, while SOV and OSV and OVS are not (Mohammad 2000; judgments from native speakers, except in formal or Classical contexts with case marking), suggesting that there is no scrambling (for objects) and therefore explaining word order. Word order in Arabic is not free. It is determined by the syntax.

- Object-fronting (e.g., OSV) is possible, but only with a resumptive pronoun. See the next section.

3.6 CLLD and reflexivity

- Now, Clitic-left dislocation (CLLD), data from Aoun et al. (2010: 193) can be immediately explained:

  kariim zeina   ʕarranfnee-ha   ʕal-ee
  Karim Zeina introduced.1P-her   to-him
  'Karim, Zeina, we introduced her to him.'

- The resumptive pronouns appear because the inner TP is a separate clause and the arguments must be filled. The subjects are in higher TPs.

- We would expect reflexives in this context, but the subjects are not in the (TP) Binding Domain.

3.7 "Resumption"

- Three contexts for RPs in Arabic:

  - Relative clauses (Aoun et al. 2010: 172):

    aʕrifu l-mumaθilata [TP allati [TP sayuqabilu-<u>ha</u> saami]]
    'I know the actress [that [Sami will meet]].'

    - The relative pronoun is a higher-TP subject, which also explains the absense of subject resumptives.

  - Questions (Jassim 2011:):
    meno [zarat-<u>hum</u> nada]   'Who did Nada visit <u>them</u>?'

    - Resumption only for arguments, where the positions are required in the lower TP (Jassim 2011: 23).

  - Normal sentences (CLLD), as shown in 3.6.

- In fact, there are no "resumptive" pronouns at all in Arabic. They are regular pronouns.

4. Revisiting the "Dichotomy"

- In fact, it appears that all of the other facts may follow from a single conclusion: Arabic TP does not require a VP.

    – However, there is also reason to believe that verbal and verbless sentences are externally distinct, as shown by the selectional properties of *anna/inna* and *an/in*. (Goodenkauf 2011: 4; Kenstowicz 1999)

    – If there is still a dichotomy, then is it based on T? Spec,TP? Multiple "TP" projections?

5.1 Summary

- Although it's a significant change in the analysis of Arabic and presents some challenges for syntactic theory, it actually is efficient in that it explains three seemingly unrelated puzzles in Arabic syntax:

  i) verbless sentences

  ii) Broad Subjects

  iii) VSO and SVO asymmetries

  Additionally, it also explains:

  iv) status (lack) of pro-drop

  v) word orders (no/minimal scrambling/movement)

  vi) resumptive pronouns

- Avoids the complexity of previous analyses.

5.2 Future Research

- Does this proposal account for cross-linguistic data? Arabic dialects? Hebrew? Irish? Japanese? Spanish (pro-drop)? French (topics)?

- There appears to be a diachronic trajectory: Classical Arabic (scrambling, case marking) → Modern Standard Arabic (described here) → modern dialectal variation (including the development of a pronominal copula in some dialects of Arabic, and Hebrew)

- Interaction with WH-movement, including multiple WH-movement

5.2 Future Research

- VSO analysis (see Benmamoun 1999). Is there no subject in TP? Or is there movement to some higher projection? In fact, by recognizing two different kinds of subject, it may be possible to maintain the VSO-internal Subject.

- Exact nature of TP projection and verbless T-head

- Correlation between VSO and present tense and SVO and past tense (Al-balushi 2012; Benmamoun 2005) due to default presentness nonverbal T-head?

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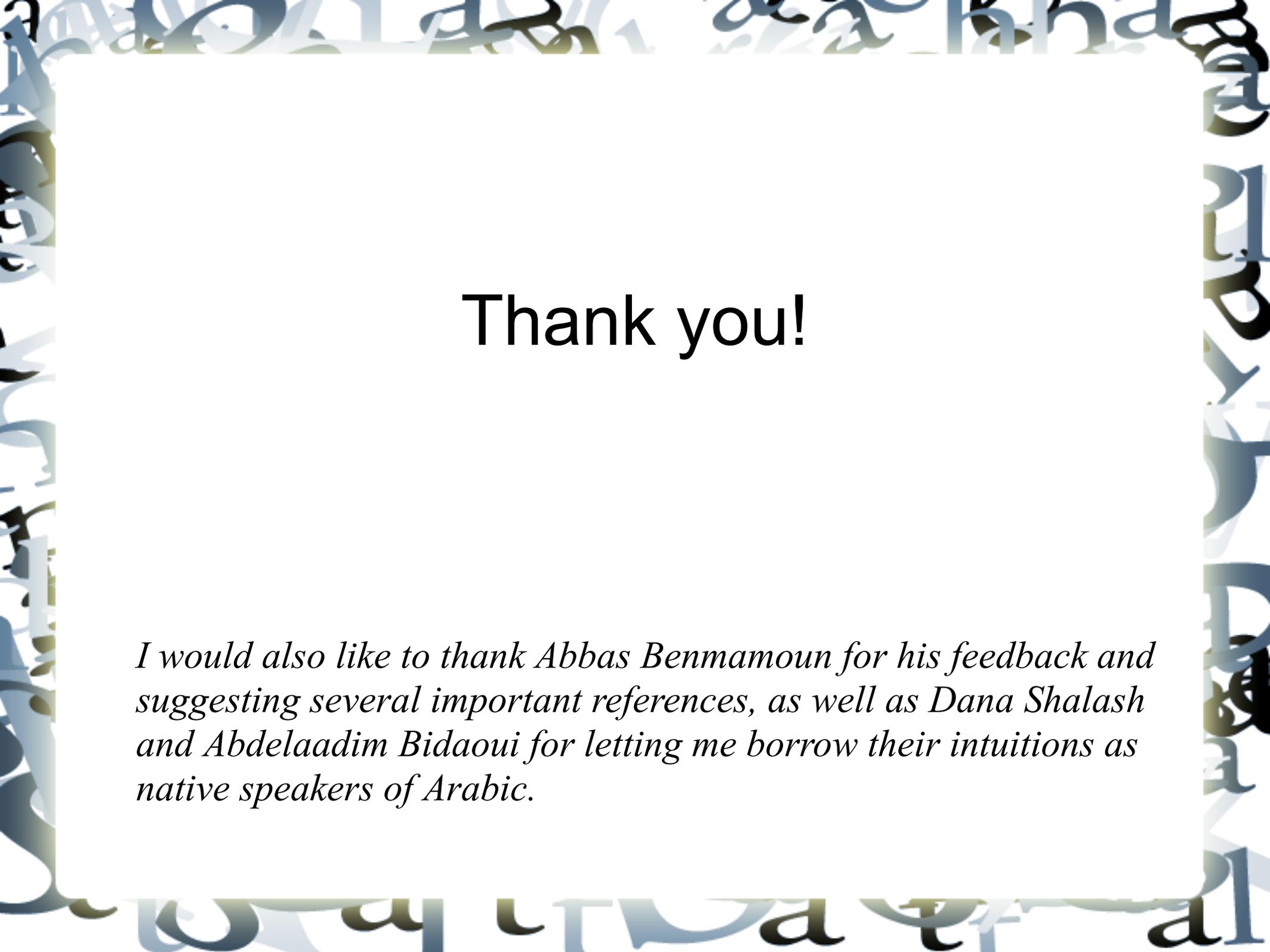
Thank you!

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