

Definiteness Effect in Najdi Arabic Fiih-Sentences: Towards a Pragmatic Account

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Abstract:

The notion of the definiteness effect (DE), which excludes the occurrence of definite NPs as pivots in existential sentences, has attracted researchers to provide various syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic accounts to explain this phenomenon. Whereas the syntactic account proposes that the DE can be explained in terms of the structure of existential sentences, the semantic and pragmatic accounts suggest that it can be better explained in terms of the meaning of existential sentences. This paper aims to provide an account for the DE in Najdi Arabic (NA) existential sentences. It has been observed that although definite NPs cannot generally occur as pivots in NA existentials, they may sometimes be acceptable. To explain this inconsistent behavior, I assume that the NA fiih-sentences can be divided into existential and list sentences. The DE is only evident in the former and is lacking in the latter. In the list sentence, it is the list itself that is being predicated to exist, and thus, there is no restriction on its members. I also assume that the DE follows from the notion of novelty. Indefinite NPs are allowed as pivots in NA existentials because they represent hearer-new entities. The anomaly of definite NPs in NA existentials is due to the incompatibility of placing hearer-old entities in a position reserved only for new entities. However, in the list sentence, the list itself represents a hearer-new entity; thus, its items can be definite NPs.

Keywords: definiteness effect, fiih-sentences, list sentences, pivot, Najdi Arabic

1. Introduction

Since Milsark (1974, 1977), it has been observed that one of the main characteristics of existential sentences, crosslinguistically, is the definiteness effect (DE)¹, or definiteness restriction, which bars the occurrence of definite noun phrases (NPs) as pivots (i.e., the nominal item in existential sentences), as shown in (1) from Najdi Arabic (NA).

- (1) fiih **ridʒdʒaal** / (***r-ridʒdʒaal**)_{pivot} b-l-bait
 there man the-man in-the-house
 ‘There is a man (*the man) in the house.’

This interesting phenomenon has received considerable attention in the literature. A number of different accounts have been provided for the DE that all seek to explain why definite NPs function poorly as pivots in existential sentences. These different accounts may be classified into three types: syntactic (Higginbotham 1987; Mohammad 1989; Moro 1997; Witkoš 2004), semantic (Barwise & Cooper 1981; Chung & Ladusaw 2004; Keenan 1987; Kuno 1971; Law 2011; McCloskey 2014; McNally 1998; Milsark 1974, 1977; Sabbagh 2009; Stowell 1978; Zucchi 1995), and pragmatic (Abbott 1993; Kim 2013; Pollard & Sag 1994; Prince 1992; Rando & Napoli 1978; Ward & Birner 1995; Ziv 1982). The syntactic account suggests that the DE can be explained in terms of the syntactic structure of existential sentences, whereas the semantic and pragmatic accounts, although entirely different from each other, propose that the DE can be better explained in terms of the meaning of existential sentences.

This paper deals with the DE in existential sentences in NA, a variety of Arabic that is acquired natively and spoken by people living largely in the central parts of Saudi Arabia. The paper particularly aims to provide an account for the phenomenon of the DE in NA existential sentences. It has been demonstrated that although definite NPs cannot generally occur as pivots in NA existential sentences, they are sometimes acceptable. To account for this inconsistent behavior of the DE in NA existential sentences, I adopt the pragmatic accounts suggested by numerous researchers (e.g., Rando & Napoli 1975; Ward & Birner 1995) and assume that NA fiih-

¹ The following abbreviations are used in this paper: 3 = third person, CMH = Colloquial Modern Hebrew, DE = definiteness effect, Fem = feminine, JA = Jordanian Arabic, NA = Najdi Arabic, Neg = negative, NP = noun phrase, PA = Palestinian Arabic, SAA = Spoken Arabic of Aleppo, Sg = singular.

sentences can be divided into two types: existential and list sentences. The DE is only evident in the former type but is lacking in the latter. In the list sentence, it is the list itself, not its members, that is being predicated to exist. Thus, there is no restriction on the list members. I also assume that the DE follows from the notion of novelty, which is assumed to be the main function of the existential sentence. As a result, indefinite NPs are allowed as pivots in NA existential sentences because they represent hearer-new entities. The anomaly of definite NPs in NA existential sentences is due to the incompatibility of placing familiar or hearer-old entities in a position reserved only for new and unfamiliar entities. However, in the list sentence, the list itself represents a hearer-new entity; thus, its items can be definite NPs.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. Section (2) discusses the distribution of the DE in NA existential sentences. Section (3) reviews the relevant literature on the DE phenomenon. Section (4) provides an account of the DE in NA existential sentences. Section (5) concludes the work and suggests avenues for future work.

2. Distribution of the DE in NA existential sentences

The existential sentence, as shown in (2) from NA, refers to a noncanonical sentence type that asserts the (non)existence or (non)presence of someone or something (Abdel-Ghafer & Jarbou 2015; Bentley et al. 2013; Jarad 2015; Kuno 1971; McNally 1992, 1998, 2011, 2016; Milsark 1974, 1977; Moro 2006). This type of sentence consists of a number of syntactic items, including an expletive, a nominal pivot, and a coda expression, as illustrated in (2)¹.

- (2) fiih{expletive} walad{pivot} b-l-yurfah{coda}
 there boy in-the-room.Fem.Sg
 ‘There is a boy in the room.’

As seen in (2), the expletive item is the existential pronoun, the pivot² is the nominal item, and the coda is the expression that generally follows or precedes the pivot. It has been observed that only the pivot is universally

¹ The data reported in this paper were provided by the researcher himself and some other informants, who are all native speakers of NA.

² Chomsky (1993, 2000, 2001) uses the term "*associate*" instead of the pivot.

obligatory; the other items may not be available, or may be optional, in existential sentences in some languages (Bentley et al. 2013; Francez 2009; McNally 2011). In existential sentences, the presence of the pivot item is universally obligatory because this item represents the entity whose existence is being asserted. One of the grammatical properties of pivots is that they must be nominals (Hazout 2004; Lasnik 1995). This property is substantiated in NA existential sentences. In other words, the pivot item in NA existentials must always be an NP, as illustrated in (3.a); it cannot be from any other syntactic category, such as an adjective or verb, as illustrated in (3.b-c).

- (3) a) fiih walad b-l-yurfah
 there boy in-the-room.Fem.Sg
 ‘There is a boy in the room.’
- b) *fiih gas'iir b-l-yurfah
 there short in-the-room.Fem.Sg
 ‘*There is short in the room.’
- c) *fiih ya-lfab b-l-yurfah
 there 3-play in-the-room.Fem.Sg
 ‘*There is play in the room.’

Another interesting property of nominal pivots is the notion of the DE, which bars the occurrence of definite NPs as pivots, i.e., the nominal pivot must be indefinite, as shown in (3.a) above from NA (see, e.g., Abbott 1993, 1997; Francez 2009; Freeze 1992; Jenkins 1975; Kim 2013; Lasnik 1995; McNally 1992, 1998, 2011, 2016; Milsark 1974, 1977; Moro 1997, 2006; Rando & Napoli 1978; Safir 1985; Stowell 1978; Ward & Birner 1995; Ziv 1982). As pointed out by McNally (1998) and Ward and Birner (1995), the DE refers to the anomaly or ungrammaticality of definite NPs as pivots in existential sentences. This section discusses the distribution of DE in NA existential sentences and compares it with that observed in other numerous languages.

The status of the DE differs in various languages. It is attested in many languages, and very few languages do not exhibit it. For example, in existential sentences in English, the most studied language, the DE is well-

attested. As illustrated in (4)¹, definite NPs, which include NPs with a definite article (4.a), proper names (4.b), personal pronouns (4.c), universal quantified NPs (4.d), and demonstrative NPs (4.e), are not allowed as pivots in English existential sentences (see, e.g., Abbott 1997; Francez 2009; Kim 2013; McCloskey 2014; McNally 2011; Moro 2006; Rando & Napoli 1978; Stowell 1978; Woisetschlaeger 1983; Zucchi 1995).

(4) a) ??There is the student in the garden.

b) ??There is John in the garden.

c) ??There is he in the garden.

d) ??There is every/all student/s in the garden.

(Zucchi 1995, pp. 33-74)

e) ??There is that book in the library. (Francez 2009, p. 25)

Nonetheless, research has shown that these definite NPs may be used in English existential sentences but are interpreted differently. As will be demonstrated in section (3), a number of researchers (e.g., Abbott 1997; Milsark 1974, 1977; Rando & Napoli 1978; Ward & Birner 1995) have suggested that the possible occurrence of definite NPs in English existential sentences could be attributed to the list interpretation, rather than existential interpretation, of these sentences.

Likewise, Huang (1987) points out that in Chinese existential sentences, specifically within you-sentences², NPs with definite or demonstrative determiners, proper names, pronouns, and universal quantified NPs cannot be used as pivots, as illustrated in (5).

(5) a) You yiben shu zai zhuo-shang

have one book at table-top

‘There is a book on the table.’

b) *You neiben shu zai zhuo-shang

have that book at table-top

‘??There is that book on the table.’

c) *You Lisi/ta/meige ren zai wuzi-li

¹ It should be noted that the researchers use different notations regarding the grammaticality of these examples. Whereas most of them use the double question marks (??) for these sentences, some of them use the asterisk (*).

² Huang (1987) discusses four types of existential sentences in Chinese. See this source for further discussion of Chinese existential sentences.

have Lisi/he/every man at room-in
 ‘??There is Lisi/him/everybody in the room.’

(Huang 1987, pp. 73-74)

As for the DE in Arabic, Jarad (2015) and Mohammad (1989), without providing a complete descriptive and analytic account of this phenomenon, report that the DE is attested in the existential sentences in the dialects of Spoken Arabic of Aleppo (SAA) and Palestinian Arabic (PA), as illustrated in (6). They point out that the expletive *fii/fiih* in these dialects never allows a definite NP to follow it.

(6) a) *fī l-malja’ taħt l-ard
 there the-shelter under the ground
 ‘??There is the shelter under the ground.’ (Jarad 2015, p. 249)

b) *fiih le-ktaab maſ mona l
 there the-book with Mona
 ‘Mona has the book with her.’ (Mohammad 1989, p. 25)

Despite its general prevalence, there exist some languages that do not exhibit the DE in their existential sentences. For instance, the DE is not substantiated in Irish existential sentences (McCloskey, 2014). As demonstrated in (7), in Irish existentials, it is acceptable to have NPs with definite and demonstrative determiners, proper names, and pronouns as pivots. Bentley et al. (2013) also assert that in some languages, such as archaic Campidanese, Nourese, and Logudorese Sardinian, pivots can be definite or indefinite, as illustrated in (8) from Logudorese Sardinian.

(7) a) Ní raibh na purgóidí ann na laethanta úd a tá inniu.
 NEG be.PAST the drugs in-it the days those C be-PRES today
 ‘There weren’t the drugs in those days that there are today.’

b) Bhí fhios ag a’ diúlach go raibh sí seo ann.
 be.PAST knowledge at the guy C be.PAST she DEM in-it
 ‘The guy knew that there was this person.’

c) Táimse ann ó roimh Ábraham a bheith ann.
 I-am in-it from before Abraham be.NONFIN in-it

¹ This sentence seems to be a possessive sentence, not an existential sentence. See Eid (1993) for further discussion on copular, possessive, and existential sentences in Arabic.

‘I have existed since before Abraham existed.’

- d) Bhí sé ann roimh mo linn.
be.PAST he in-it before my time
‘He existed before my time.’

(McCloskey 2014, pp. 362-364)

- (8) a) Bi sun sas piseddas
PF be.3PL the girls
‘There are the girls.’

- b) B’ at medas piseddas
PF have.3SG many girls
‘There are many girls.’

(Bentley et al. 2013, p. 7)

As in English, Chinese, and other Arabic varieties, the DE is evident in NA existential sentences. At first glance, it appears that NPs with definite and demonstrative determiners, proper names, personal pronouns, and universal quantified NPs are barred from occurring as pivots in NA existential sentences, as illustrated in (9). To realize the ungrammaticality or anomaly of the examples in (9), which contain definite NPs, compare them with the grammatical and felicitous example in (10), which contains an indefinite NP pivot.

- (9) a) ??fiih r-rid3d3aal b-l-bait
there the-man in-the-house
‘??There is the man in the house.’

- b) ??fiih ðaak r-rid3d3aal b-l-bait
there that the-man in-the-house
‘??There is that man in the house.’

- c) ??fiih Ahmad b-l-bait
there Ahmad in-the-house
‘??There is Ahmad in the house.’

- d) ??fiih anaa b-l-bait
there I in-the-house
‘??There is I in the house.’

e) ??fiih kill r-ridʒaal b-l-bait
 there all the-men in-the-house
 ‘??There are all men in the house.’

(10) fiih ridʒdʒaal b-l-bait
 there man in-the-house
 ‘There is a man in the house.’

It should be pointed out that although the sentences in (9) with definite NPs in the pivot position are ungrammatical or anomalous, such is not always true. In other words, each of these sentences with definite pivots seems to be acceptable (i.e., grammatical and felicitous) in NA when it is used as a response to a question. For example, all of the sentences in (9) may serve as a response to a question like “min fiih blbait?” ‘Who is there in the house?’.

This inconsistent behavior of the DE in NA existential sentences raises two challenging questions: Why does the definite NP generally function poorly as a pivot in NA existential sentences? Why is it sometimes acceptable? Before presenting my account of the DE in NA existential sentences, let us discuss in the next section the different accounts that have been suggested in the literature for the DE in various languages.

3. Previous accounts

There is long literature on the DE, but in this section, I review only the works of immediate relevance. These works can be classified into three types: syntactic accounts, semantic accounts, and pragmatic accounts. The following subsections discuss each of these three accounts.

3.1 Syntactic accounts

Very few researchers (e.g., Higginbotham 1987; Mohammad 1989; Moro 1997; Witkoś 2004) have suggested various syntactic accounts for the DE. As suggested by Higginbotham (1987) and Moro (1997), only NPs with determiners of adjectival character are allowed in the pivot position in existential sentences. Based on their definition of determiners of adjectival character, determiners such as some, one, and two are of adjectival character, whereas determiners such as the and every are not (i.e., cannot be interpreted adjectively), and thus the NPs associated with them cannot occur in the pivot position. This account indicates that the DE follows from the type of determiners that can be used in the pivot position.

Mohammad (1989) also argues that the expletive *fiih* is required in PA copular sentences¹ to license the indefinite subject, as shown in (11). He treats the pivot as a subject and the coda as a predicate.

(11) a) **bent be-d-daar*
girl in-the-house
'A girl is in the house.'

b) *fiih walad be-d-daar*
there boy in-the-house
'There is a boy in the house.'

(Mohammad 1989, pp. 6-19)

Based on this argument, Mohammad suggests that if the expletive *fiih* is followed by a sentence that consists of a subject and predicate (i.e., the pivot and coda), then the subject of this sentence (i.e., the pivot NP) must be indefinite. This generalization does not hold in NA as there exist simple existential sentences that do not have codas, as shown in (12). Such sentences present counterevidence against Mohammad's generalization, demonstrating that the DE can occur even if the item following the expletive is not a sentence but a simple NP.

(12) *fiih ?izʕaadʒ (*l-?izʕaadʒ)*
there noise the-noise
'There is noise (*the noise).'

Witkoś (2004) provides a different syntactic account for the DE in English existential sentences. He argues that the expletive *there*, which is a dummy element, is merged in the head D, which takes the pivot as its nominal complement. The fact that *there* is located in the head D forces the NP with which it merges to be bare and thus indefinite. This account explains why only indefinite NPs are allowed as pivots. This syntactic analysis by Witkoś cannot be maintained. As argued by Abdel-Ghafer and Jarbou (2015), in Jordanian Arabic (JA) existential sentences, it is sometimes possible for the expletive *fii* to co-occur with definite pivots, as shown in (13).

(13) A: *ʃuu fii hunaak?*
what there there
'What do we have over there?'

¹ The work of Mohammad (1989) was mainly about copular sentences in PA.

B: fii HaaD li-ktaab, wi-fwayyit dafaater
 there this the-book and-some notebooks
 ‘There’s a book and some notebooks.’

(Abdel-Ghafer & Jarbou 2015, p. 170)

The possible occurrence of definite NPs in the pivot position, as illustrated in section (2), shows that these syntactic accounts are inadequate and thus cannot be used to explain the DE in NA existential sentences. Let us consider the second alternative account, specifically the semantic account, in the next subsection.

3.2 Semantic accounts

Numerous semantic accounts have been provided for the DE (Barwise & Cooper 1981; Chung & Ladusaw 2004; Keenan 1987; Kuno 1971; Law 2011; McCloskey 2014; McNally 1998; Milsark 1974, 1977; Sabbagh 2009; Stowell 1978; Zucchi 1995). For instance, Milsark (1974, 1977) argues that only NPs with weak determiners, such as *a*, *some*, and number words, are allowed in the pivot position in existential sentences, whereas NPs with strong determiners, such as *every*, *all*, and *the*, are disallowed. According to his account, weak determiners are not quantificational, whereas strong determiners are quantificational (i.e., universal or proportional quantifiers). Thus, the occurrence of any strong determiner in the pivot position in existential sentences is expected to be anomalous because there be is taken as an existential quantifier, which would result in double quantification on the pivot NP (i.e., existential quantification in existential sentences and universal quantification). However, in the list sentence, in which it is acceptable to have definite NPs in the pivot position, as shown in (14), Milsark argues that it is the entire list that is being predicated to exist, and hence, the notion of DE is irrelevant. In this latter case, the existential reading is blocked, thereby forcing the list reading. Following this account of Milsark, Stowell (1978) also argues that the constructions in (14), though not ungrammatical, have an interpretation distinct from that of typical existential sentences, as in (15). They instead have a list interpretation, as illustrated in (16), in which they can serve as a response to a question.

- (14) a) !There is the man in the closet.
 b) !There was John playing with Suzie.

- (15) a) There is a man in the closet.
 b) There was a child playing with Suzie.

(16) A: Who was playing with Suzie?

B: Well, there was John playing with Suzie, there was Danny playing with Suzie, and a few other kids too.

(Stowell 1978, p. 460)

In her work on donkey sentences, Heim (1982) suggests that the definite determiner *the* is not a quantifier¹. This fact argues against Milsark's account, which assumes that the definite determiner *the* is a quantifier and hence must be barred from occurring in the pivot position in existential sentences.

Inspired by the work of Milsark, Barwise and Cooper (1981) argue that when there-sentences include a strong quantifier, such as *the*, *all*, *every*, *each*, *this*, and *that*, they are tautological, which explains why they are ill-formed. For instance, the sentence in (17), which contains the determiner *every*, is true in every model. This determiner is classified as a strong determiner and thus cannot be used in the pivot position.

(17) Every gnu is a gnu. (Barwise & Cooper 1981, p. 182)

Barwise and Cooper add that since existentials are used to assert the existence or presence of an individual, expressions that presuppose the existence of that individual, such as NPs with definite and demonstrative determiners, proper nouns, and pronouns, cannot be used in the pivot position. Kuno (1971) also argues that these expressions are disallowed as pivots due to the absurdity of asserting the existence or presence of entities that are already proposed to exist. In alignment with the counterargument suggested by Heim above, Zucchi (1995) points out that the sentence in (18.a), which is based on the account of Barwise and Cooper, has the same truth conditions of (18.b) and thus should also be deviant. Nonetheless, this is not the case, as the sentence in (18.a) is grammatical².

(18) a) Every student in the garden exists.

b) ??There are all students in the garden.

(Zucchi 1995, pp. 33-39)

Furthermore, Keenan (1987) suggests that only NPs that belong to the class of existential NPs are allowed as pivots in existential sentences. The determiners *every* and *all* do not denote existential functions and thus cannot occur in existential sentences. Zucchi (1995) points out that the Keenan's

¹ See Heim (1982) for further discussion on definite and indefinite determiners.

² See Zucchi (1995) for more arguments against Barwise and Cooper's (1995) account of the DE.

account of the DE does not explain why only existential NPs are allowed as pivots in existential sentences.

In her substantial work, McNally (1998) suggests that the DE cannot be accounted for from a single generalization or principle. McNally argues that the DE can be explained through the selectional restriction required by the existential predicate on its argument. The existential predicate in English (i.e., *there be*), which is similar to the predicate *be* instantiated, holds of expressions that are property-denoting. That is, the intransitive existential predicate requires its argument (i.e., the pivot) to have the denotation of a one-place property. Thus, any DP (e.g., indefinites) that can denote a property will be expected in the pivot position. In contrast, the DPs with strong determiners (e.g., definite DPs and universal quantified NPs), which cannot denote properties, are barred from occurring in the pivot position in existential sentences¹. Similarly, but with a different mode of composition, Chung and Ladusaw (2004) argue that since quantificational and definite DPs are not property-denoting, they are excluded in existential sentences. Sabbagh (2009) uses McNally's analysis to account for the DE in Tagalog; specifically, the existential predicate, *mayroón* in (19), in Tagalog existential sentences has the denotation of an existential quantifier ($\lambda P\exists x[P(x)]$). Thus, the DE is a consequence of the denotation of the existential predicate, which is assumed to be an existential quantifier.

(19) *Mayroón-ng aksidente dito kahapon*
 exist.there-L accident here yesterday
 'There was an accident here yesterday.' (Sabbagh 2009, p. 679)

Nevertheless, McNally points out that not all quantificational NPs are barred from existential sentences. As shown in (20.a), universal quantified NPs may occur as pivots, but only when they quantify over properties, kinds, or sorts. However, in example (20.b), the NP *every doctor* ranges over a particular (doctors) and thus cannot occur as a pivot. McNally asserts that crosslinguistically quantificational NPs are acceptable as pivots as long as they quantify over properties or kinds. Although McNally's account offers important insights into the unacceptability of NPs with definite determiners and some universal quantified NPs as pivots, it falls short in explaining clearly the unacceptability of the other types of definites, such as proper names and personal pronouns.

¹ Recently, McCloskey (2014) has used McNally's (1998) account to explain the DE in English.

- (20) a) There was every kind of doctor at the convention.
b) *There was every doctor at the convention.

(McNally 1998, p. 357)

Law (2011) suggests a syntactic and semantic account for the DE in Malagasy existential sentences. As shown in (21), demonstrative NPs, strong quantified NPs, and proper names are disallowed as pivots in Malagasy existential sentences¹.

- (21) a) *misy ity zaza ity mihira.
exist this child this sing.ACT
'There is this child singing.'

- b) *misy ny olon-drehetra mihira.
exist DET people-all sing.ACT
'There is everyone singing.'

- c) *misy i Rabe.
exist Rabe
'There's Rabe.'

(Law 2011, p. 1620)

On the one hand, Law argues that the demonstrative NP is barred from the pivot position due to vacuous quantification; there is no variable for the existential quantifier to bind. This is based on his semantic analysis of Malagasy existentials, which suggests that the existential predicate *-isy* in Malagasy existential sentences functions as an existential quantifier that binds a variable supplied by the pivot. On the other hand, Law argues that other NPs are disallowed in the pivot position because strong quantifiers and proper names cannot generally occur in predicate positions, as illustrated in (22). It should be mentioned that Law has not discussed the (im)possible occurrence of NPs with definite determiners in the pivot position in Malagasy existentials.

- (22) a) *(ny) zazalahy rehetra ny mpianatra.
DET boy all DET student
'The students are all (the) boys.'

- b) *i Rabe ny mpianatra.

¹ See Law (2011) for further discussion on the behavior of the DE in other Malagasy existential constructions.

Rabe DET student
 ‘The student is Rabe.’

(Law 2011, p. 1621)

Lastly, Zucchi (1995) suggests that proper names and pronouns are barred from occurring in the pivot position in English existentials for the same reasons suggested for NPs with strong determiners. In other words, Zucchi considers these NPs as generalized quantifiers that have the same denotation as other strong quantifiers, such as *all*, *every*, and *the*.

As observed above, most of the semantic accounts proposed for the DE are inadequate and have shown to be associated with numerous flaws. There still exists another alternative account for the DE from a pragmatic standpoint. This account will be discussed in the following subsection.

3.3 Pragmatic accounts

In the literature, a number of researchers have proposed pragmatic accounts for the DE (Abbott 1993; Kim 2013; Pollard & Sag 1994; Prince 1992; Rando & Napoli 1978; Ward & Birner 1995; Ziv 1982). The most prominent of these, that by Rando and Napoli (1978), provides an account for the DE in English *there*-sentences that relies on two assumptions: (i) the separation of *there*-sentences into existential and list sentences and (ii) the notion of anaphoricity. On the first assumption, Rando and Napoli suggest that there are two types of *there*-sentences in English: an existential sentence, as in (23), and a list sentence, as in (24)¹. The former expresses the existence or presence of someone or something, whereas the latter often occurs as a response to a question. While the existential sentence allows only indefinite NPs, the list sentence allows both indefinite and definite NPs.

(23) There’s a (*the) woman in the house.

(24) Q: What’s worth visiting here?

A: There’s the park, a very nice restaurant, and the library. That’s all as far as I’m concerned.

(Rando & Napoli 1978, pp. 300-301)

¹ Rando and Napoli (1978) argue that these two sentences have different intonational patterns. In a list sentence all the items except the last one have a rising intonation. The most natural intonation in existential sentences is the early-fall pattern.

Based on this assumption, it appears that Rando and Napoli follow Milsark's (1974, 1977) account and attribute the possible occurrence of definite NPs in there-sentences to the fact that this sentence is a list sentence, not an existential. In the list sentence, definites are allowed because what is predicated to exist is the entire list, not its components. In other words, the list, but not its items, functions as an indefinite argument akin to the indefinite NP pivot in typical existential sentences. Consequently, there is no constraint on the items in the list sentence; they may be indefinite, definite, universal quantified NP, nonuniversally quantified NP, etc. This assumption has been adopted by some researchers. For example, Pollard and Sag (1994) argue that a list interpretation, rather than the existential interpretation, will be obtained with definite pivots. Without providing a fully explanatory analysis, Mohammad (1989) also assumes that the possible occurrence of definite NPs in PA existential sentences, as shown in (25), could be attributed to the fact that these sentences have a list reading. The example in (25.a) can be used to answer a question like "How shall we go to Amman?", whereas the example in (25.b) can be used to answer a question like "Whom shall we send?".

(25) a) fiih l-baaS we-t-taksi
there the-bus and-the-cab
'There are the bus and the cab.'

b) fiih Hmad w-mona w-rasmiyye
there Ahmed and-Mona and-Rasmiyye
'There are Ahmed, Mona, and Rasmiyye.'

(Mohammad 1989, p. 26)

On the second assumption, the notion of anaphoricity (i.e., familiarity), Rando and Napoli argue that an NP is anaphoric if it has been previously introduced into the discourse or if it refers to someone or something known to both the hearers and the speakers. As a result, definite NPs are mostly anaphoric because they either appear in previous discourse or have unique references in the real world. Given this assumption, they suggest that in existential sentences only nonanaphoric NPs can occur in the pivot position, whereas in list sentences it is the list itself, rather than its items, that must be nonanaphoric. In other words, in the list sentence, the items on the list can be definite since it is the list that supposed to be nonanaphoric. Rando and Napoli point out that the list is nonanaphoric if some of its items are unknown (i.e., must be new information). In short, the

arguments, which are the pivot NP in existential sentences and the list in list sentences, must be nonanaphoric.

In his discussion of the DE in Colloquial Modern Hebrew (CMH), Ziv (1982) argues that the possible occurrence of definite NPs as pivots in CMH existential sentences, as shown in (26), does not raise issues for the DE. Following the account proposed by Rando and Napoli (1978) for English there-sentences, Ziv suggests that this construction in CMH has a list interpretation, rather than an existential interpretation¹. This analysis is supported by the fact that the sentence in (26) can serve as an appropriate response to a question like "Who is teaching linguistics at MIT this year?". Thus, this construction does not assert the existence of entities but rather serves as a reminder of the presence of someone or something in a given location.

(26) yeš et xomski be am ay ti

exist. def. Chomsky

'Lit: There is Chomsky at M.I.T.'

(Ziv 1982, p. 75)

Equally important, Abbott (1993) assumes that the function of the existential sentence is to draw the hearer's attention to the existence or presence of some entity denoted by the pivot NP. In light of this assumption, asserting the existence of an entity that is familiar to the hearer—for example, definite NPs—will be anomalous. However, asserting the existence of an entity as a response to a request for this entity will not be anomalous. Abbott argues against the assumption of Rando and Napoli that considers the list sentence as a distinct class. She instead suggests that in a list sentence, the speaker attracts the hearer's attention to the existence of the items on the list, rather than asserting the list with its items. This argument is consistent with her proposed function of existential sentences.

Lastly, Ward and Birner (1995) suggest that the DE can be accounted for through a single pragmatic principle: the notion of novelty. They assume that the existential sentence has a single function of introducing a hearer-new entity into the discourse. This assumption is in line with Prince (1992), who also argues that the existential sentence requires a hearer-new NP. Based on

¹ Ziv (1982) discusses another type of CMH existential construction that also allows the occurrence of definite NPs. He argues that this type of construction has a different communicative function; specifically, it expresses some information about the location of an entity. As a result, this construction is not existential but locative.

this assumption, only NPs that have not previously been mentioned and are not familiar to the hearer can be used in the pivot position. The unacceptability of definite NPs in existential sentences is the result of the incompatibility of placing given or known information in a position reserved for new or unfamiliar information. In other words, since the use of definite NPs requires that their referents be given or known, these NPs are incompatible with the information status reserved for the pivot position, which must be new or unknown.

In contrast, Ward and Birner have provided several instances in which definite NPs are felicitous in English existential sentences, as shown in (27)¹. They argue that these definite NPs in the pivot position are construable as hearer-new in context. Although the NP *the stupidest article* in example (27) is formally definite, the entity it represents is assumed by the speaker to be new to the hearer's knowledge.

(27) There was the stupidest article on the reading list. (Ward & Birner 1995, p. 729)

For the list sentence, Ward and Birner assume that although the items in the list sentence, which can be definite NPs (i.e., uniquely identifiable), are not hearer-new, their membership in the list is hearer-new. This argument is quite similar to that proposed by Rando and Napoli (1975) for English list sentences. Following Ward and Birner's (1995) account, Kim (2013) also argues that the DE follows from the main discourse function of the existential construction, which has been assumed to introduce a novel referent into the discourse. As a result, any expression describing a pre-existing referent is blocked. Kim points out that the DE can be waived in the list sentence, as illustrated in (28), and when a definite NP introduces new information, as shown in (29).

(28) A: Is there anyone coming to dinner?

B: Yes, there's Harry and there is also Mrs. Jones.

(29) A: Have we any loose cash in the house?

B: Well, there's the money in the box over there.

(Kim 2013, p. 21)

¹ Ward and Birner (1995) found approximately 100 instances in which definite NPs are acceptable in the pivot position in English existential sentences. All of these instances consistently represent a hearer-new entity.

In summary, this section discusses a number of various relevant works that have proposed explanations for the DE in existential sentences. These works are classified into three types: syntactic accounts, semantic accounts, and pragmatic accounts. As illustrated here, the first two types of accounts run into several issues. The following section employs the pragmatic account to analyze this notion in NA existential sentences.

4. The DE in NA existential sentences

Having discussed the distribution of the DE in NA existential sentences and the various accounts proposed in the literature to explain the DE, this section deals with the inconstant behavior of the DE in NA existential sentences. The analysis to be provided in this section employs the various pragmatic accounts presented in section (3.3). It is motivated by the claim, made by Chomsky (1977), Francez (2009), and Hazout (2004), that the DE cannot be explained in terms of syntax; it is apparently due to meaning restrictions.

Following primarily the account of Rand and Napoli (1975), I argue that the DE in NA existential sentences can be explained through two main assumptions, stated in (30).

- (30) a) The split of NA fiih-sentences into existential and list sentences.
 b) The notion of novelty.

The first assumption is that NA fiih-sentences can be split into two types: an existential sentence, as in (10), repeated in (31), and a list sentence, as in (9.a), repeated in (32.b). While the former conveys the existence or presence of an entity, the latter serves as a response to a question, as illustrated in (32.a). In other words, the existential sentence has an existential interpretation, whereas the list sentence has a list interpretation. Only indefinite NPs are allowed as pivots in the existential sentence, whereas in the list sentence, there is no constraint on the pivot (i.e., both indefinite and definite NPs can occur as pivots). As an illustration, consider the list sentence in (33), which includes both the definite NP Ahmad and the indefinite NP *rid3d3aal yariib* ‘a strange man’.

- (31) fiih rid3d3aal b-l-bait
 there man in-the-house
 ‘There is a man in the house.’

- (32) a) min fiih b-l-bait?
 who there in-the-house
 ‘Who is there in the house?’

- b) fiih r-riɖɖɖɖɖɖ b-l-bait
there the-man in-the-house
'There is the man in the house.'

- (33) a) min fiih b-l-bait?
who there in-the-house
'Who is there in the house?'

- b) fiih Ahmad w-riɖɖɖɖɖɖ ɣariib
there Ahmad and-man strange
'There are Ahmad and a strange man.'

As pointed out by Milsark (1974, 1977), Rando and Napoli (1978), and Ziv (1982), in the list sentence, it is the entire list, not its items, that is being asserted to exist. Thus, there is no restriction on the components of the list; they may be indefinite NPs, NPs with definite or demonstrative determiners, universal quantified NP, proper names, and/or personal pronouns, as exemplified in (34). Other researchers have argued along similar lines (e.g., Kim 2013; Mohammad 1989; Pollard & Sag 1994; Ward & Birner 1995; Ziv 1982). Ward and Birner (1995) assert that "the list reading is almost universally acknowledged as permitting definites" (p. 728).

- (34) a) min fiih b-l-bait?
who there in-the-house
'Who is there in the house?'

- b) fiih ðaak r-riɖɖɖɖɖɖ/ anaa/ kill r-riɖɖɖɖɖɖ b-l-bait
there that the-man I all the-men in-the-house
'There is/are that man/me/all men in the house.'

NA list sentences have several apparent properties that distinguish them from their existential counterparts. First, while it is typically possible for NA native speakers to produce the existential sentence, as in (31), from scratch (i.e., without relying on any prior questions), it is odd to do so with the list sentence. In other words, the list sentence, as in (32.b), should be a response to a prior question. Second, as pointed out by Rando and Napoli (1978), list sentences have a different intonational pattern from that of existential sentences. For example, the nominal pivot in NA list sentences, such as rriɖɖɖɖɖɖ 'the man' in (32.b), has a rising intonation, whereas the existential sentence has the most natural intonation (i.e., a falling intonation). Third, whereas the existential sentences seem to be natural under negation

and polar questions, the list sentences do not (Keenan, 2003). As an illustration, the NA list sentence in (35), which contains the definite NP pivot *ldzaamʕah* ‘the university’, is unnatural under negation and polar questions, whereas its existential counterpart in (36), which includes the indefinite NP pivot *dzaamʕah* ‘a university’, is preserved under negation and polar questions¹.

(35) a) **fiih l-dzaamʕah b-l-midiinah?*
 there the-university in-the-city
 ‘Is there the university in the city?’

b) **ma fiih l-dzaamʕah b-l-midiinah*
 Neg there the-university in-the-city
 ‘There isn’t the university in the city.’

(36) a) *fiih dzaamʕah b-l-midiinah?*
 there university in-the-city
 ‘Is there a university in the city?’

b) *ma fiih dzaamʕah b-l-midiinah*
 Neg there university in-the-city
 ‘There isn’t a university in the city.’

Lastly, in NA existential sentences, the use of the expletive *fiih* is obligatory, as shown in (37), but is optional in list sentences, as shown in (38). The obligatory presence of *fiih* in NA existential sentences may be attributed to the fact that this item functions as an existential quantifier, which scopes over the nominal pivot.

(37) *(*fiih*) *ridʒdʒaal b-l-bait*
 there man in-the-house
 ‘There is a man in the house.’

(38) a) *min fiih b-l-maktab?*
 who there in-the-office
 ‘Who is there in the office?’

b) (*fiih*) *anaa w-Ahmad w-l-mudiiir*
 there I and-Ahmad and-the-manager

¹ See Keenan (2003) for comparable examples from English.

‘There are me, Ahmad, and the manager.’

To recap, by adopting the pragmatic account of Rando and Napoli (1975), I assume that NA fiih-sentences can be divided into two types: existential and list sentences. The DE is only observable in the former but is lacking in the latter. In the list sentence, it is the list itself, not its members, that is being predicated to exist. As a result, there is no restriction on the list members; they may be definite or indefinite NPs.

In light of the pragmatic accounts suggested by several researchers (e.g., Kim 2013; Prince 1992; Rando & Napoli 1975; Ward & Birner 1995), I also assume that the DE in NA existential sentences can be accounted for through the notion of novelty¹. That is, the main function of the existential sentence is to introduce a hearer-new entity into the discourse. Thus, only indefinite NPs are allowed as pivots in NA existential sentences, as shown in (39), because they represent hearer-new entities (i.e., they have not been previously introduced in the discourse and are unfamiliar to the hearer). However, definite NPs are barred as pivots in NA existential sentences, as shown in (39), because they do not represent hearer-new entities. They either appear in previous discourse or have unique referents in the actual world. As a result, the anomaly of the definite NPs in NA existential sentences is due to the incompatibility of placing familiar or hearer-old entities in a position reserved only for new and unfamiliar entities.

(39) fiih **ridʒdʒaal** / (***r-ridʒdʒaal**) b-l-bait
 there man the-man in-the-house
 ‘There is a man (*the man) in the house.’

As for the NA list sentence, I assume, following Milsark (1974, 1977), Rando and Napoli (1978), and Ward and Birner (1995), that the list itself that represents a hearer-new entity. In other words, since the list itself is supposed to be hearer-new, its members are not hearer-new and can thus be definite NPs, as shown in (38.b). Rand and Napoli point out that it is the pivot NP in the existential sentences and the list in the list sentences that must be hearer-new entities. In a nutshell, the DE also appears to follow from the notion of novelty, which is supposed to be the primary function of the existential sentence.

¹ Rando and Napoli (1978) use the term ‘*anaphoricity*’ instead of novelty or familiarity. They argue that NPs are anaphoric if they have been previously mentioned in the discourse or if they have unique referents in the real world.

5. Conclusion

This paper examines the interesting phenomenon of the DE in the existential sentences in the NA dialect. It begins by discussing the distribution of the DE in NA existential sentences and the different accounts proposed for the DE in various languages. Then, it provides a pragmatic account for the DE in NA existential sentences that rests on two main assumptions: the split of NA fiih-sentences into existential and list sentences and the notion of novelty. On the first assumption, the DE is only observable in the existential sentence but is lacking in the list sentence. In the list sentence, it is the list itself, rather than its components, that is being predicated to exist. Thus, there is no restriction on the list components. Regarding the notion of novelty, which is assumed to be the main function of existential sentences, only indefinite NPs can occur as pivots in NA existential sentences because they represent hearer-new entities. The unacceptability of definite NPs in NA existential sentences could be attributed to the incompatibility of placing familiar or hearer-old entities in a position reserved only for new and unfamiliar entities. However, in the list sentence, the list itself represents a hearer-new entity, and thus, its items can be definite NPs. The current work about the DE in the existential sentences in NA, which is the least-researched language, may help improve our understanding of this interesting phenomenon, thereby enabling more thorough analysis.

Due to time and space restrictions, a few issues have been left for future research. First, although the data provided in this work, specifically those that are related to the list sentence, are reliable, experimental research is required to confirm that NA native speakers use definite NPs only in list sentences. Second, the possible occurrence of quantified NPs as pivots in NA existential sentences requires an in-depth investigation. It is recommended first to examine the syntax and semantics of quantification in NA, which have been largely overlooked. Lastly, more work is needed on the phenomenon of the DE in the existential sentences in Standard Arabic and other related Arabic varieties, since this may present important insights into the distribution of the DE in the various Arabic varieties. Hopefully, the data and the pragmatic account provided in the present work will serve as a basis for these avenues of future work.

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التأثير المعرفي في جمل - فيه في اللهجة النجدية : نحو تحليل تداولي

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ملخص البحث :

جذبت ظاهرة التأثير المعرفي، والتي تمنع استخدام المعارف، كالمعرف بأل والعلم والضمير، كمحور أساسي في الجمل الوجودية، الباحثين إلى تقديم تحليلات نحوية ودلالية وتداولية متعددة لتفسير هذه الظاهرة. وحيث يقترح الاتجاه النحوي تفسير التأثير المعرفي من خلال تركيب الجمل الوجودية، تشير الاتجاهات الدلالية والتداولية إلى تعليل هذه الظاهرة من خلال معنى الجمل الوجودية. تهدف هذه الورقة إلى تقديم تفسير للتأثير المعرفي في الجمل الوجودية في اللهجة النجدية. فبالرغم من أن المعارف لا يمكن استخدامها بشكل عام كمحور أساسي في الجمل الوجودية في اللهجة النجدية، إلا أنها قد تكون مقبولة أحيانا. ولتعليل هذا الاستخدام المتباين، افترض أنه يمكن تقسيم جمل - فيه في اللهجة النجدية إلى جمل وجودية وجمل قائمة. وبهذا يكون التأثير المعرفي ظاهراً فقط في الجمل الوجودية، ولا وجود له في الجمل القائمة، إذ أنه في الجمل القائمة، القائمة نفسها هي التي يُخبر عن وجودها، وبالتالي ليس هناك قيد على عناصرها. كما افترض أيضا بأن التأثير المعرفي يمكن تعليله من خلال مفهوم الجدة. فالنكرات يمكن استخدامها في الجمل الوجودية في اللهجة النجدية لأنها تمثل كيانات جديدة للسامع. ويُعزى عدم مقبولية المعارف، والتي تمثل كيانات معروفة

وقديمة للسامع ، في الجمل الوجودية في اللهجة النجدية إلى عدم ملائمة وضعها في مكان مخصص فقط للكيانات الجديدة. ولكن في الجمل القائمة ، تمثل القائمة نفسها كيان جديد للسامع ، وبالتالي يمكن لعناصرها أن تكون معارف.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التأثير المعرفي ، جمل -فيه ، الجملة القائمة ، المحور الأساسي ،
اللهجة النجدية