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## SOMMAIRE

<b>La communauté Afro-Américaine musulmane à la recherche de l'identité perdue.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<i>Soumaya TIFNOUTI</i>	
<b>Quantifier scope in standard Arabic : a logico-pragmatic approach .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<i>Habib DARKAOUI SOUFI</i>	
<b>Ferdinand de Saussure, l'incompris .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<i>Ayoub BOUHOUHOU</i>	

# Quantifier scope in Standard Arabic: A logico-pragmatic approach

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## Abstract

This article sheds light on the relation existing between quantifier scope and phenomena relating to pragmatics in Standard Arabic (SA). Note here that by "pragmatics" I mean all that is extra-linguistic, be it the speaker's state of mind or the sum of beliefs and facts relating to real life. The pragmatic factor that refers to real-life facts gives rise to what I can call "pragmatic well-formedness". The pragmatic factor that relates to the speaker's state of mind is the concept of presupposition which is at the basis of the notion of quantification force. With this in mind, It is demonstrated that scope in (SA) is sensitive to both pragmatic well-formedness and quantification force.

**Keywords:** scope, quantifiers, quantification force, presupposition, pragmatic well-formedness.

## ملخص

تسلط هاته المقالة الضوء على العلاقة القائمة بين "حيز الأسوار" (quantifier scope) وبعض العوامل التداولية في اللغة العربية المعيار. تجدر الإشارة إلى أن المقصود بعبارة "تداولية" كل العوامل غير ذات الصلة باللغة، سواء تعلق الأمر بحالة المتكلم الذهنية أو بمجموع المعتقدات والحقائق المتعلقة بالواقع. ينتج عن العامل الأول مفهوم "الإفتراض المسبق" (presupposition) الذي يعد أساس "القوة التسويرية" (quantification force)؛ بينما يتولد عن العامل الثاني ما يمكن أن يطلق عليه "سلامة التكوين التداولي" (pragmatic well-formedness). بالنظر إلى ما سبق، نبرهن أن عاملي "الإفتراض المسبق" و "سلامة التكوين التداولي" يؤثران بشكل مباشر على حيز الأسوار في اللغة العربية المعيار.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الحيز – الأسوار – الإفتراض المسبق – القوة التسويرية – سلامة التكوين التداولي.

## Résumé

Cet article met en lumière la relation existante entre la portée des quantificateurs et les phénomènes relatifs à la pragmatique en arabe standard (SA). Notons ici que par « pragmatique », j'entends tout ce qui est extra-linguistique, qu'il s'agisse de l'état d'esprit du locuteur ou de la somme de croyances et de faits relatifs à la vie réelle. Le facteur pragmatique qui se réfère à des faits réels donne lieu à ce que l'on peut appeler "la bonne formation pragmatique". Le facteur pragmatique lié à l'état d'esprit

du locuteur est le concept de présupposition qui est à la base de la notion de force de quantification. Dans cet esprit, il est démontré que la portée dans (SA) est sensible à la fois à la bonne formation pragmatique et à la force de quantification.

**Mots clés** : portée, quantificateurs, force de quantification, présupposé, la bonne formation pragmatique

## Introduction

The aim in this article is to demonstrate that factors related to logic and pragmatics are no less important than those related to syntax in deciding about scope values of quantifiers in (SA). To this end, I will introduce the concept of “pragmatic well-formedness”, which is based on our experiential knowledge about the world, and empirically prove that it affects scope behavior of quantifiers. Then, I will show that “presupposition”, which is pragmatic in nature, is decisive in distinguishing between two concepts pertaining to logic, namely, quantification and cardinality. It will be demonstrated that for a quantifier to qualify as an operator, and hence participate in scope dependencies, it must have quantification force. When the latter is lacking, a quantifier will not be interpreted as an operator and will, therefore, receive a cardinal reading. Finally, I will propose that the presence of quantification force or its absence can be encoded in the grammar by the feature [ quant]. This means a quantifier will be drawn from the lexicon with [+ quant] or [- quant] depending on whether its reading is quantificational or cardinal, respectively.

## 1 Scope and pragmatic well-formedness

The purpose in this section is to demonstrate the impact of the pragmatic factors relating to real-life context on the scope behavior of quantifiers. Let us, in this respect, consider these examples:

- (1) raʔay-tu     furṭiyy-an     ζinda   kulli   ʔiʃa:ra:ti   l-muru:ri  
saw-I     policeman- indef   at     all     lights   the- traffic

“ I saw a policeman at all traffic lights”

- (2) yužadū     raʔi:s-un     fi:     žami:ζi     dduwali  
exists     president- indef   in     all     the-nations

“There is a president in all nations”



What is interesting about the two examples above is that they allow only the reading where the universal quantifiers “kull” and “žami:ž” enjoy wide scope over the indefinite “furṭiyy-an” and “raʔi:s-un”. In other words, both in (1) and (2) the group reading, where the indefinite enjoys wide scope, is hard to obtain, which makes the distributive reading the only available interpretation in both examples. In the remainder of this section, I will try to account for the unambiguity of (1) and (2).

Due to pragmatic considerations, the group reading, where the indefinite “raʔi:s-un” enjoys wide scope, is not available in (1). This is because the group reading in this sentence would imply that in each nation there exists the same president, which goes against what we know about the normal situations in real life. So, just like in (2), the reading where the indefinite takes wide scope in (1) is not available since it is not “pragmatically well-formed”.

Let us consider the examples in (3) and (4) which provide clear evidence to the sensitivity of scope dependencies to pragmatic well-formedness.

- (3) kullu    ʔal-ḥawa:mili            waḍažna    šabiyy-an  
all    the-pregnant-plural    gave birth    boy-indef  
“All pregnant women gave birth to a baby boy”

- (4) ʔanbatat    žami:žu    ʔal-buðu:ri    ʔazarat-an  
grew    all            the seeds    tree-indef  
“All seeds grew into a tree”

Just like (1) and (2) above, the sentences in (3) and (4) are unambiguous with the quantifiers “kull” and “žami:ž”, respectively having wide scope. Such unambiguity on the part of (3) and (4) can be explained if we take into consideration the pragmatic dimension. Note, in this regard, that the group reading, associated with the wide scope of the indefinite, is unavailable in both sentences because it goes against our knowledge of real life. In (3), the wide scope of the indefinite “šabiyy-an” involves the interpretation which can be formulated as the following: there is a baby x, such that all pregnant women gave birth to x. Such an interpretation is unacceptable for the sole reason that it is at odds with the real-life context, namely that pregnant women cannot give birth to the same baby. On the other hand, the wide scope of the quantifier “kull” involves the distributive

reading which is the only interpretation that is in harmony with such situations in a real-life context.

Likewise, (4) does not support the group reading associated with the wide scope of the indefinite “fažarat-an” because it is pragmatically not a well-formed interpretation. The latter can be formulated as follows: there is a tree *x* such that all seeds grew *x*. Such an interpretation is not acceptable since it goes against what we know about the state of affairs in real-life situations, namely that seeds grow separate trees. This leaves the distributive reading associated with the wide scope of the quantifier “žami:ž” as the only available interpretation as it matches our knowledge of such situations in real-life contexts.

It has become clear now that scope dependencies are sensitive to pragmatic well-formedness. The latter has been empirically proved to be pivotal in deciding about scope values in quantificational sentences.

## **2 Scope and quantificational force**

In this section, we will be concerned with the relation between the logico-pragmatic notion of “quantificational force” and the scope behavior of quantifiers. To this end, we first examine the notion of “quantification” as opposed to “cardinality”, trying to understand the basis of this opposition. Second, we see how scope dependencies are affected by quantification and cardinality functions.

### **2.1 A note on quantification vs cardinality**

When we deal with quantifiers we presuppose that they are endowed with a quantificational force which is translated into the ability of the quantifier to form an operator-variable structure. However, this is not always the case, since a quantifier, under certain circumstances, can be void of such a quantificational force. Being without the latter, a quantifier is not liable to assume the function of quantification and, instead, marks a mere cardinality. The question that imposes itself here is that what distinguishes “quantification” from “cardinality”?

In Milsark (1974)<sup>1</sup>, the concept of “presuppositionality” is invoked to distinguish the quantificational function of a quantifier from its cardinal function. “Presuppositionality” can be thought of as what is taken for granted by speakers and hearers in a conversation. In this respect, on its quantificational reading, a quantifier presupposes the existence of the set

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Diesing (1992)

over which it quantifies. On its cardinal reading, however, a quantifier just asserts the existence of the set whose size is specified by the quantifier. Moreover, Milsark (Ibid) believes that assuming a quantificational function means undergoing Q(uantifier) R(aising) and, thus, forming an operator-variable structure. Having a cardinal function, however, implies not being affected by QR and, hence, not forming an operator-variable structure.

In light of what is said in the previous paragraph, the sentence in (5) can, according to Diesing (1992), admit two interpretations, depending on whether the numeral quantifier has a quantificational reading or a cardinal one.

(5) Every person saw three ghosts

On the quantificational reading<sup>1</sup> of “three ghosts”, the house is presupposed to be haunted by a set of known ghosts. In this context, every person could see three of the ghosts. On the cardinal reading, on the other hand, the house would not have such a pre-established reputation. In this case, every person could see even three different ghosts each time, which means that (5) would merely assert the existence of ghosts seen.

Contrary to Milsark (1974), who recasts the distinction between quantification and cardinality in semantico-pragmatic terms, De Swart (1993) invokes logic to address such a distinction. She, in this respect, holds that on its quantificational reading, a quantifier establishes a relation between the denotation of NP, which functions as a restrictor, and the event. On its cardinal reading, however, a quantifier does not make such a relationship but just refers to the quantity of the set of individuals. She, thus, uses the terms relational reading and cardinal reading. De Swart (Ibid) also believes that the two readings are not true under the same circumstances. With this in mind, consider these examples:

(6) Three cats are pink

(7) Three passengers died. Three others were safe.

De Swart (Ibid), just like Kadmon (1987), claims that the numeral in (6) has a cardinal non-relational reading since it does not establish a relation between the denotation of the NP restrictor “cats” and the set of individuals denoted by VP, and hence has the reading of “at least”. In (7), on the other hand, the numeral “three” makes a relation between the denotation of NP “passengers”, and the set of individuals who died, indicating that the intersection of the set of passengers and the set of passengers who died constitutes exactly a three-member set. This “exactly” meaning of the

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<sup>1</sup> Diesing (Ibid) uses the term ‘presuppositional’ instead of ‘quantificational’.

numeral in (7) is made clear by the second clause. The truth conditions in (8a-b) are associated with (6) and (7), respectively.

(8) a - Three (x) { cats (x) | x are pink . | x | = 3 }

b - Three( x,y) {passengers (x) ; died passengers (y) . | x  $\cap$  y | = 3 }

With what we have discussed so far in mind, let us consider the following examples:

(9) kull-u            ʔal- ʔawla:d-i            ža:ʔ-u:  
all-nom            the- boys-Gen            came-3pl-m

“All the boys came”

(10) ʔal- ʔawla:d-u            ža:ʔ-u:            kullu-hum  
the-boys-nom            came-3pl-m            all-them

“The boys all of them came”

At first sight, (9) and (10) seem to state the same facts; however, they do not carry the same information content. This can be understood from the fact that the two sentences do not answer the same question. The sentence in (9) can be a perfect answer to the question "how many of the boys came?". On the other hand, (10) can answer the question "who came in their totality?", meaning that the set of boys is not presupposed to come. This can be made clear if we use the cleft construction " it is the boys who came in their totality". Notice that (9) cannot be clefted in a like manner. This can tell us much about the difference between (9) and (10) concerning presuppositionality. While in the former, the quantifier "kull" presupposes the set denoted by the NP "ʔal-ʔawla:d"; in the latter, the quantifier does not make such a presupposition.

In addition to their difference on the level of presupposition, the sentences (9) and (10) also differ as far as truth conditions are concerned. The propositions expressed in the two sentences are not true under the same circumstances. In (10), the proposition is false if the set of boys is absent, while its absence in (9) would render the truth-value of the proposition undefined. We have now evidence that the quantifier "kull" has two different interpretations in (9) and (10), respectively. In (9), "kull" has the interpretation qualified by Milsark (1974), Diesing (1992), and De Swart (1993) as quantificational. On the other hand, the interpretation of "kull" in (10) corresponds to what is known as cardinal reading.

To conclude this section, notice that (9) and (10) are the same in every respect except for word order. In (10), we have a case of quantifier float, while in (9) no such floating exists. Since “kull” in (9) has a quantificational reading while it has a cardinal reading in (10), two conclusions can be stated. First, in addition to presuppositionality and relation, the two examples above provide evidence that word order can also be used to distinguish “quantification” from “cardinality”. Second, it will not be incorrect if we believe that, at least as far as (SA) is concerned, a floating quantifier has a non-quantificational reading.

At this stage, and after examining the distinction “quantification vs cardinality”, one question comes to mind, namely does the dichotomy “quantification vs cardinality” has repercussion on the scope behavior of a quantifier? Answering this question will be the concern of the next section.

## 2.2 Scope dependencies and quantification vs cardinality

In this section, the goal is to demonstrate that the functions "quantification" and "cardinality" have a direct effect on the scope properties of a quantifier. In this respect, I will empirically prove that on its quantification reading, a quantifier can scopally be valued as having either a wide or narrow scope. On the other hand, on its cardinal reading, a quantifier cannot be scopally interpreted. To elaborate on this issue, let us consider this paradigm:

(11) a- kull-u      ttala:mi:ð-i      sa:çadu:      muhta:ž-i:na

all-nom    the students-Gen    helped-3pl-m    poor-pl-indef

“All the students helped some poor people”

b- ttala:mi:ð-u      kullu-hum      sa:çadu:      muhta:ž-i:na

the-students-nom    all-them    helped-3pl-m    poor-pl-indef

“The students all of them helped some poor people”

(12) a- yuma:ris-u      kull-u      ṭtulla:b-i      riya:ɖat-an

practise-3sg-m    all-nom    the-students-Gen    sport-indef

“All the students practise a type of sport”

b- yuma:ris-u      ṭtulla:b-u      kull-u-hum      riya:ɖat-an

practise-3sg-m    the-students-nom    all-nom-them    sport-indef

“The students all of them practise a sport”

(13) a- tazawwaž-a      kull-u    ʔal-fitya:n-i    bikr-an  
          married-3sg-m   all-nom   the-boys    virgin-indef

“All the boys married a virgin”

? ? b- tazawwaž-a    ʔal-fitya:n-u    kull-u-hum    bikr-an  
          married-3sg-m   the-boys-nom   all-nom-them   virgin-indef

“The boys all of them married a virgin”

(14) a- ga:ž    drari    tzuwžu    bənt  
          all    the boys married    girl (indef)

“All the boys married a girl”

? ? b- drari      ka:mlhum      tzuwžu      bənt  
          the-boys   all-them      married      girl (indef)

“The boys all of them married a girl”

As can easily be noticed, in (11-14) the a-examples do minimally differ from the b-ones since the sole difference consists in the existence of quantifier floating in the latter examples and its absence in the former ones. It can also be noted that the a-examples are ambiguous while the b-ones are not. The unambiguity of (11b) and (12b) is due to the fact that only the indefinites “muhta:ž-i:na” and “riya:ḡat-an”, respectively, do enjoy wide scope over the universal quantifier “kull” in the two examples.

The ambiguity of (11a) and (12a), on the other hand, can be traced back to the possibility of both the universal quantifier and the indefinite in the two examples to enjoy wide scope over each other. In the light of these facts, one interesting statement can be made, namely in (11b) and (12b) the universal quantifier “kull” is floated, and in both cases, it does not enjoy wide scope. This implies that the universal quantifier in the two examples does not enjoy wide scope because it is floated. The question that comes to mind here is why floated quantifiers do not enjoy wide scope?

The answer to the foregoing question can be found in the observation made in the preceding section, namely that floated quantifiers have a cardinal interpretation, which means that they do not have quantificational force. So floated quantifiers do not enjoy wide scope because they are devoid of any quantificational force which is necessary for a quantifier to be scopally interpreted. We conclude, then, that the cardinality of “kull” in (11b) and (12b) renders it not scopally interpretable,

and consequently not liable to participate in scope dependencies. This permits the indefinites in the two examples to enjoy wide scope.

In (11a) and (12b), on the other hand, the universal quantifier participates in the scope dependencies since it can enjoy wide scope over the indefinites “muħta:ž-i:na” and “riya:ḍat-an”, respectively. This means that “kull” in these examples have a quantificational force. In other words, the universal quantifier in (11a) and (12a) does induce scope dependencies because it has a quantificational interpretation.

The fact that quantifiers do not participate in scope dependencies when having cardinal interpretation is made clear by the unacceptability of (13b) and (14b). The former is deviant because the indefinite “bikr-an” enjoys wide scope, giving way to the group reading which can informally be expressed as the following: there is a girl *x* such that different boys married *x*. Such a reading is not pragmatically well-formed, whence the unacceptability of this example.

That (13b) is unacceptable means that the distributive reading for this sentence is not available. Such a distributive reading can informally be stated as follows: for every *x* such that *x* is a boy, *x* married a different girl. The unavailability of the distributive reading in (13b) implies that the universal “kull” enjoys neither a wide scope nor narrow one. Notice, however, that the distributive reading in (13a) is available. This means that “kull” in this example has a quantificational reading, and hence can enjoy wide scope over the indefinite, whence the acceptability of (13a).

The analysis proposed for (13a-b) can be carried over to (14a-b) from Moroccan Arabic (MA). (14b) is unacceptable because the indefinite “bənt” enjoys wide scope, giving way to the unacceptable group reading. This sentence would have been acceptable if the quantifier “ka:məl” were to enjoy wide scope, permitting the distributive reading to obtain. However, “ka:məl”, being on its cardinal reading, cannot enjoy wide scope, and consequently, the acceptable distributive reading does not obtain. In (14a), on the other hand, the quantifier “ga:ž” is on its quantificational reading and can thus enjoy wide scope over the indefinite, permitting the distributive reading to obtain, whence the acceptability of this sentence.

After the foregoing discussion, it has become clear that scope dependencies are, as noted by Diesing (1992)<sup>1</sup>, sensitive to whether a

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<sup>1</sup> Diesing (1992:63-64) notes that cardinal-read quantifiers do not take wide scope, and she gives these examples:

- (i) Sm cellists played every suite today
- (ii) Mny cellists played some suite today

quantifier is quantificationally or cardinally interpreted. On its quantificational reading, a quantifier can be scopally valued as having either wide or narrow scope. On the other hand, when being cardinally interpreted, a quantifier does not have the quantificational force, and consequently cannot be scopally valued.

At this stage, two statements are in order. First, the distinction between quantification and cardinality can be reduced to the presence vs the absence of the quantificational force. Its presence enables a quantifier to get a quantificational reading, while its absence makes it receive a cardinal interpretation. Second, as has been shown through (11-14), the quantificational force is necessary for a quantifier to be scopally interpreted. When having quantificational force, a quantifier gets quantificational reading, and can, thus, enjoy either wide or narrow scope. When not having quantificational force, however, a quantifier receives a cardinal reading and, hence, cannot be scopally interpreted.

To close this section, we want to explore the possibility of how presence vs the absence of quantificational force is encoded in "Grammar". In this respect, and as we have seen with Milsark (1974), on its cardinal reading, a quantifier does not qualify as an operator since it is not affected by Q(uantifier) R(aising) and hence cannot form an operator-variable structure. The latter is however formed when a quantifier has quantificational reading, meaning that it qualifies as an operator, and it is affected by QR. The point we want to reach is that the presence of quantificational force makes a quantifier qualify as an operator, and hence have quantificational reading. On the other hand, the absence of such a quantificational force does not permit a quantifier to be an operator, confining it thus to cardinal interpretation.

Being an operator is syntactically expressed by the existence of the feature [+quant]. Now, how can we syntactically express the case when the quantifier does not qualify as an operator? As an answer, we can assume that when a quantifier does not qualify as an operator, it is drawn from the lexicon with [quant] inactive, which can be expressed by [- quant]. Therefore, the result achieved at this point is that when being an operator, the quantifier is selected with [+quant]; when not being an operator it is selected with [- quant].

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(iii) Tw cellists played some suite today

In these sentences, the strongly quantified objects NPs "every suite", "some suite" take scope over the cardinal-read subjects whose unstressed reading are indicated by the deletion of the vowels.



At this stage, we are in a better position to consider how the presence vs the absence of quantificational force can syntactically be expressed. Notice, in this respect, that we have shown earlier that the presence of quantificational force makes a quantifier qualify as an operator and consequently receive a quantificational reading. Its absence, on the other hand, renders the quantifier non-operator and hence gets a cardinal interpretation. So, since being an operator implies having quantificational force, while not being an operator means not having it, then in syntactic terms, [+quant] expresses the presence of quantificational force, while [-quant] expresses its absence.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, we have tried to empirically prove three claims about the scope behavior of quantifiers in (SA). First, that the scope values of quantifiers are decided depending on whether the reading is in accordance with the experiential knowledge of the world or not, which I called “pragmatic well-formedness”. Second, that the pragmatic concept of presupposition plays a central role in distinguishing between the quantificational interpretation of a quantifier and the latter’s cardinal reading. It has been demonstrated that on its quantificational reading, a quantifier has quantification force and can, therefore, participate in scope dependencies. On its cardinal reading, however, a quantifier does not have quantification force and, hence, cannot be interpreted to enjoy scope. Third, that the feature [quant] encodes quantification force in the grammar. In this respect, we have demonstrated that when a quantifier is drawn from the lexicon with [+quant], it can participate in scope dependencies and can be valued as having either wide or narrow scope. When, on the other hand, it is selected with [-quant], it cannot participate in scope dependencies and, therefore, its scope value remains undefined.

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# ضفاف

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بجامعة القاضي عياض - مراكش - المغرب

المدير : عميد كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية

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