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Communicating affect in news stories: The case of the lead sentence*

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Abstract

The phenomenon of affect in language has recently received some attention from researchers who have focused primarily on its lexical expression. This article examines syntactic manifestations of affect in the lead sentence of Arabic news stories. It addresses the question of the pragmatic motivation for the occasional occurrence of spatiotemporal structures in text-initial position. Empirical analysis reveals that marking affect is one pragmatic function that the text-initial spatiotemporal structure serves in Arabic news stories. The importance of certain sociopolitical events is a crucial factor. The lead sentence acquires an emotive value or interpretation as it exhibits the writer's affective stance toward reported events. Although spatiotemporal structures are used sparingly in text-initial position, they manifest variation in their composition—a possible indication of varying degrees of emotional involvement or intensity. Illustrative examples of this phenomenon explain implications for the communication of affect.

Keywords: affect; cross-cultural communication; grammar; news discourse; perspective.

1. Introduction

One of the main functions of language, distinct from the referential function, is the expressive or emotive function (Bühler 1934; Jakobson 1960; Lyons 1977). In addition to communicating information (i.e., description), language also communicates feelings, emotions, and attitudes (i.e., evaluation). Though distinct, the two functions are 'intricately intertwined along a communication continuum' (Sarangi 2003: 166). In terms of this continuum, language users do not only express propositions but

also different attitudes to these propositions (Andersen and Fretheim 2000: 3). In other words, the expressive or emotive function of language is an area where language users communicate their ‘feelings, judgements, or commitments concerning the propositional content of a message’ (Biber and Finegan 1989: 93). In short, they communicate their ‘cognitive, emotive or volitional qualification of a state-of-affairs’ (Kiefer 1987: 73).

This article is about the intricate blending of informational and affective functions of language. The terms *affect* and *affective stance* are used to denote emotive communication, which is essentially appellative (Caffi and Janney 1994: 329), and as cover terms for notions such as feelings, moods, dispositions, and attitudes (see Ochs 1986b: 254; Martin 2000: 147).¹ As such, affective stance—or ‘affective orientation’ (Ochs and Schieffelin 1989: 9)—may also subsume *attitudinal stance*, which conveys language users’ attitudes, feelings, value judgments (Conrad and Biber 2000: 57), as well as their involvement (see Chafe 1982) in what they say or write.

Although linguistic resources for communicating affect are legion (they include ‘word order, dislocated structures, tense/aspect marking, mood, evidential and affect particles and affixes, phonological variation, and prosody . . .’; Ochs 1986a: 8), relatively little work has been done in linguistics on affective dimensions of language. In fact, linguists ‘have underestimated the extent to which grammatical and discourse structures serve affective ends’ (Ochs and Schieffelin 1989: 7). As a result, affect ‘has been consistently set aside as an essentially unexplorable aspect of linguistic behavior’ (Besnier 1990: 420).

Further advances in the area of communicating affect or ‘emotive meaning’ (Maynard 2002b: 6) are even more necessary given the fact that ‘[g]rammatical descriptions, in particular those of non-Indo-European languages, contain little information on how emotional situations are rendered linguistically, since this aspect is assumed to be too idiosyncratic to be considered part of the grammar’ (Reh 1998: 375). This article is an attempt to help redress this situation by addressing the question of the pragmatic motivation for the placement of spatiotemporal structures at the beginning of the lead sentence of Arabic news stories.

The article is organized as follows. After this introduction, a short review of previous studies follows. Then the significance of the phenomenon of text-initial spatiotemporal structures will be explained and the theoretical approach outlined. Findings of this study will be presented, and illustrative examples of the various manifestations of the phenomenon will be given. The discussion and concluding remarks draw attention to wider implications of the phenomenon.

2. Previous studies

Little work has been done in linguistics on affective dimensions of language. In fact, '[t]he systematic study of linguistic expressions rendering emotional situations is still in its beginnings' (Reh 1998: 375). Caffi and Janney (1994) emphasized the importance of emotive aspects of communication as a neglected variable of pragmatic theories. In investigating the potential of language to express affect, Czechoslovak and (East) German linguists (see Prucha 1983) focused on the phenomenon of the speaker's attitude to the propositional content and the emotional modality of utterances.

Biber and Finegan (1988, 1989) identified stance adverbials in English and considered them as 'one of the primary lexical markers of stance in English' (1988: 1). By stance adverbials they meant 'the overt expression of an author's or speaker's attitudes, feelings, judgements, or commitment concerning the message' (1988: 1). The authors showed that the discourse functions of stance adverbials differ considerably from the functions suggested by their literal meanings.

In another study (Biber and Finegan 1989), the authors identified and described various speech styles of English as marked by stance. They distinguished six stance styles. The first two are 'Emphatic Expression of Affect' (very frequent affect markers: frequent emphatics) and 'Faceless Stance' (marked absence of all stance features). They also noted that there is a very large number of 'faceless' texts (65% of 500 texts) that denote absence of stance markers, and concluded that the majority of English texts do not mark stance (or do not mark it with the features they have examined). The texts they examined included press reviews, press editorials, academic prose, and general fiction.

In the same vein, Ochs and Schieffelin (1989) presented a long list of grammatical categories that express affect, including word order, right and left dislocation, and tense-aspect marking.² Similarly, Besnier (1990) provided a list of linguistic devices by which languages may express affect and noted that '[m]any syntactic features are exploited for affective purposes' (1990: 425). For example, active-passive alternatives in many languages (e.g., *the opposition accused the government* versus *the government was accused by the opposition*) 'align speaker, hearer, and events along different axes of identification, which some linguists call "empathy"' (1990: 425). Besnier (1990: 425) added that '[d]epersonalization and affective distance can be communicated in impersonal constructions (e.g., *it will be shown that this hypothesis is incorrect*), agentless passives, or pronoun deletion in many languages'.

In another study (Besnier 1998), the author provided a number of categories that have some theoretical relevance to the notions of involvement and detachment:³ emotional identification (e.g., with the topic of discourse, with interlocutors), high versus low affect, relative distancing, participant status, point of view, and alignment. In this regard, Chafe (1982) presented a number of devices that mark involvement including first- and second-person reference as well as emphatic particles (e.g., *just*, *really*). Among devices of detachment he mentioned the passive voice.

Signals of evaluation by the writer have also been examined in newspaper stories by Weizman (1984a, 1984b). She focused on the use of quotation marks that may signal the attitude of the writer toward the quotation.

The emotional dimension of language has also been examined by Labov (1984). He focused on *intensity* and identified several of its linguistic markers such as emphatic adverbs (e.g., *really*, *so*, *very*), repetition, and inversion. He defined intensity as ‘the emotional expression of social orientation toward the linguistic proposition: the commitment of the self to the proposition’ (1984: 43). Similarly, Reh (1998) examined the lexicogrammatical means by which emotional situations are signified in Dholuo, a Western Nilotic language spoken in western Kenya and parts of Tanzania.

Hübler (1998) too examined grammatical forms that communicate emotion (or emotional attitude)/subjectivity in grammar—forms of expressivity implicit in grammatical devices such as *the expanded form*, *the present perfect*, or *the get-passive*. In Hübler’s view, emotions are subjective, existing in contrast to propositional content, which is objective. The author showed how emotions express the *emotional stance* of the speaker toward the objects of predication. Subjectivity in syntax has also received some attention in the linguistic literature (see Verhagen 1995; Kuno 1987).

Stein (1995: 132) noted that ‘[t]he concept of meanings of inversion seems tied to the notion of deviation from an unmarked pattern’. The author (Stein 1995: 132) provided the following example,

- (1a) Bitterly did they repent their decision.
- (1b) They repented their decision bitterly.

and observed that version (1b) with unmarked word order ‘does not have the same emotional acuity’ (1995: 132) as (1a).

The relation between inversion and affective function or subjectivity has been examined by Dorgeloh (1997), who suggested that ‘inversion is a marker of subjectivity, on the one hand, and a discourse marker serving the organization of a discourse on the other’ (1997: 5). The author

included *adverbial placement* among devices for marking pre-posing phenomena.

Right and left dislocation as a marker of the speaker's standpoint has been examined by Chafe (1976). Also the use of right and left dislocation for affective emphasis has been noted in French (Blyth 1995) and Italian (Duranti and Ochs 1979). Other grammatical categories that have been found to express the speaker's or writer's standpoint include tense/aspect (Hopper 1979; Smith 1983), verb voice (Hopper 1979; Hopper and Thompson 1980), word order (Givón 1979; Halliday 1967; Kuno 1972; MacWhinney 1977, 1984), and sentential mood (Searle 1969).

The communication of affect, and the role therein of cultural and linguistic systems, has been examined by Irvine (1982). She studied the communication of affect in Wolof, a tribe in Senegal, and surveyed a number of devices including exclamations, emphatic particles, left dislocation, and lexical devices. The author noted that 'affective expression blends in with the system of focus and topicalization' (Irvine 1982: 38).

Cross-linguistic work in Mandarin by Li and Zubin (1995) and in Korean by Chun and Zubin (1995) provided evidence for the influence of subjectivity on the language of narrative texts. The two studies showed that reflexive pronominals are clear markers of subjective context and suggested that the choice of anaphoric-referring expressions involves perspective-taking (or subjectivity) in discourse.

Affect has also been considered in some detail in the Japanese language. Hinds (1982) showed that right dislocation of elements after the verb in Japanese can be used as a type of repair, but may also function to add emotional emphasis. Dunn (1999) examined 'linguistic indices of affective engagement in Japanese' (1999: 109–110) and analyzed the use of a variety of linguistic forms, showing how they were combined with particular rhetorical strategies to index varying degrees of emotional intensity or restraint. Dunn also showed how a speaker of Japanese deploys a complex array of grammatical emotion-markers to build audience rapport.

Maynard (2002a) examined the reports/articles of a Japanese newspaper about a collision between a Japanese and an American vessel in 2001. She considered the phenomenon of referential choice—namely, the way the two vessels were identified—from the perspectives of where the reporter psychologically and emotionally positions him- or herself, that is to say, the different 'emotive perspectives', depending on how the writer feels about the two vessels. She argued that the way the vessels were referred to was influenced by the reporter's intention as regards emotional appeal to readers ('with different degrees of intimacy and distance'; 2002a: 1066), and that 'choosing how to refer to these two vessels is itself

a means for conveying emotivity' (2002a: 1048). Maynard used the concept of emotive perspectives as an analytical tool to account for referential choices, and proposed two emotive perspectives: the proximal 'insider' perspective and the distal 'outsider' perspective (2002a: 1066).

3. The phenomenon and its significance

Although previous studies included sentence structure among (the taxonomy of) devices associated with affect functions in discourse, they seldom dealt at length with it. More importantly, the linguistic literature has seldom been based on empirical analyses of syntactic structures that express affect. This article accounts for the linguistic phenomenon of the occasional occurrence of temporal and spatial constituents (i.e., an adverbial phrase or clause) at the beginning of the lead sentence of the Arabic news story such as in the following example:

During his meeting yesterday with the American President, the French president emphasized that ...

This phenomenon constitutes a departure from the typical pattern of expressing meaning in the lead sentence of the Arabic news text (see Khalil 2000), namely to start with the main clause in which the verb occupies the initial position. While the main clause in Arabic maintains a VS syntax (e.g., *emphasized the French President that ...*), the lead sentence in the preceding example starts with a constituent that is customarily relegated either to a far-inside-the-sentence position or to a separate/subsequent sentence (e.g., *This occurred during his meeting yesterday with the American President*).⁴

The spatiotemporal constituent in text-initial position will be referred to as the *circumstantial constituent* (henceforth CC). In general, the CC may serve in text a relational function as the preceding example illustrates. It may also serve a framing function such as in the following example:

In a statement to the Parliament, the minister of defence announced that ...

Spatiotemporal constituents vary in their composition and hence they may express what Geis (1987: 107) calls 'a complete setting', when for example event, place, and time adverbials occur together: *In a speech to the Parliament in The Hague on the eve of...* According to Geis, the main function of these complex adverbials in sentence-initial position is 'to

situate discourses as a whole or to situate the events and states of affairs denoted by sentences in a discourse inside a situational framework previously established for that discourse' (1987: 107).

In exploring the phenomenon of the occasional occurrence of a CC at the beginning of the lead sentence, the article addresses two related questions:

1. What motivates the shift in the standard structure of the lead sentence of the news story? In other words, what are the factors that influence the writer's choice of—or preference for—a spatiotemporal constituent in text-initial position, instead of first reporting the event in the main clause?
2. What communicative or pragmatic function does this pattern of sentence organization—that starts the news imparting process with a description of the context—serve?

In answering these questions, it would be necessary to keep in mind two general features. The first pertains to the writer's motivation in terms of his/her relation with developments or states of affairs and with readers as well as the public at large. The second feature pertains to the nature of the event at issue. These two features are assumed to 'co-operate' in accounting for the writer's motivation for CC placement and, concomitantly, for the communicative function of this pattern of sentence organization.

In reporting certain events, the writer of the news story may opt for an involved—or an attached (as distinct from a detached)—mode of description or presentation that exhibits his/her affective stance, comment on, and assessment of the events that are introduced onto the scene. In short, this mode of presentation shows the writer's frame of mind at the time the news story was written.

In this regard, the article examines the possible use of a CC for affective purposes—marking or encoding affect, and hence serving a discourse-pragmatic function. Since the writer of the news story is generally assumed to express the propositional content in a detached mode, the CC would seldom be expected in text-initial position.

It should be noted that *affective syntax* is a verbal means of encoding affect (or attitudinal meaning), substituting, of course, nonverbal means such as tone, gesture, and facial expressions. Besides, it remains a tacit means of expressing the writer's attitudinal stance, distinct from the explicit mentioning in text of positive or negative attitude by means of stanced lexical items—adjectives and adverbs that qualify events and states of affairs. In affective syntax the writer is subtly present in the news story.

Broadly speaking, the expression of affect in language differs across cultures. Languages (and language users, of course) may assign different values to the same syntactic structure. Therefore, the meaning potential a sentence-initial CC has in Arabic (news discourse) may not be shared (in the same degree) by all languages. And the placement of a CC in initial position may fulfill in that language a more specific role as a marker of high affect and emotive behavior than similar constituents in some other languages do.

4. Theoretical approach and framework

In order to identify and explore affective meaning in linguistic structures, it would be necessary to draw distinctions among some basic, and related, features. The first distinction is between the propositional content of a text (e.g., about facts, events) and the intention or attitude of the writer toward it. Put differently, the writer may have a *default* attitude toward the text as distinct from a *non-default*—and hence a marked—attitude, for example by assigning an *added value* or *significance* to the facts or events referred to (for details, see Khalil 2003). This suggests that intentions vary; they ‘come in various types and strengths’ (Jaszczolt 1999: 200), and they constrain various levels of text-realization, including the surface structure level of sequential presentation.

The second basic distinction is between objective, noninvolved or detached reporting, and nonobjective, involved or engaged reporting.⁵ This echoes the distinction that has been made between a proximal (‘insider’) perspective and a distal (‘outsider’) perspective (Maynard 2002a). As writers and readers share the same sociocultural context, a certain degree of relationship—distance or closeness—may exist between both parties. Although the news story is generally assumed to have a predominantly information-imparting function, namely to *register* phenomena and not to *respond* to them (see Werlich 1976) for example by asserting, commenting, interpreting, evaluating, or passing a judgment, it may nevertheless convey the writer’s opinion and attitude toward recounted events by several means such as by evaluative markers. This is particularly the case in what is called the *interpretative news story* (see Werlich 1976: 64–65), which shows varying degrees of affect.

A third distinction is in the structure the sentence takes. Sentence structure is usually governed by intentions and determines the interpretation of sentence meaning. Order within a sentence is therefore not arbitrary (van Dijk 1997: 8) and syntactic choices convey the writer’s intentions and attitudes (see Maynard 1996: 397). In this regard, sentences that

diverge from the unmarked, canonical word order carry an additional meaning potential (see Schmid 1999). And the placement of a CC in initial position of the Arabic news story is assumed to signal an absence of a neutral style that is 'unmarked by any of the linguistic choices that reflect the encoder's responses to phenomena' (Werlich 1976: 270).⁶ It also triggers emotion in the reader and reduces impressions of objectivity. (See Ungerer 1997: 309 for the distinction between *described* emotion that can be pinpointed in a text and *invoked* emotion in the reader.)

In an earlier study (Khalil 2000), I explained how the placement of prepositional phrases or adverbial clauses in sentence-initial position is typical of involved reporting such as editorials. That these structures have a potential affect-signaling function is supported by the fact that they are not used sentence-initially in short Arabic news texts. This is also the case for translated texts. Instances where short English news texts start with spatiotemporal structures are avoided in equivalent Arabic texts (see Khalil 2000).

5. Data analysis and findings

The data used to investigate the phenomenon of text-initial CC in this article have been drawn from the International edition of the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram*. Daily issues have been collected in a period of more than ten months (1 September 1995–16 July 1996). The opening news story,⁷ which appears on the (right side of the) front page, has been examined in a total of 315 issues.⁸ The preliminary analysis, which was conducted in order to ascertain the frequency of the phenomenon, showed a predominant occurrence of the main clause at the beginning of the lead sentence. This default structure of the Arabic sentence was found in 240 (or 76.1%) news stories. A total of 75 news stories (or 23.9%) was found to manifest the phenomenon of text-initial CC. These news stories were further examined as regards the nature of the event reported as well as the syntactic structure of the CC.

Before presenting the findings, it would perhaps be useful to show how the majority of news stories typically start.

(1) (27 July 1995)

S1 *a^c lana* *al-ra'iys* *Husniy mubaarak* *anna-hu*
 Announced the-president Husny Mubarak that-he
muhtamm li-al-ghaayah *al'aan* *bi-mushkilat* *al-asraa*
 concerned extremely now with-problem the-prisoners
al-miSriyyiyyyn ...
 the-Egyptians ...

- S2 *wa-qaala fiy Hadiyih li-SaHiyfat niwywrk taymz*
 And-said in talk to-newspaper *New York Times*
nasharat-hu ams inna miSr . . .
 published-it yesterday that Egypt . . .
- S1 'The Egyptian President Husny Mubarak announced that he is at the moment very concerned with the problem of the Egyptian prisoners . . .'
- S2 'He said, in an interview with the *New York Times* published yesterday, that Egypt . . .'

The lead sentence of this news story shows an unmarked structure. It starts with the main clause—headed by the verb—that encodes the main event. Similarly, S2 starts with a verb of saying that expresses an addition to the announcement reported in S1. Information about the context of the main event, namely the interview, is expressed parenthetically.

5.1. *The syntactic structure of the CC*

A close examination of opening news stories starting with a CC showed that this pattern of sentence structure tends to obtain when the writer reports highly important (foreign or domestic) events. It also showed that the CC, which precedes the main clause of the lead sentence, varies in its composition or internal structure, and consequently length. Five different types or manifestations of the CC were identified. The five types and the frequency of their occurrence are summarized in Table 1.

The five types of text-initial CC differ syntactically from the syntax of plain reporting, which is typical for Arabic news texts (see Khalil 2000). They also differ from each other. Thus, while Type A is standard, in the sense that it is characterized by an absence of any lexical markers of affect, Type B includes several lexical words that evaluate and explicitly signal affective stance. Types C and D consist of an extended CC by means of relative clauses and co-ordinate structures. The CC in Type E expresses an event that coincides with the event encoded in the following main clause. In what follows, the five types are briefly described and illustrated.

Table 1. *Types of text-initial CC and their distribution*

Type A: Standard	16 items	21.3%
Type B: Evaluation	21 items	28.0%
Type C: Extended: Relative clause	18 items	24.0%
Type D: Extended: Co-ordinate structures	15 items	20.0%
Type E: Co-occurrence	5 items	6.7%
Total	75 items	100.0%

5.1.1. *Type A: Standard.* This type is referred to as the standard CC since it is devoid of any lexical marking of affect, and syntax is the sole indicator of writer's stance. This is apparent in Excerpt (2).

(2) (10 January 1996)

Qabla 12 yawman min maw^Cid al-intixaabaat alfilisTiyniyyah
 Before 12 day from date the-elections the-Palestinian
fiy al-Diffah al-gharbiyyah wa-ghazzah, waafaqat al-duwal
 in the-Bank the-West and-Ghaza, agreed the-countries
wa-al-mu'assasaat al-maaniHah fiy mu'tamar baariys ^Cala
 and-the-institutions the-donor in conference Paris on
taqdiym 500 milyuwn duwlaar ila sulTat Al-Hukm al-dtaatiy
 offering 500 million dollar to authority the-rule the-self
al-filisTiyniy . . .
 the-Palestinian . . .

'Twelve days before Palestinian elections take place in the West Bank and Ghaza, donor countries and institutions agreed to grant \$500 million to the Palestinian self-rule authority . . .'

By opting to start the news imparting process with context information, the writer presents the event about financial aid from his/her own perspective (i.e., as being related to the temporal context referred to). In addition, this pattern of sequential organization emphasizes the significance of the event and manifests the writer's attitude and emotion toward what is reported, namely enthusiasm or appreciation for the financial aid that, as the text subsequently mentions, will be used to build the infrastructure.

It should be noted that this news story could have started with the event about the agreement to provide financial aid to the Palestinian authority, that is to say, with the main clause (i.e., verb-initial: *agreed donor countries to . . .*). Information about the date and the location of the impending Palestinian elections could have been expressed either in sentence-internal position or in a subsequent sentence (see Example [1]).

5.1.2. *Type B: Evaluation.* Type B is the most frequent type of CC: 28% of the total number of occurrences. Though syntactically similar to type A, the text-initial CC consists of a short adverbial structure that includes evaluative viewpoint words and hence it encodes the writer's explicit evaluation of the event. It also shows the writer's emotional closeness to—and affinity with—the situation the news story describes. Consider Example (3), in which the writer talks about a terrorist attack that took place on the Egyptian embassy in the Pakistani capital Islamabad and that resulted in killing five Egyptian officials and several Pakistanis. The news story opens as follows:

(3) (20 November 1995)

fiy ^C*amal* *ijraamiy xasiys*, *shannat jamaa* ^C*aat* *al-irhaab*
 In deed criminal mean, launched groups the-terrorism
hujuwman waHshiyyan ams ^C*ala* *mabnaa al-sifaarah*
 attack brutal yesterday on building the-embassy
al-miSriyyah fiy islaamabaad asfar ^C*an* *tadmiyr mabnaa*
 the-Egyptian in Islamabad resulted in destruction building
al-sifaarah bi-al-kaamil taqriyban ...
 the-embassy in-the-total almost ...

‘In a mean, criminal deed, terrorist groups launched yesterday a brutal attack on the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad, destroying the building almost completely ...’

The writer’s emotional involvement in the reported event is apparent in the text-initial CC that characterizes—and gives an assessment of—what happened.

The funeral of the five Egyptian officials two days later in Cairo was also covered by the opening news story. The lead sentence starts as follows:

(4) (22 November 1995)

wasTa mashaa ^C*ir* *waTaniyyah fayyaaDah*, *shayya* ^C*at* *miSr*
 Amid feelings patriotic exuberant, paid tribute Egypt
ba ^C*da* *Zuhr ams* *fiy janaazah rasmiyyah wa-sha* ^C*biyyah*
 after noon yesterday in funeral official and-national
mahiyyah shuhadaa’ahaa al-abraar alladiyyn raaHuw
 solemn martyrs-her the-devoted who gone
DaHiyyat al-hujuwam al-irhaabiy al-aathim ...
 victim the-attack the-terrorist the-evil ...

‘Amid exuberant feelings of patriotism, Egypt, in a solemn official and national funeral, paid yesterday afternoon tribute to its devoted martyrs, victims of the evil terrorist attack ...’

The CC (*Amid exuberant feelings of patriotism*), which precedes in Arabic the verb of the main clause, mirrors the writer’s closeness to the event and perception of its solemnity. It also captures the feelings of the Egyptian masses and shows empathy with them. It is worth noting that the following main clause also includes adjectives that demonstrate the writer’s viewpoint as regards the terrorist attack that led to the death of the five officials.

5.1.3. *Type C: Extended: Relative clause.* Type C is an extended CC as it contains a relative clause that provides additional information about

the preceding adverbial phrase. It is illustrated by the following fragment of a news story about an explosion that took place in the American military mission/facility in Saudi Arabia.

(5) (15 November 1995)

Ba^C da saa^Caat min al-infjaar alladhiy dammar
 After hours from the-explosion that destroyed
maqarr ba^C that al-tadriyb al-^Caskariyyah al-amrikiyyah
 headquarters mission the-training the-military the-American
fiy al-riyaaD, akkadat al-wilaayaat al-muttaHidah ams
 in Riadh, emphasized the-States the-United yesterday
thiqata-haa al-kaamilah fiy istiqaar wa-amn
 confidence-its the-complete in stability and-security
al-mamlakah al-^Carabiyyah al-sa^Cuwdiyyah . . .
 the-kingdom the-Arabic the-Saudi . . .

‘Hours after the explosion that destroyed the American military training mission in Riadh yesterday, the U.S. emphasized its complete confidence in the stability and security of Saudi Arabia . . .’

The structure of the lead sentence of this news story underscores the immediacy of the main event about the assurances that Washington gave shortly after the serious event of the explosion.

The same pattern is also apparent in the following excerpt of a news story about the death of the former French president François Mitterand. The event of Mitterand’s death provided the impetus to start the main news story as follows.

(6) (9 January 1996)

Ba^C da Hayaah siyaasiyyah Haafilah intaddat li-akthar
 After life political teeming extended for-more
min niSf qarn, tuwuffiya ams al-ra’iys al-fransiyy
 than half century, died yesterday the-president the-French
al-saabiq franswaa mitteraan.
 the-former François Mitterand.

‘After a teeming political life that extended for more than half a century, the former French President François Mitterand died yesterday.’

Before reporting the death of the former French president, the writer provided context information about his long political life, expressing, in this way, the magnitude of the loss and taking a sympathetic attitude toward Mitterand as well as appreciation for his role in international politics. It is to be noted that the CC in the above example includes lexical items (e.g., the adjective *teeming*) that also denote an affective stance and closeness to the event.

5.1.4. *Type D: Extended: Co-ordinate structures.* Type D is an extended CC as it contains co-ordinate structures that provide additional information about the context of the event referred to in the following main clause. This is apparent in the following lead sentence of a news story about the funeral of the former Israeli premier Yitzhak Rabin.

(7) (7 November 1995)

Fiy Zill ijraa'aat amniyyah Saarimah wa-ghayr
 In shadow measures security strict and-not
masbuwqah, wa-bi-HuDuwr al-ra'iys Husniy mubaarak
 preceded, and-with-presence the-president Husny Mubarak
wa-al-ra'iys al-amriykiy biyl kliyntuwn, wa-qaadat
 and-the-president the-American Bill Clinton, and-leaders
wa-ruw 'saa' Hukuwmaat akthar min 80 dawlah,
 and-heads governments more than 80 country,
shuyyi^Cat ams janaazat isHaaq raabiyn ra'iys
 was performed yesterday funeral Yitzhak Rabin president
wuzaraa' israa'iyl...
 ministers Israel ...

'Amid strict and unprecedented security measures, and in the presence of President Husny Mubarak and the American President Bill Clinton, as well as heads of states and governments of more than 80 countries, the funeral of the Israeli Premier Yitzhak Rabin was performed yesterday ...'

By providing several co-ordinate entities that describe and further specify the context of the funeral, the writer wanted to emphasize the solemnity of the occasion and to express compassion toward it as well as toward the circumstances that preceded it.

Co-ordinate structures may also provide a comment on the context of the main event that follows the CC. The following excerpt of a news story, reported by the chief editor, illustrates this feature.

(8) (24 June 1996)

Fiy manaax iyjaabiy ghayr masbuwq lam tashhadh
 In atmosphere positive not preceded not witnessed
al-manTiqah al-^Carabiyyah mundhu^Ciddat sanawaat,
 [by]the-region the-Arab since several years,
wa-bi-ijmaa^C kaamil, wa-tafaahum wa-taTaabuq fiy
 and-with-unanimity complete, and-understanding and-identity in
wujhaat al-naZar, najaHat al-qimmah al-^Carabiyyah
 aspects the-view, succeeded the-top the-Arab

bi-ri'aasat al-ra'iys Husniy mubaarak ba C da yawmayn
 with-leadership the-president Husny Mubarak after day-two
min al-mushaawaraat al-mukaththafah, wa-silsilah min jalasaat
 of the-consultations the-intensive, and-a series of sessions
al-Camal al-mughlaqah, fiy ittixaadh mawaaqif SariyHah
 the-work the-closed, in taking standpoints open
wa-Haasimah . . .
 and-decisive . . .

'In an unprecedented positive atmosphere not witnessed by the Arab region for several years, and in complete unanimity, understanding, and identity in viewpoints, the Arab summit presided by President Husny Mubarak succeeded, after two days of intensive consultations and a series of closed working sessions, in adopting clear and decisive standpoints . . .'

It is apparent that the writer of this news story maintains the insider perspective, projecting closeness to, and affinity with, the event at issue. By describing the atmosphere in which the top conference was held, the text-initial CC encodes the writer's assessment of the context and emphasis of the significance of the event, reflecting enthusiasm as well as appreciation for the achieved results.

5.1.5. *Type E: Co-occurrence.* The last type of text-initial CC is an adverbial clause that encodes an event about the broader context of the main event expressed in the following main clause. Both events overlap and co-occur. This is apparent in the following lead sentence.

(9) (9 March 1996)

Fiy al-waqt alladhy aSbaHa fiy-hi al-irhaab xaTaran
 In the-time that became in-it the-terrorism danger
jasiyman yuhaddid muxtalif al-duwal, wa-juhuwd al-salaam
 grave threatens different the-countries, and-efforts the-peace
fiy al-sharq al-awsaT, ittafaq al- C aalam C abr
 in the-East the-Middle, agreed the-world [leaders] through
ittiSaalaat sariy C ah jarat fiy xilaal al-yawm-ayn
 contacts fast occurred in during the-day-two
al-maaDiyayn C ala C aqd muw'tamar qimmah dawliyy
 the-past on convening conference top international
fiy miSr li-inqaadh C amaliyyat al-salaam fiy al-sharq
 in Egypt for-rescuing process the-peace in the-East
al-awsaT wa-mukaafaHat al-irhaab al-dawliyy.
 the-Middle and-combating the-terrorism the-international.

‘As terrorism became a grave danger, threatening different countries as well as peace efforts in the Middle East, world leaders agreed through fast contacts in the last two days to hold an international top conference in Egypt in order to save the peace process in the Middle East and to combat international terrorism.’

International terrorism furnished the broader context that coincides with the event reported in the opening news story about the international summit conference that was held in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt. The sentence-initial CC manifests the insider perspective and encodes the writer’s empathy—sharing with others the gravity of the situation in the world as a result of international terrorism and emphasizing the importance and relevance of the summit conference at this juncture.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The goal of this article has been to account for the occasional and seemingly random occurrence of spatiotemporal structures at the beginning of the lead sentence of Arabic news stories. The article has shown that their placement, which departs from the typical pattern of presenting main event information, is governed by pragmatic or extra linguistic constraints, namely the importance (and possible consequences) of certain sociopolitical events. In this communicative situation, the writer’s intention is to provide positive or negative comment on—or response to—highly newsworthy events. As such, the writer ‘assumes a viewpoint within the universe of discourse’ (Dorgeloh 1997: 169), and projects him- or herself as a close observer of the situation and a participant in the current popular mood.

By identifying affective meaning in adverbial structures occurring in text-initial position, the article provides evidence that syntax interacts with pragmatics, which, it is recalled, ‘studies the factors that govern our choice of language in social interaction and the effects of our choice on others’ (Crystal 1997: 120). It also illustrates that grammatical structures may sometimes be employed as a rhetorical strategy to inject emotive meaning into discourse.

Sequential organization may be the sole indicator of affective stance, that is to say, without necessarily including lexical markers or linguistic triggers of emotional inferencing (see Ungerer 1997: 314). Communicating affect, however, may blend with communicating information through the use of markers that denote features such as importance (e.g., *this news is important to you*), emotional (subjective) attitude or comments (e.g., *in*

my opinion, I believe that, I emphasize, indeed, it is clear that; see Jones 1983: 76–77), or involvement (e.g., first and second person reference; see Chafe 1982).

In addition to sequential organization, the internal structure of text-initial constituents varies. The extended type, which spans several lines, displays a high density of information. This may denote emotional intensity—engendering ‘emotional acuity’ (Stein 1995: 132)—toward the upcoming event referred to in the main clause.

Apart from showing the significance of the CC as a *global signal* of the nature of the event reported in the news story, the article underscores the key role that sentence-initial position plays in discourse. Relevant here is the role of this position to denote ‘involved narration’, which aims at more than just giving information (Abelen et al. 1993: 324). The slow start and the gradual approach to the main event add suspense. Restrained emotional intensity keeps readers waiting for the main event to unfold. This syntactic manipulation is comparable to narratives that start as follows:

Last week at a parking lot in the city of London a meeting took place between . . .

This mode of expression captures the writer acting as a *calculated storyteller* engaged in a *reconstruction process*. It amounts to an illocutionary act that ‘communicates speaker’s beliefs, feelings, attitudes, or opinions with respect to a specific event or state of affairs’ (Edmondson 1981: 137).

Ultimately, assigning affective functions to syntactic structures depends largely on interpretation—a process that necessarily takes into account knowledge of discourse structure and discourse type (see Caenepeel and Moens 1994), as well as knowledge of various patterns of relationships, such as knowledge of text-type specific *foreground–background* structure and of how that structure ought to be encoded. (On the place of *grounding* in the process of text production, see Khalil 2000.) In terms of the *grounding* theory, the CC represents a fronted—a *foregrounded*—constituent that retains its *background* function, serving as the ‘ground’ or ‘scene-setting’ for what follows (Quirk et al. 1985: 491).

As affect ‘permeates the entire linguistic system’ (Ochs and Schieffelin 1989: 22), exploring the affective functions of spatiotemporal structures is a contribution to the grammar of affective evaluation, which has not been sufficiently investigated (see Thompson and Hunston 2000). It is, concomitantly, a call for a closer examination of various grammatical structures for their possible attitudinal meanings.

Notes

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1. *Evaluation* has also been used as a cover term for various concepts, namely ‘for the expression of the speaker or writer’s attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about’ (Thompson and Hunston 2000: 5).
 2. Right and left dislocation are associated with the discourse notions of *foregrounding* and *backgrounding* (see Section 6).
 3. See Besnier (1998) for a short description of the literature on the early studies of involvement. For an overview of some current notions of involvement in pragmatics, see Caffi and Janney (1994).
 4. VS syntax is the term Givón used for the verb preceding the subject (see Givón 1977). In Modern Standard Arabic, VSO is considered to be the basic, stylistically neutral or unmarked word order (see Dik 1980 for different language types). The alternate SVO occurs in certain situations. The position of spatiotemporal structures is usually after the VS(O).
 5. In informative texts, writers are customarily neutral observers and presenters of facts; their attitude is ‘non-engaged and non-evaluative’ (Košir 1988: 354). This is apparent in short news texts, which typically maintain a detached presentation and preclude involvement (see Khalil 2000).
 6. It remains, of course, difficult to produce or achieve a completely neutral mode of writing, so-called ‘the zero degree of writing’ (Barthes 1967: 6). In fact, ‘language use cannot be regarded as neutral, value-free or exempt from at least some “angle of telling”’. Rather it is shaped by a mosaic of cultural assumptions, political beliefs and institutional practices—in other words, ideologies’ (Simpson 1993: 176).
 7. The opening news story of *Al-Ahram* reports current and highly informative news events. It engages the interest and attention of a large number of readers. It is usually written by different journalists from the editorial board of the newspaper, including the chief editor, or by one of the correspondents abroad. Sometimes the news story does not have a by-line.
 8. The newspaper did not appear on 25 and 26 December 1995 and 1 and 2 January 1996. One issue (31 May 1996) was missing.

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