A Systemic Approach to the Study of the Clause as Exchange in Information Questions in English And Arabic

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1. Introduction:

SFG (Systemic Functional Grammar) provides a framework within which the grammar of any natural language can be described. Hudson (1970: 1) argues that SFG defines the overall structures that grammars must have by defining the kinds of categories that must appear in them and the way in which they are related to each other in the grammar.

The word "systemic" refers to that feature of the Hallidayan grammar that "it interprets language not as a set of structures but as a network of systems or interrelated sets of options for making meaning. Such options are not defined by reference to structures; they are purely abstract features, and structure comes in as the means whereby they are put into effect or realized (Halliday, 1994: 15). Functional, on the other hand, means that this grammar is based on meaning.

According to Halliday (1985: 34), there are three lines of meaning in the clause: clause as a message, clause as exchange, and clause as a representation which refer to the three distinct kinds of meaning that are embodied in the structure of a clause. In fact, these three kinds of meaning run throughout the whole language. They are referred to in this grammar as metafunctions, and as Halliday states: "The concept of metafunction is one

of the basic concepts around which the theory is constructed" (ibid.: 35). These metafunctions according to Halliday are: the ideational, interpersonal and textual, corresponding to the systems of transitivity, mood and theme respectively.

In this paper, we will try to study the information questions in English and Arabic clauses as exchanges in an attempt to shed light on the similarities and differences between the two languages.

2. **English Clause as Exchange:**

Clause as exchange corresponds with the interpersonal metafunction. It conveys information from the speaker (or the writer) to the listener (or reader). In this respect, both the speaker and the listener have a particular speech role, which can be either giving (inviting to receive) or demanding (inviting to give) (ibid., 1994: 68). Furthermore, the act of giving and demanding can be referred to two types of exchange, namely exchange of goods and services (offers and commands) and exchange of information (statement and question).

The basic grammatical system of the clause as exchange is Mood. The grammatical relation of the elements of the mood determines whether the clause is a statement or a question.

The initial choice in the mood system is between indicative and imperative. If the clause is indicative, there is a further choice between declarative and interrogative. A declarative clause has its subject preceding its predicator, e.g.:
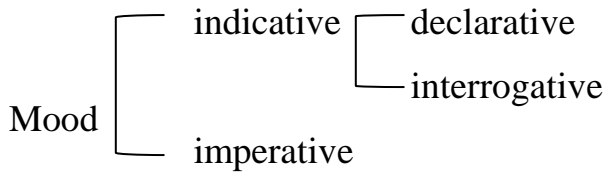
1. *Layla drives the car fast.*

As for the interrogative clause, it has either the subject included in the predicator, or an initial wh-element as in (2) and (3) respectively:
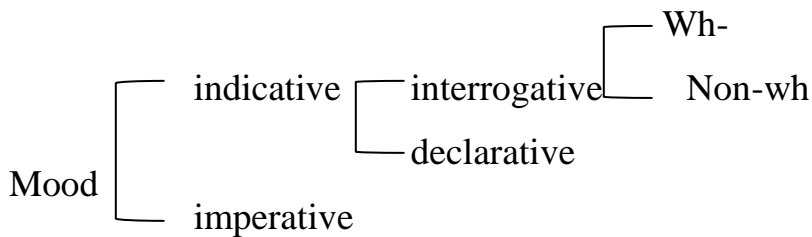
2. *Does Layla drive the car?*

3. *How does Layla drive the car?*

The Mood system, then, may be represented as:

Mood
- indicative
  - declarative
  - interrogative
- imperative

(Muir, 1972: 95)

Thus, the interrogative clauses may be either wh-interrogative or non-wh interrogatives. The Mood system may be represented by:

Mood
- indicative
  - interrogative
    - Wh-
    - Non-wh
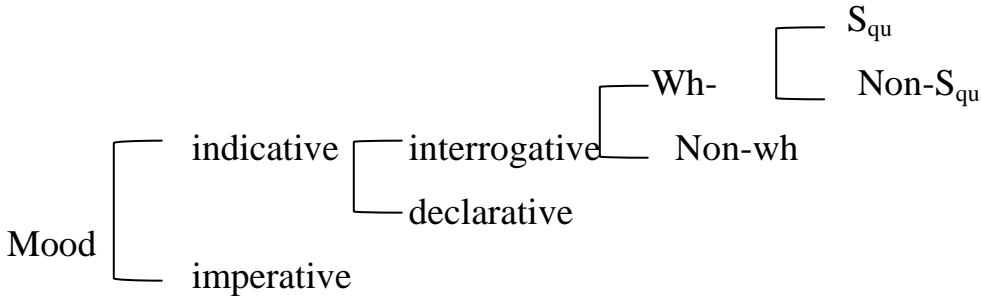 - declarative
- imperative

(ibid.: 96)

Further, in wh interrogatives, it may be the identification of the subject which is in question or it may be some other element. If it is the former, the wh-element is the subject of the clause, and takes the initial clause position for wh-elements as in:

4. *Who opens the door?*

If it is not the subject of the clause which is in question, the wh-element will take initial position in the clause and the subject will be included in the predicator as in:

5. *When will he go?*

Thus, the Mood system will be shown as:

$$
\text{Mood}
\begin{cases}
\text{indicative}
\begin{cases}
\text{interrogative}
\begin{cases}
\text{Wh-}
\begin{cases}
S_{qu} \\
\text{Non-}S_{qu}
\end{cases} \\
\text{Non-wh}
\end{cases} \\
\text{declarative}
\end{cases} \\
\text{imperative}
\end{cases}
$$

(ibid.)

As for the constituents of the mood, they are the <u>subject</u> and the <u>finite operator</u>. The finite operator expresses the primary tense (present, past), modality (probabilities or obligations) and polarity (choice between positive and negative). The order of the subject and the finite defines the mood of the clause which can be indicative or imperative, there is a further choice between declarative and interrogative.

The rest of the clause not including the subject and the finite operator is called <u>Residue</u>. It consists of the predicator, complements and adjuncts. Thus, the clause as exchange can be analysed in terms of the SFPCA functions.

The predicator is realized by the verbal group minus the finite element. Complements follow the predicator and they are realized by a nominal group. If the complement follows a transitive verb, it is then a direct object. Some ditransitive verbs; however, take two objects: direct and indirect. If a complement follows a copular verb such as (be, seem, become), it is called an intensive complement. As for the adjuncts, they are realized by prepositional phrases, adverbial groups or nominal groups. The structure of

the clause as exchange in the indicative mood can be shown in the figure (1) below:

Layla	has	bought a book
S	finite	Residue
mood		

Fig. (1): Structure of a declarative English clause.

2.1 English Information Questions:

The information question is an important element in the inter-personal structure of the clause (Halliday, 1994: 85). Its function is to specify the entity that the speaker wishes to have supplied. In information questions, also called wh-questions, it is some other element embodied in the information word that is in question and that the speaker wants to know (Downing & Locke, 2003: 185).

These questions are formed with the aid of one of the following interrogative words: who/ whom/ whose/ which/ when/ where/ how/ why.

- **Who** refers to people and can be used as subject, object, or complement, e.g.

6. *Who comes?*

- **Whom** is used as a formal alternative to who as object, e.g.

7. *Whom did you see?*

- **Whose** is used for possession, e.g.

8. *Whose books are these?*

- **<u>Which</u>** refers to people when we want to identify somebody in a group, or talk about a choice between one or more things:

9. *Which is your brother?*

10. *Which one do you like?*

We can say, then, that the wh-element operates in various clause functions (Quirk et al., 1985: 818; 1998: 818), as in:

11. *Who opened the door?*

   [Wh-element: S]

12. *Which books do you like?*

   [Wh-element: O_d]

13. *How long did they make the dress?*

   [Wh-element: C_S]

14. *When did they come?*

   [Wh-element: A]

15. *Where did they go?*

   [Wh-element: A]

16. *Why did she travel to Baghdad?*

   [Wh-element: A]

Turning back to the information questions in the clauses as exchange, they are conflated with one or another of the three functions: subject, complement and adjunct. The information question is part of the mood element when it is conflated with the subject, and the order within the mood

is subject + finite (Halliday, 1994: 85; Downing and Locke, 2003: 187). This can be shown below:

Who	owned		that house
Subj/ Wh	past (finite)	own	complement
mood		residue	

Fig. (2): Information question conflated with subject.

On the other hand, the information question is part of the residue if it is conflated with a complement or adjunct. Thus, the finite precedes subject. Put differently, if any other clause element is questioned (Object (O), Complement (C), or Adjunct (A)), it is placed in initial position and the normal interrogative order prevails. Consider:

17. Whose are these glasses?

Whose	are	these glasses
Complement/Wh	finite	subject
Residue	Mood	

Fig. (3): Information question conflated with complement.

18. Where have you been?

Where	have	you	been
Adjunct/ Information Structure	finite	subject	predicator
	mood		
Residue …………			

Fig. (4): Information question conflated with adjunct.

It should be noted that the predicator cannot be conflated with the wh-element. These questions are realized as do + what (complement), or what (subject) + happen; and whatever had done to it, comes in as an adjunct in the form of the prepositional phrase, with the preposition 'to' (Halliday, 1994: 86).

19. What has she given to him?

What	has	she	given	to him
Complement/ Wh	finite	subject	predicator	adjunct
	mood			
Residue				

Fig. (5): Wh-clause not conflated with predicator.

3. <u>Arabic Clause as Exchange:</u>

The Arabic clause as exchange consists of the mood and the residue. The initial choice in the mood system is between indicative and imperative. The further choice, then, is between declarative and interrogative clauses. The declarative clauses could either be nominal or verbal, the nominal clauses have no verb, while verbal ones have a verb. See examples (20) and (21) respectively:

20. الطالب ذكي   [The student is intelligent]

21. يلعب عليُ في الحديقة   [Ali plays in the garden]

As for the interrogative clauses, they are preceded by interrogative particles which could either be information questions like ماذا (what), متى (when), أين (where), من (who), etc. or non-information questions like هل or أ. Consider (22) and (23) below:

22. **هل جاء محمد؟**   [Did Mohammed come?]

23. **من ضرب علي؟**   [Who hit Ali?]

Thus (22) is an example of Arabic clause in which the polarity question (هل)

is used, while in (23) the information question من (who) is used.

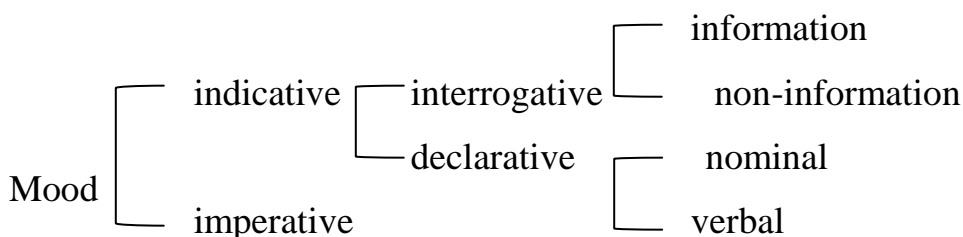The mood system, in Arabic, may be represented as:

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                              ┌── information
          ┌─ indicative ┌─ interrogative ──── non-information
Mood ─┤              └─ declarative ┌── nominal
          └─ imperative             └── verbal
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Fig. (6): The mood system in Arabic.

As far as the elements of the Arabic clause as exchange are concerned, they are the mood and the residue. The mood consists of the subject only when the clause is declarative positive, e.g.

24. **يكتب الطالب الدرس**   [The student writes the lesson.]

*

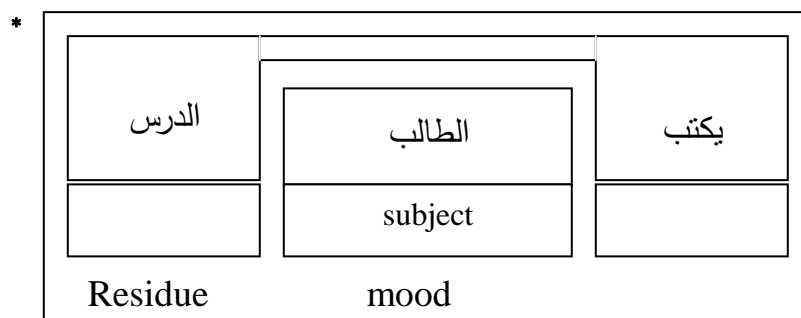| الدرس	الطالب	يكتب
	subject	
Residue	mood	

Fig. (7): The mood system in Arabic declarative clause.

However, when the clause is interrogative, the mood consists of the subject and the finite, e.g.

25. **من درس الدرسَ؟**   (Who studied the lesson?)

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* All the Arabic figures are designed by the researchers.

الدرس	درس		من
complement	يدرس	past (finite)	subject/ information question
Residue		Mood	

Fig. (8): The mood system in Arabic interrogative clause.

3.1 Arabic Information Questions:

Information questions in Arabic ask about one of the elements of the clause. They usually begin with one of the following question words: (Ibn Ya'eesh, 8: 150; Al-Mubarrad, 1388: 1:52; Al-Zarkashi, 1957: 227; Al-Makhzumi, 1966; Al-Jurjani, 1969: 165; Al-Ghalayini, 1973: 14f).

I. من (who) which is used to ask about persons:

26. *من جاء؟* (Who came?)

II. ما (what) which used to ask about things?

27. *ما اشتريت؟* (What did you buy?)

III. ماذا (what) which is also used to about things:

28. *ماذا فعلت؟* (What did you do?)

IV. أي (which) which is used to define things:

29. *أي كتاب تفضل؟* (Which book do you prefer?)

V. أين (where) which is used as adverbial to ask about place:

30. *أين سافرت؟* (Where did you travel?)

VI. متى (when) which is used as adverbial to ask about time:

31. *متى رأيت احمد؟* (When did you see Ahmed?)

VII. أيان (when) which is used to ask about time in future:

32. أيان تسافر؟　　　(When are you going to travel?)

VIII.　كيف (how) which is used to ask about manner or condition:

33. كيف أنت؟　　　(How are you?)

IX.　لماذا، لِمَ (why) to ask about reasons:

34. لِمَ/ لماذا زرت ليلى؟ (Why did you visit Layla?)

X.　أنّى It has the meaning of 'how', e.g.

35. أنّى تفعل هذا؟　　　(How do you do this?)

It also has the meaning of "from where", e.g.

36. أنّى لك هذا؟　　　(Where did you get that from?)

In Arabic, the information questions are part of the mood element when they are conflated with the subject. That is to say, if it is the identity of the subject that is questioned, the information question conflates with the subject and the subject + finite order prevails:

37. من سافر إلى بغداد؟ (Who traveled to Baghdad?)

إلى بغداد	سافر		من
complement	يسافر	past (finite)	subject/ information question
Residue		Mood	

Fig. (9): An information question conflated with subject.

38. من ضربَ محمداً؟ (Who hit Mohammed?)

محمد	ضرب	من

complement	يضرب	past (finite)	subject/ information question
Residue		Mood	

Fig. (10): Another example of information question

conflated with subject

On the other hand, the information question is part of the residue if it is conflated with object or adjunct:

39. *ماذا اشترى احمد البارحة؟* (What did Ali buy yesterday?)

البارحة	احمد	اشترى		ماذا
	subject	finite	يشتري	obj./inf.Q.
	mood			
Residue				

Fig. (11): An information question conflated with object.

40. *أين ذهبت سلمى البارحة؟* (Where did Salma go yesterday?)

البارحة	سلمى	ذهبت		أين
	subject	finite	يذهب	adjunct/inf.Q.
	mood			
Residue				

Fig. (12): An information question conflated with adjunct.

However, if the complement element is questioned; there will be no residue simply because we are dealing here with the Arabic nominal clauses[*] in which there is no verb:

41. من جميلة   (Who is beautiful?)

جميلة	من
subject	complement/ information question
Mood	

Fig. (13): An information question of an Arabic nominal clause.

4. Comparison:

1. In both English and Arabic, the information questions are part of the mood element when they are conflated with the subject, and the order within the mood is Subject + finite. See examples (42) and (43) below:

42. Who broke the window?

Who	broke		the window
Subj/ information question	past (finite)	break	complement
Mood		Residue	

Fig. (14): English information question conflated with subject.

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[*] Nominal clauses are one of two types of Arabic sentences in which the predicate may or may not contain a verb. On this basis, Arabic sentences may be classified into verbal (containing a verb) and nominal (containing no verb) (Aziz, 1989: 11).

43. *منْ درّسَ الدرسَ؟*

الدرس	درس		من
complement	يدرس	past (finite)	subject/ information question
Residue	Mood		

Fig. (15): Arabic information question conflated with subject.

2. In English and Arabic, the information question is part of the residue if it is conflated with the object and adjunct. Consider examples (44, 46) (English) and (45, 47) (Arabic).

44. *What did she do?*

What	did	she	do
Object/ Information Structure	finite	subject	Predicator
	mood		
Residue …………			

Fig. (16): English information question conflated with object.

45. *ماذا كتب محمدٌ في المدرسة؟*

في المدرسة	محمدٌ	كتبَ		ماذا
	subject	finite	يكتب	object/inf.Q.
	mood			
Residue				

Fig. (17): Arabic information question conflated with object.

46. Where did Layla stay?

Where	did	Layla	stay
Adjunct/ Question	finite	subject	predicator
	mood		
Residue			

Fig. (18): English information question conflated with adjunct.

٤٧. كيف سافر زيدٌ إلى بغداد؟

إلى بغداد	زيدٌ	سافر		كيف
	subject	finite	يسافر	adjunct/Q.
	mood			
Residue				

Fig. (19): Arabic information question conflated with adjunct.

3. Unlike English, however, the Arabic information question is not part of the residue when it is conflated with the complement because there is no residue in Arabic nominal clauses:

48. Whose are these books?

Whose	are	these books
Complement/Question	finite	subject
Residue	Mood	

Fig. (20): English information question conflated with complement.

49. ما محمدٌ؟

ما	محمد
complement/ question	subject
Mood	

Fig. (21): Arabic information question asking about the complement element.

5. Conclusion:

This paper tackles the grammar of both English and Arabic clauses within the interpersonal metafunction. It concludes that the Hallidayan model can be applied to the Arabic clause almost as it does to the English one, yielding certain similarities and differences which can be summed up by the following:

1. In both English and Arabic, the clause as exchange corresponds with the interpersonal metafunction.

2. The information questions in English and Arabic are within the choice of the interrogative clauses into information and non-information interrogatives.

3. The information questions can be used in English and Arabic to seek for the information that the speaker wants to know by means of interrogatives such as: what, when, where (English), and كيف، أين، ماذا، من (Arabic).

4. The English and Arabic information questions are parts of the mood element when they are conflated with the subject.

5.   The information questions are part of the residue when they are conflated with the object and adjunct in English and Arabic.

6.   The most important difference between the English and Arabic clauses as exchange is that the Arabic information question is not part of the residue when it is conflated with the complement and specifically in Arabic nominal clauses.

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