On sluicing and its kin: Evidence from Egyptian Arabic
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[Introduction] One influential generalization on the syntax of sluicing (call it Generalization A) maintains that sluicing or lack thereof is tied to the wh-syntax of a given language (Ross 1969; Merchant 2001; Lasnik 2001). In English, sluicing is assumed to result from wh-fronting plus TP-deletion, as in (1).

1) John bought something, but I don’t know [CP what [John bought]].

Egyptian Arabic (EA) is primarily a wh-in-situ language that also allows wh-clefting and wh-fronting under very specific conditions; as such, it provides a good testing ground for Generalization A. In this paper, I show that the language exhibits genuine sluicing only in contexts where wh-fronting is allowed, and cleft-sluicing otherwise, thereby supporting Generalization A. The data and analysis presented here thus aim to (i) contribute to the cross-linguistic study of sluicing and sluicing-like constructions (SLCs) and (ii) bear on theoretical issues related to the investigation of ellipsis phenomena in human language.

Wh-syntax of EA (cf. Wahba 1984; Cheng 1997). EA utilizes multiple strategies for wh-questions. Wh-arguments may appear in situ (2), or as pivots of a cleft structure (3), followed by an (optionally overt) pronominal copula and/or an optional demonstrative, and a free relative clause (FRC) marked by the complementizer ?illi (and a resumptive pronoun). Fronting of a wh-argument is strictly prohibited (4).

2) shuf-t miin? 3) miin, (huwwa) (da) ?illi 4) *miin, shuf-t ti?

Bare wh-adjuncts, meanwhile, can appear either in situ (5), or in a left-peripheral focused position via fronting (6); but they are strictly prohibited from appearing as pivots in a cleft structure (7). That wh-adjuncts undergo movement is supported by their island-sensitivity, as the ungrammatical (8) shows.

5) ?inta ha-tsaafir feen/?inta/?izzaay/leeh? 6) feen/?inta/?izzaay/leeh, ha-tsaafir ti?

Where did Mona get upset because Ali traveled to?

7) *feen/?inta/?izzaay/leeh (huwwa) ?illi 8) *feen, Mona zi’il-it la?ann Ali saafir ti?

Who did you see?

9) *Miin shuf-t ti?

Mona will travel, but I don’t know where/when/how/why.

10) *Miin shuf-t ti?

Mona loves someone, but I don’t know who.

The appearance of wh-adjuncts as remnants in a cleft-sluicing clause is expected, since they can undergo fronting in the language (cf. 6). As such, (9) can have a standard sluicing derivation as in (11), where CP is the sluicing clause, and the wh-adjunct is in SpecFocP (rather than SpecCP, given that an overt Q-particle optionally occupies the C position and precedes wh-phrases in matrix questions; cf. Eid 1992).

11) [CP [FocP feen/?inta/?izzaay/leeh, Foc [ti[tilla]]]

It is the occurrence of wh-arguments in SLCs such as (10) that poses a challenge to Generalization A, since EA strictly prohibits fronting of wh-arguments, unlike Emirati Arabic (Leung 2014) and Libyan Arabic (Algryan 2015). One possible analysis of (10) is as an instance of pseudoslucing (along the lines suggested for Japanese SLCs in Kizu 1997 and Merchant 1998), where the wh-phrase miin in (10) is a reduced cleft equivalent to ‘who it is.’ Even though EA is a null subject and a null copula language, there is no evidence that the language has overt or null expletives of the ‘it’ type, which casts doubt on a pseudoslucing analysis. I would like to argue instead that SLCs such as (10) are derived from an underlying wh-cleft structure whose TP undergoes deletion, leaving the wh-pivot behind, with recoverability of elided material licensed under semantic identity with the antecedent clause (Merchant 2001; Potsdam 2007; van Craenenbroeck...
2010). The main evidence for this cleft-sluicing analysis is that elements such as the pronominal copula and demonstrative, which characterize cleft structures, (as in 3 and 12), may also appear stranded with the wh-phrase in SLCs, as the multiple possibilities in (13) show.

12) Ahmad (huwwa (da) ?illii Mona bi-tihbib-uh
Ahmad COP.SGM DEM.SGM COMP Mona ASP-love.3SGF-him
‘It is Ahmad that Mona loves.’

13) Mona bi-tihbib waahid bass ma-raf-§ miin (huwwa (da)
Mona ASP-love.3SGF one but NEG-know.1SG-NEG who COP.SGM DEM.SGM
‘Mona loves someone, but I don’t know who.’

Notice that an analysis of (13) whereby huwwa is a referential third person pronoun, instead of a copula, faces the challenge of explaining the co-occurrence of both a pronominal and a demonstrative in SLCs. In addition, such an analysis would have to assume that the [WH-PHRASE PRONOMINAL DEMONSTRATIVE] string is specific to SLCs only. By contrast, under a cleft-sluicing analysis, no such construction-specific assumption needs to be made, since this string is what is left behind after deletion applies to a regular cleft structure. This account is strengthened by the prosodic fact that, when sluiced behind with a wh-phrase, either huwwa or da in (13) receives the pitch accent, exactly as in clefts. The analysis is also cross-linguistically supported, since the occurrence of a demonstrative in SLCs like (13) is similar to what van Craenenbroeck (2010) calls spading in Dutch dialects. In both Dutch and EA, the demonstrative carries a presuppositional meaning and is incompatible with wh-adjuncts. Interestingly, van Craenenbroeck argues for a cleft-sluicing analysis of spading, which is what is proposed here for EA SLCs. Further, the analysis can readily account for the behavior of wh-PPs in a non-P-stranding language like EA: Since PPs can be fronted in EA, a wh-PP can appear as a sluicing remnant (like bare wh-adjuncts in 11), hence the impossibility of the copula and demonstrative in (14). If a wh-phrase is merged as a pivot of a cleft, while being associated with a resumptive pronoun inside the PP, then we have a case of cleft-sluicing, (15). Both structures obey Merchant’s (2001) generalization on P-stranding (cf. Rodriguez et al 2009).

14) Mona bi-ti-tikkallim ma‘a waahid bass ma-raf-§ miin (huwwa (da)
Mona ASP-talk.3SGF with one but NEG-know.1SG-NEG with who COP.SGM DEM.SGM
‘Mona is talking with someone, but I don’t know with whom.’

15) Mona bi-ti-tikkallim ma‘a waahid bass ma-raf-§ miin (huwwa (da)
Mona ASP-talk.3SGF with one but NEG-know.1SG-NEG who COP.SGM DEM.SGM
‘Mona is talking with someone, but I don’t know who.’

Syntactic derivations of cleft-sluicing in EA I will assume the equative copular structure in (16) for EA clefts; cf. Eid 1983, 1991; Ouhalla 1999; Choueiri 2016.

16) [CP [Foc Pivot Foc [TP Dem F [TP T [Pred proi [Foc Pred [COPULA [DP [CP C?illii … RP; …]]]]]]]]

Pivots of clefts are base-generated in SpecFocP. A copula heads a PredP (Bowers 1993), whose subject is pro and whose complement is a free relative clause (FRC) with a resumptive pronoun (RP). The pivot, pro, and the RP are all coindexed. Pred may stay in situ (in which case it is null at PF) or it head-moves to T and Foc (in which case it surfaces as a pronominal copula with T’s phi-features). An optional projection in clefts (named FP in 16) can host a (Dem)onstrative pronoun in its Spec, and is assumed to be where presupposition is encoded. Finally, I assume that ellipsis is triggered by an E-feature on a functional head H, causing H’s complement to delete at PF (Merchant 2001). Unlike in English, the E-feature is hosted by either Foc or F in EA, triggering TP-deletion in both cases. Given these assumptions, the derivations of the four surface possibilities of the cleft-sluiced CP in (13) are as in (17-20). Remnants are in blue; the E-feature is marked by a red subscript. Strikethrough marks deletion. For readability, head-movement of Pred to T and Foc in (18) and (20) is not shown, but is signaled via a huwwa subscript on Foc.


18) [CP [Foc miin, Foc [TP Dem F [TP T [Pred proi [Foc PredatorCOPULA [DP [CP C?illii … RP; …]]]]]]]]]]]]]]}}

19) [CP [Foc miin, Foc [TP Dem F [TP T [Pred proi [Foc PredatorCOPULA [DP [CP C?illii … RP; …]]]]]]]]]]]]]]}}

20) [CP [Foc miin, Foc [TP Dem F [TP T [Pred proi [Foc PredatorCOPULA [DP [CP C?illii … RP; …]]]]]]]]]]]]]]}}

Conclusion In sum, EA exhibits genuine sluicing only in contexts where fronting is permitted (bare wh-adjuncts and wh-PPs), and cleft-sluicing otherwise, in line with the wh-syntax of the language.