

Expressing Relative and Absolute [ALIGNMENT] in Traditional aṣ-Šāniʿ Arabic

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Spatial Frames of Reference (FoRs) are conceptual and semantic coordinate systems (Intrinsic, Relative, Absolute) used to establish projective relations between an object to be located (Figure, F) and the reference object (Ground, G). In Traditional aṣ-Šāniʿ Arabic (TAA) – North Western Arabic, nomadic Ḥijāzi – all three FoRs are used for small-scale location, selected according to a domain-related and culture-based ontology of Gs. Intrinsic and Relative FoRs are used only for the Front/Back Axis: Intrinsic FoR is restricted to mobile, shaped objects of the traditional life (horse, dog, tent, coffee pot); Relative FoR is applied by Translation, with unshaped Gs, when G, F and Observer (O) are in [ALIGNMENT]: ‘F min G wjāy’, ‘F (is) from G and coming (toward O)’ means ‘F is closer to G than O’; ‘F min G wġād’, ‘F is from G and on the farther side (with respect to O)’, means ‘F is farther from O than G’. Absolute FoR – anchored on cardinal directions (CaDs), north šimāl, east šarg, south giblih and west ġarb – always replaces Right/Left and both Front/Back and Right/Left of unfamiliar Gs. CaDs are highly grammaticalized, showing a prepositional morpheme (-íy, F šargíy G, ‘F (is) east of G’) and path-encoding verbs (šarrag ‘to go east’). Nominal forms (used also adverbially) have different origins: šarg/ġarb are verbal nouns (the rising/setting of the sun), šimāl/giblih are place names. CaDs manifest in two types of locative expressions: 1. ‘F šargíy G’, 2. ‘F min G wšarg’, both meaning ‘F (is) east of G’. In fact, 1. contains no information about the position of O, while 2. entails [ALIGNMENT] among G-F-O. The construction F min G w+adverb expresses G-F-O’s [ALIGNMENT] both in Relative and Absolute FoRs. Grammatical distinctions based on G-F-O’s [ALIGNMENT] are found in other South Semitic languages.