A Syntactic Study of Adjectives in Jordanian Arabic

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Abstract

This paper provides a syntactic analysis of adjectives in Jordanian Arabic. The study explores a number of syntactic approaches that have dealt with adjectives. Then, it investigates whether these approaches account for the syntactic behavior of adjectives in Jordanian Arabic. The study argues that there is no syntactic approach fully accounts for Jordanian Arabic adjectives, and thus it invites other researchers to examine this issue and provide a comprehensive analysis for adjectives in Jordanian Arabic.

1. Adjectives in Jordanian Arabic

The majority of adjectives in Jordanian Arabic follow the modified noun and agree with it in number, gender, case and definiteness (Alhailawani, 2018).

1)   ʃufit   ʔilbint   ʔilḥilweh
        saw-I DEF-girl-SF DEF-pretty-SF
         I saw the pretty girl

2)   darasna   maʕ   walad   ðaki
        studied-we with INDEF-boy-SM INDEF-smart-SM
         We studied with a smart boy

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3)   laʕbna: maʕ   ʔilʔawlad   ʔilmuʕadabi:n
        played-we with   DEF-boys-PM   DEF-well-manared-PM
           We played the well-mannered boys

However, adjectives can also come before the noun. In this case, they do not agree with the noun in number, gender, or definiteness (ibid).

4) ʔilʕibit   maʕ   ʔakbar   ʔilbana:t
      played-I with INDEF-oldest-SM DEF-girl-PF
        I played with the oldest girl.

5)   ʔiʃtare:t   fustan   ʔaxḍar   ʔillo:n
       bought-I   dress   INDEF-green-SM DEF-colour-SM
        I bought a dress that is green in colour

6) bidi   ka:seh mutawasiṭaṭ   ʔilḥaʤim
      want-I glass   IND-middle-SF DEF-size-SM
        I want a glass that is middle-sized

In Jordanian Arabic, when the adjective agrees with the modified noun, it has to come in a postnominal position. However, when it does not fully agree with the noun, the adjective comes in a prenominal position. Accordingly, the following sentences are ungrammatical in Jordanian Arabic:

7) *ʃufit   ʔilḥilweh   ʔilbint
       saw-I   DEF-pretty-SF DEF-girl-SF
        I saw the pretty girl

8) *darasna   maʕ   ðaki   walad
       studied-we with   INDEF-smart-SM INDEF-boy-SM
         we studied with a smart boy

9) *ʔilʔibit   maʕ   ʔilbana:t   ʔakbar
       played-I with DEF-girl-PF   INDEF-oldest-SM
        I played with the oldest girl

10) *ʔiʃtare:t   fustan   ʔillo:n   ʔaxḍar
        bought-I   dress   DEF-colour-SM INDEF-green-SM

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I bought a dress that is green in colour

2. A syntactic analysis of pre- and post-nominal adjectives in Jordanian Arabic

In syntax, there are controversies regarding: whether adjectives are adjoined to the left or to the right of the modified noun; whether there is a movement in the DP or not; and if there is a movement, which element has to move and what motivates it. The following discussion provides an analysis of Jordanian Arabic adjectives using different approaches:

The positions of Arabic adjectives may reflect a linearization procedure. This means that postnominal adjectives are merged to the right and prenominal adjectives are attached to the left of the modified noun (Kremers, 2003). However, this approach is problematic. Having two different syntactic structures for adjectives as (11) and (12) may violate the principle of economy (Samadi, Sayyar, &, Sadighi, 2015).

11)   darasna   maʕ   [DP walad   ðaki]
        studied-we   with   INDEF-boy-SM   INDEF-smart-SM

12)   bidi   kaseh   [DP mutawasiṭaṭ   ʔilḥadʒem]
        want-I glass   IND-middle-SF   DEF-size-SM

Based on the antisymmetric approach suggested by Kayne's (1994), all adjectives are merged to the left of the noun, and then the NP moves to a higher head position above the adjective. One criticism to this approach is that the NP movement violates the Inclusiveness Condition which prohibits the introduction of any new features during the derivation other than these contained in the lexical item(s) (Radford, 2009). Moreover, it does not account for the differences between prenominal and postnominal position. This approach may give us the following incorrect sentence:

13)   * [DP ʔilbana:t   [NP ʔakbar   ʔilḥilwa:t   tʔilbana:t]]
        Def-girls-PF   indef-oldest-SM   Def-pretty-PF

Nevertheless, some studies suggest roll-up-of -N (Cinque, 2005). The adjective is merged to the left. Then, N moves to a higher position above postnomial adjectives and pied-pies the prenominal adjectives:

14)   [DP ʔakbar   ʔilbana:t   [NP ʔilḥilwa:t tʔakbar ʔilbana:t]]
        indef-oldest-SM Def-girls-PF   Def-pretty-PF

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Despite this analysis is applicable, basic questions remain regarding what motivates the movement, what proves it, and why we cannot suggest that adjectives are merged to the right and only prenominal adjectives moves before the noun as the analysis in (15):

15)   [_DP ʔakbar   [_NP ʔilbana:t   ʔilḥilwa:t t_ʔakbar]]
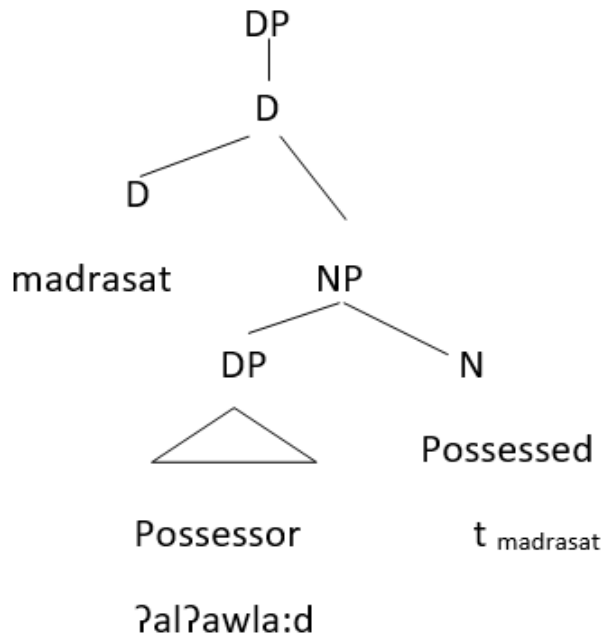   indef-oldest-SM   Def-girls-PF   Def-pretty-PF

3.   Prenominal Adjectives and Construct State

Prenominal adjectives can reflect the main properties of construct state (Bardeas, 2009; Alshamari, 2022). The construction in (16) and (17) consists of an initial adjective that is assigned structural case based on its structural position in the sentence and a noun that is definite and assigned the genitive case (ibid).

16)   ḍaʕi:fat   ʔiʃʃaxṣijeh
         weak-SF   DEF-personality-SF- GEN
17)   ʔakbar   ʔiʔawla:d
         biggest-SM   DEF-boys-PM- GEN

In (16) and (17), the adjectives [ḍaʕifit] and [ʔakbar] are the head of a construct state, and they are followed by the definite genitive DPs [ʔiʃʃaxṣijeh] and [ʔilʔawlad], respectively. However, the syntactic research of Arabic genitive relations often focuses on the construct state nominals (CSN) which include two nominal as the construction in (18). According to Fassi-Fehri (1989) and Ritter (1988), the head NP [madrasat] is generated after the genitive DP [ʔilʔawlad], and then moves to D as observed in (18):

18)   madrasat   ʔilʔawla:d
         school-SF   DEF-boys-PM

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              DP
              |
              D
             / \
            /   \
           D     \
                  \
        madrasat   NP
                  / \
                 /   \
               DP     N
              /\
             /  \     Possessed
            /____\
          Possessor   t madrasat

            ?al?awla:d
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Evidence for N movement can be seen in the agreement between the head N and the adjective in sentences like (19):

19)   madrasat   ?il?awla:d   ?ilkabi:rah
       school-SF   DEF-boys-PM   DEF-big-SF

In the genitive construction (19), the head [madrasat] agrees with the adjectives [?ilkabi:rah] in terms of number, gender, and differentness (the head is definite as it inherits the properties of the whole phrase).

For Ritter (1988) what motivates the movement of the head is +/- DEF value assignment to D. The head has the definiteness features of the genitive DP and moves to D to assign that value. Nonetheless, this cannot explain the behavior of the following sentences:

20)   ?itkalamit maʕ   ?akbar   walad
       talked-I   with   INDEF-oldest-SM INDEF-boy-SM
          I talked to the oldest boy

21)   ?aðka: waḥad   fa:z fi ?ilmusa:baqah
       INDEF -smart-SM   INDEF -one-SM   won   in   the contest
        The smartest one won the contest

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22) *ʔiʃtareːt   ʔaxḍar   ʔilfustaːn
    bought-I   INDEF-green-SM DEF- dress-SM
      I bought a green dress.

Fassi-Fehri (1999) and Kremers (2003) suggest that if the head of the construct state is indefinite then the genitive DP has to be definite and vice versa. The previous analysis cannot explain why (20) and (21) are grammatical despite the fact that the adjectives and the nouns are in full agreement in terms of definiteness, and why (22) is incorrect despite the fact that the adjective is indefinite and the noun is definite. Furthermore, the previous analyses do not apply to nominal sentences as the following:

23)   ʔilbint   ḥilweh
        DEF-girl-SF   INDEF-pretty-SF
          The girl is pretty

24)   ḥilweh   ʔilbint
        INDEF-pretty-SF   DEF-girl-SF
            The girl is pretty

25)   ʔilwalad   ðaki
          DEF-boy-SM   INDEF-smart-SM
              The boy is smart

26)   ðaki   ʔilwalad
        INDEF-smart-SM   DEF-boy-SM
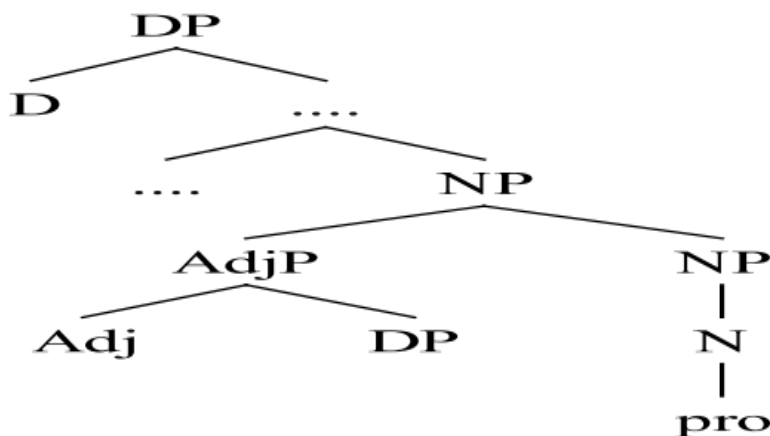   The boy is smart

It is clear that adjectives behave differently in nominal sentences. The adjectives in (23, 24, 25, and 26) can move freely before and after the noun. This may suggest that we have an AP not an NP specifier.

Interestingly, some recent studies have been conducted to investigate nominal and adjectival genitive constructions. For example, Jarrah et al. (2020) examine nominal constructions in Jordanian Arabic. The study shows that the first conjunct of the construct state nominal can agree with the second conjunct when the DP associate is referential (e.g., galam ʔil-walad 'the boy's pen'> galamuhi ʔil-waladi, but barbiːʃ ʔil-ʁaːz 'the gas pipe'>*barbiːʃ-uhi ʔil-ʁaːzi). The study suggests that the head D of the Construct State is endowed with a bundle of uninterpretable, unvalued ɸ-features which are valued via Agree by the DP associate of the Construct State. The study indicates that referential DPs carry a [person] feature and hence ɸ-complete unlike

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nonreferential DPs. With non-referential DPs, ɸ-incompleteness makes them unable of valuing uninterpretable ɸ-features carried by c-commanding heads in Jordanian Arabic. However, the valuation of referential DPs carrying a [person] feature surfaces as an inflectional suffix that appears on the head noun in PF. Based on this study indicates CSNs in Arabic are not a homogeneous group. They split into two different types based on the agreement between the first conjunct with the associate DP.

Alshamari (2022), on the other hand, provides a syntactic analysis for adjectival genitive constructions in Standard Arabic. The study proposes that adjective does not agree with the following DP but with a hidden element (i.e., pro) whose Φ-features control that of the adjective. The study also suggests that the adjective as well as the following DP enter the derivation as an adjunct to NP whose head is filled with the pro. The adjective head moves at PF to merge with the head D that c-commands the whole construction. This study proposes that this analysis accounts for the fact that the adjective is assigned a structural case depending on the function of the adjectival genitive construction in the host sentence (i.e., a subject, an object, an object of preposition, etc.). As for the morphological form of the adjective, it is not fixed, and it can be assigned with different values, depending on the Φ-features of the pro.

(27)

Recent analyses may suggest that the structure of pernominal adjectives is different from that of postnominal adjectives. Therefore, future research is required to account for these syntactic differences, provide evidence, and explain motivations.

4.   Conclusion
In conclusion, there is no single theory that can fully explain the syntactic behavior of prenominal and postnominal adjectives. We need a theory that provides an explanation to all Jordanian sentences with AP: that not only explains why prenominal adjectives do not agree with

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the modified noun and postnomial adjectives do, but also explains all the unpredictable nature of Arabic adjectives. Finally, the syntax of adjectives in Jordanian Arabic is not an easy topic that can be discussed in a short paper. This study does not attempt to hypothesize anything, but it aims at drawing the researchers' attention to this debatable issue and inviting them to study it.

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Abbreviations

 DEF   Definite

INDF   Indefinite

M   Masculine

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F   Feminine

GEN   Genitive

P   Plural

S   Singular

AP   Adjective Phrase

NP   Noun Phrase

DP   Determiner Phrase

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