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A phase-based approach to the construct state

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Abstract This paper presents a phase-based analysis of the derivation of the status constructus (or construct state). That analysis is built on two arguments. First, I contend that a construct state in Classical/Standard Arabic contains a phase the head of which is K. Second, I claim that the head noun is a full indefinite DP the functional projection of which is similar to regular definite DPs. I maintain that a process of repeated External Merge merging the genitive phrase with the head noun culminates in a KP. Because of a ban on the co-occurrence of two syntactic functional projections of the same type in the same Spell-Out domain, I argue that the head noun is moved via Internal Merge from the complement of the phase head K to the edge of the phase. Since K is a phase boundary, it provides protection for the head noun DP from the genitive phrase DP, allowing the phase domain to be spelled out. That the genitive phase DP must be assigned only a genitive case, while the head noun DP can be assigned any one of the three cases can be derived from Chomsky's (1998, 1999, 2001) Phase Impenetrability Condition.

1. Introduction

The Semitic status constructus (or construct state)[1] has been extensively studied in the literature (Kremers, 2009; Alexiadou et al., 2007; Shlonsky, 2004; Siloni, 2002; Benmamoun, 2000; Dobrovie-Sorin, 2000; Borer, 1996; Fassi Fehri, 1993; Ritter, 1991; Mohammed, 1988; among many others). The focal point of those studies is the derivation of that structure.

The Arabic[2] construct state contains an overtly case-marked genitive phrase following the head noun. The properties of the construct state have been investigated in a myriad of studies (such as Alexiadou et al., 2007, p. 247ff; Shlonsky, 2004, p. 1503ff; Siloni, 2002, p. 162ff; Benmamoun, 2000, p. 141f). The salient properties of the Arabic construct state nominal are given in (1) (cf. Benmamoun, 2000; Borer, 1999; Aboudi, 1987).

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[1] I use the term 'construct state' in this paper to mean the nominal construct state.

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[2] The transcription system of the Classical/Standard Arabic data that is adopted in this paper is based on the phonemic transcription system of Classical/Standard Arabic that is adopted in the *Handbook of the International Phonetic Association* (1999) (pp. 51–54).

(1) a. It consists of two members, X and Y, the first of which is the head.
b. X and Y must be adjacent.
c. The construct state nominal constitutes a single prosodic unit.
d. X may take neither the definite determiner □al 'the' nor the affix –n (although see below) (traditionally assumed to be the indefinite determiner in Classical Arabic), and Y may take either.
e. X may be assigned nominative, accusative, or genitive case, while Y may be assigned only genitive case.

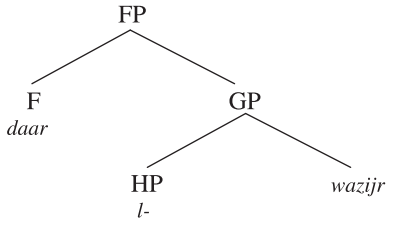
Two examples of the construct state in Classical/Standard Arabic are given in (2) and (3).[3]

(2) kasartu □aqlaam-a l-mudrris-i θ-θalaaθat-i
broke-1S pencils-ACC the-teacher-GEN the-three-GEN
'I broke the three pencils of the teacher.'

(3) taħadaθat □ibnat-u l-mudijr-i haaðihi
spoke-3SF daughter-NOM the-manager-GEN this
'This daughter of the manager arrived.'

The structure in question is □qlaama lmudrrisi 'the teacher's pencils' in (2), and □ibnatu lmudijri 'the manager's daughter' in (3). As (2) and (3) show, the head noun (possessed) precedes the genitive phrase (possessor). Moreover, any modifier of the head noun, a numeral in (2) and a demonstrative in (3), obligatorily occur after the genitive phrase. A representation of the construct state daar lwazijr 'house of the minister' is given in (4) (cf. Shlonsky, 2004).

(4)



In (4), dar 'house' is the construct noun, l- 'the' is the specifier of the complement, and wazijr 'minister' is the adnominal complement.[4]

In this paper, I present a novel approach to the construct state. Two tenets constitute the crux of the approach. First, I assume that a construct state contains a phase. Second, I maintain that the head noun in the construct state is a full indefinite noun DP that has the same functional projections that a regular definite DP has. I argue that when the genitive phrase is merged with the head noun, a KP phase is built. In order for the complement of the phase head to be spelled out, and because of a Distinctness condition that bans the linearization of two syntactic objects of the same type in the same Spell-Out domain, the head noun DP is forced to exit the complement of the phase head. It moves to the edge of the phase KP. The phase head K introduces a phase boundary shielding the head noun DP from the genitive phrase DP.

I introduce a number of the important concepts of the Minimalist Program in Section 2. In Section 3, I provide a sketch of some of the previous analyses of the construct state. In Section 4 I present my own analysis of the derivation of the construct state. A note on the defining features of phases is presented in Section 5. Section 6 is the conclusion.

2. The theoretical framework

2.1. The Minimalist Program

One of the most important tenets of the Minimalist Program is that the only linguistically significant levels are the interface levels (Chomsky, 1998, p. 27). Linguistic expressions in the minimalist framework are defined as the optimal realizations of the interface (PF, LF) conditions, where optimality is determined by the principles of derivational economy. These principles guide the computational system to select the optimal derivation(s) from a set of competing derivations (cf. Hornstein, 1995; Kitahara, 1995). According to Chomsky (1998, p. 12), Universal Grammar (UG) provides a set of features (linguistic properties) and operations CHL (the computational procedure for human language) that access the set of features to generate expressions.

According to Chomsky (1995, p. 225), the computational system CHL maps some array of lexical choices to a linguistic expression. This array must be a numeration, i.e. a pair of a lexical item and the number of times this item is selected from the lexicon. Thus, the computational system CHL selects a lexical item for only one time. This lexical item is then introduced into the derivation by the operation Select, which adds it to the set of syntactic objects generated. In other words, a derivation makes a one-time selection of a lexical array from the lexicon, then map the lexical array to expressions, dispensing with further access to the lexicon. In this way the Inclusiveness Condition (Chomsky, 1999, p. 2), which bars introduction of new elements (features) in the course of the computation, is respected. Lexical items, though, are drawn freely from the lexicon throughout the formation of a sentence, and thus a level of Deep Structure is no longer necessary. Chomsky (1995, p. 237) assumes that it is in the numeration that Case and ϕ-features of nouns are specified, whether by the lexical entry (intrinsic features) or by the operation that forms the numeration (optional features).

The computational system CHL includes a second procedure that combines syntactic objects that are formed by the distinct application of Select to lexical items (Chomsky, 1995, p. 226). The operation Merge takes two syntactic objects (α, β) and form K(α, β) from them. The operation Merge (α, β) is asymmetric, projecting either α or β, the head of the object that projects becoming the label of the complex formed. If α

[3] The following conventions are used in the glosses: NOM: nominative; ACC: accusative; GEN: genitive; 1: first person; 2: second person; 3: third person; S: singular; P: plural; PASS: passive; F: feminine; M: masculine; NM: nominal marker.

[4] The construct (head) noun and the adnominal complement should be assigned case. In the case of the head noun, it can be nominative, accusative, or genitive. In the case of the adnominal complement, it must be genitive.