# **Adjectival Constructs in Standard Arabic**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study focuses on two constructs in Arabic; adjectival genitive constructs and adjectival constructs with a possession clitic. They have been previously studied in Kremers (2003) and Fassi (1999); however, the distinction in between is not clear. This study shows how they are syntactically different. Following the spell-out algorithm (Chomsky 2001), I show that only the adjectival genitive construct should be a spell-out domain. Being a spell-out domain prevents accessing this domain after shipping it to interfaces. Therefore, word insertion and optional number agreement are prevented in the construct that forms a spell-out domain, which is the adjectival genitive construct.

**Keywords:** Adjectival genitive construct, construct with a possession clitic, spell-out domain, word insertion, optional number agreement.

## 1. Introduction: syntactic distribution of adjectives in Arabic

In this section, I introduce the possible distributions of adjectives in Arabic. I also show how agreement is established between adjectives, either post-nominal and pre-nominal, and their modified nouns. Adjectives can appear in post-nominal and pre-nominal positions in Arabic. Post-nominal adjectives are in a full agreement with their modified nouns. In (1a&b), for example, the adjectives *ṭawi:l* appears post-nominally and has full agreement with the preceding NPs, *radʒul-u-n* and *nisa:ʔ-u-n*:

(1) a. radʒul-u-n tawi:l-u-n man-NOM-INDEF.SG tall-NOM-INDEF.SG 'A tall man'.

b. nisa:?-u-n tawi:l-a:t-u-n woman.PL-NOM-INDEF tall-PL.FEM-NOM-INDEF 'Tall women'.

If the modified noun is intimate, its post-nominal adjectives can be either in full or partial agreement with it, as exemplified in (2). The adjective Sa:Ij is specified as plural in (2a) and singular in (2b) although the modified noun is plural in both examples.

(2) a. Full agreement:

al-samaw-a:t al-Sa:lj-a:t DEF-heaven-PL.FEM DEF-high-PL.FEM 'The high heavens'.

b. Partial agreement:

al-samaw-a:t al-sa:lij-ah

ai-samaw-a:t ai-ya:iij-an

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DEF-heaven-PL.FEM

DEF-high-SG.FEM

'The high heavens'.

Pre-nominal adjectives can appear in special constructs which are called genitive constructs. These constructs normally have a possession denotation. These constructs are either nominal or adjectival. A nominal genitive construct consists of two nouns, as exemplified in (3a). As for adjectival genitive constructs<sup>1</sup>, they start with adjectives, as shown in (3b):

(3) a. Nominal genitive construct:

kta:b-u al-ţa:lib-i

book.SG-NOM DEF-student.SG-GEN

'The student's book'.

b. Adjectival genitive construct:

țawi:l-u al-qa:ma-t-i

tall.SG-NOM DEF-length-FEM-GEN.

Literal: he has a high body

'He is tall.'

In the adjectival construct in (3b), the adjective *tawi:l-u* describes *al-qa:ma-t-i*. Such an adjectival genitive construct describes a construct-external noun. In (4), for example, the adjectival genitive construct *tawi:l-u al-qa:ma-t-i* describes the construct-external noun, *radʒul-u-n*:

(4) radzul-u-n tawi:l-u al-qa:ma-t-i

Man.SG-NOM-INDEF tall.SG-NOM DEF-length-FEM-GEN.

Literal: a man has a high body

'A tall man'.

Adjectival genitive constructs do not only have a possession meaning, but also a partitive denotation: the height is one of the properties of the man's body. The adjectival construct in (4) has the following properties: the adjective *tawi:l-u* describes *al-qa:ma-t-i*, the adjective *tawi:l-u* and the construct-external NP *radʒul-u-n* have full agreement in phi-, case and definiteness features. The embedded N is always marked by genitive case.

Pre-nominal adjectives also appear in another construct which has almost the same possession and partitive meaning. The most apparent distinctive features of this construct are its resumptive/possession pronoun cliticized to its internal NP and the absence of the genitive case to the right of the construct-internal noun, as exemplified in (5):

(5) Adjectival construct with a possession clitic:

a. ʔimraʔa-t-u-n d͡ʒamiːl-u-n wad͡ʒh-u-ha

woman-FEM-NOM-INDEF Beautiful-Nom-INDEF face-NOM-POSS.FEM

Literal: a woman whose face is beautiful

'A woman with a beautiful face'.

b. radʒul-u-n tawi:l-at-u-n

Man.SG-NOM-INDEF tall-FEM.SG-NOM-INDEF

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Adjectival constructs, similar to nominal constructs, have somehow a nominal denotation (Fassi 1999).

qa:ma-t-u-hu length-FEM-NOM-POSS.MAS Literal: a man who has a high body 'A tall man'.

Another distinctive feature of this construct is agreement: case and definiteness features of the adjective  $\widehat{d_3}$  ami:l-u-n agree with the construct-external NP  $\widehat{limra}$  a-t-u-n in (5a), and the phi-features of the adjective (i.e. number and gender) agree with the construct-internal NP  $\widehat{wad_3}h$ . Therefore, the adjectival genitive construct in (3b) and the adjectival construct with a possession clitic, which have some similarities in terms of the semantic interpretation, differ in the way agreement between the adjective and the surrounding nouns is established.

### 2. Purpose of the study

The adjectival genitive constructs and adjectival constructs with a possession clitic have been reported and studied in several studies (especially adjectival genitive constructs). They have been presented as full propositional DPs (Kremers, 2003; Fassi, 1999); however, no previous study has distinguished between these constructs. This study is mainly to demonstrate that these constructs are syntactically different. In the following section, the similarities and differences between these adjectival constructs are discussed in more details.

#### 3. Literature review

Few studies have been done on the syntax of adjectival constructs in Arabic (Kremers, 2003; Fassi, 1999; Al Sharifi & Sadler, 2009). On the contrary, much effort has been paid to analyze the nominal genitive construct and its syntactic representation in Arabic (Al-Qahtani, 2016; Al-Mansour, 2012; Benmamoun, 2006; Siloni, 2003; Kaplan, 1993; Mohammed, 1988 among others). The general proposal in the studies that have been done on the adjectival constructs is in two folds. The first one is that the adjectival genitive construct, as in (3b), has to be constructed in the syntax of Arabic but not in the morphology (Al Sharifi and Sadler, 2009). The second is that both types of constructs are full DPs.

Al sharifi and Sadler (2009) present the following tests as evidence to their assumption that an adjectival genitive construct is constructed in syntax. They report that one of the elements of an adjectival genitive construct can be coordinated and modified and therefore it should be considered as a product of syntax in Arabic. In (6a), for example, the adjective *tawi:l-at-u* which belongs to the adjectival genitive construct is coordinated by the adjective, *naħi:l-at-u*.

```
(6) a. bint-u-n
                          naħi:l-at-u
                                                  tawı:1-at-u
                                              w
          Girl-NOM-INDEF.SG slim-FEM-NOM.SG and tall-FEM-NOM.SG
al-qa:ma-t-i
DEF-length-FEM-GEN.
    'A girl is skinny and tall.'
                                             d3ami:1-u
b. radzul-u-n
                             abjad-u w
  Man.SG-NOM-INDEF
                             white-NOM
                                             and
                                                     beautiful-NOM
al-wad3h-i
DEF-face-GEN.
'A man who has a white and beautiful face'.
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In (7), the construct-internal NP al-rusu:m-i is post-modified by al- $\widehat{d_3}ami:l$ -at-i.

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(7) mala:bis-u-n kaθi:r-at-u al-rusu:m-i clothes.PL-NOM-INDEF Many-FEM-NOM DEF-paintings-Gen al-d͡ʒami:l-at-i DEF-beautiful-FEM-GEN.SG 'Clothes have many beautiful drawings.'
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Since coordination and post-modification of one element of an adjectival genitive construct is possible, Al sharifi and Sadler (2009) suggest that this construct is not built in the lexicon, but it is rather constructed in syntax. Specifically, it does not behave as a single word and syntactic operations can have access to its components.

Let us hypothesize that the adjectival genitive construct  $ka\theta i:r-at-u$  al-rusu:m-i in (7) were formed in the lexicon (excluding the grammatical markers). Based on this hypothesis, the external NP mala:bis-u-n, the pre-nominal adjective  $ka\theta i:r-at-u$  and the post-nominal adjective al-jami:l-at-u should all have nominative case by feature inheritance in two steps starting from the external NP. Since the genitive case of the embedded NP al-rusu:m-i is construct-internal, it should not interrupt nominative feature inheritance to the post-nominal adjective al-jami:l-at-u. However, the post-nominal adjective has a genitive marker, similar to the internal NP al-rusu:m-i. This indicates that the hypothesis that this construct is constructed in the lexicon is more likely to be incorrect.

As for the adjectival construct with a possession clitic, it also allows coordination and post-modifying one of its elements, as exemplified in (8a&b):

```
(8) a. mala:bis-u-n d3ami:l-at-un wa clothes.PL-NOM-INDEF beautiful-FEM-NOM-INDEF.SG and kaθi:r-at-u-n rusu:m-u-ha
Many-FEM-NOM-INDEF painting.PL-NOM-POSS

b. mala:bis-u-n kaθi:r-at-u-n rusu:m-u-ha clothes.PL-NOM-INDEF Many-FEM-NOM-INDEF painting.PL-NOM-POSS al-d3ami:l-at-u
DEF-beautiful-FEM-NOM.SG
'Clothes have many beautiful drawings.'
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Therefore, this construct also is not likely to be built in the lexicon. Otherwise, it should not have been possible that one of its elements is coordinated. It is worth noting that the construct-internal and construct-external elements in (8) have the same case specification, nominative case. Therefore, it seems impossible to use case as a test to determine whether this construct is lexical or syntactic.

Beside the proposal that both types of adjectival constructs are more likely to be built in syntax, it has been suggested by Kremers (2003) that these adjectival constructs are DPs. They contain construct-internal adjectival D head and construct-internal subject. In addition, agreement in phi-features, case and definiteness are all local to the adjectival DP. Any feature that is basically taken from the external nominal DP is inherited from its c-commanding nominal D to the c-commanded adjectival D. Based on the spell-out algorithm (Chomsky, 2001) and the proposal that both types of adjectival constructs are non-lexical, it is expected that the adjectival D head of each adjectival construct is strong enough to spell-out the adjective and its construct-internal NP in a separate domain to interfaces.

Up to this point, both types of constructs are said to be DPs and do not seem to be built in the lexicon. In the following section, I will show that they are treated differently in the syntax of Arabic. This proposal is based on the fact that they behave differently with adverb intervention and partial agreement. I suggest in the following section that although the construct with a possession clitic is a DP, it does not form only one spell-out domain, unlike the adjectival genitive construct.

#### 4. Discussion

In this section, I propose that both types of constructs are different in terms of syntactic representation. Only the adjectival genitive construct is a spell-out domain which is sent to interfaces by a non-defective/strong adjectival D head. Evidence to this proposal comes from the following assumptions: a spell-out domain does not allow the intervention of any element between its components after it is shipped to PF. Furthermore, agreement has to be established before shipping a domain to PF, and therefore it is not possible to have optional agreement between two construct-internal elements or a construct-internal and construct-external element. Only the construct that does not allow intervening elements and optional agreement is a spell-out domain.

Another tool that is used to determine whether a construct is a spell-out domain or not comes from syntax-phonology interface. I will refer to t-liaison (i.e. the realization of the feminine suffix -t at the right edge of a word). I propose that this feminine suffix has to be realized when it occupies a non-final position in a construct whose components form a single spell-out domain.

## 4.1. Immediate adjacency requirement (syntactic requirement)

If the genitive construct and the construct with a possession clitic are shipped to PF as spell-out domains, the elements of each construct should be immediately adjacent to each other. This immediate adjacency requirement is a result of shipping a construct to PF as a single spell-out domain. In other words, the components of this domain cannot be accessed again after sending to interfaces. Therefore, any intervening element should not be inserted between the elements of each construct. Adverbs, for example, are not expected to appear in a construct-internal position if this construct is a spell-out domain. Otherwise, it should allow adverb intervention.

In (9a&b), I assume that that the genitive constructs are domains that have been already shipped to PF and cannot be accessed any more throughout the syntactic derivation due to the fact that they do not allow the intervention of the adverb *d3iddan*. Therefore, these sentences are ungrammatical.

(9) Genitive constructs:

\*a. ra? aj-t-u imra?-at-a-n

See.PST-1SG-NOM woman-FEM-ACC-INDEF.SG

d͡ʒamiːl-at-a d͡ʒiddan al-wad͡ʒh-i
beautiful.FEM-ACC-INDEF.SG much DEF-face-GEN

'I saw a woman whose face is very beautiful.'

\*b. d3a:?a rad3ul-u-n ţalwi:l-u come.PST.1SG woman-NOM-INDEF.SG beautiful.NOM.SG

bi-Jiddah al-qa:m-at-i

in-strength DEF-height-FEM-GEN

'A man who is very tall came.'

One the contrary, intervening adverbs are allowed in the constructs with a possession clitic in (10). This constructs should not be spell-out domains on their own. Otherwise, they should have rejected the intervening element  $d_3iddan$  in (10a) and bi-fiddah in (10b) by virtue of the fact that the elements of each construct have been already spelled out to PF and must behave like a single lexical word.

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(10) Construct with a possession clitic:
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a. ra? ajt-u imra? a-t-a-n dʒami:l-a-n

saw.PST-1SG-NOM woman-FEM-ACC-INDEF beautiful-ACC-INDEF.SG

dʒiddan wadʒh-u-ha

much face-NOM-POSS

'I saw a woman whose face is very beautiful.'

b. d͡ʒa:?a rad͡ʒul-u-n ṭalwi:l-at-un come.PST.1SG man-NOM-INDEF.SG tall-FEM-NOM-INDEF.SG

bi-siddah qa:m-at-u-hu

in-strength height-FEM-NOM-POSS

Literal translation: A man whose body is very high came.

'A man who is very tall came.'

### 4.2. Number agreement in both types of constructs

In this subsection, I show that the genitive construct should constitute a spell-out domain and as a consequence its number is specified before shipping it to PF by a strong phase head. In (11a&b), each genitive construct agrees with the construct-external NP. In these examples, agreement in number between the construct-external NPs, muSallim-u:n in (11a) and ridsa:l-u-n in (11b), and the construct-internal pre-nominal adjectives kiba:ru and dsamil-u:n is obligatory: they are all plural.

(11) a. al-muSallim-u:n kiba:r-u al-sinn-i
DEF-teacher- NOM.PL3M old.PLM.NOM DEF-age-GEN

'The old teachers'.

b. d3a:?a rid3a:l-u-n d3amil-u: come.PST.1SG man-NOM-INDEF.PL beautiful.NOM.PL al-wad3h-i

DEF-height-FEM-GEN

'Men who are very tall came.'

On the contrary, the examples in (12) are ungrammatical due to the fact that the number feature of the construct-internal adjectives does not match the number feature of the construct-external NPs: the construct-external NPs  $al-mu\S allim-u:n$  and  $rid\Im a:l-u-n$  are plural and the construct-internal adjectives kabi:r-u and  $d\Im amil-u$  are singular

(12) \*a. al-mu\$allim-u:n kabi:r-u al-sinn-i
DEF-teacher- NOM.PL3M old.SG.M-NOM DEF-age-GEN

'The old teachers'.

\*b. d3a:?a rid3a:l-u-n d3amil-u come.PST.1SG man-NOM-INDEF.PL beautiful.NOM.SG

al-wadʒh-i

DEF-height-FEM-GEN

'Men who are very tall came.'

It is impossible to lack agreement in number in genitive constructs, as shown in the ungrammatical examples in (12), because the genitive constructs, I assume, in these examples are spell-out domains. In these domains, agreement has been already established before shipping them to PF by a strong adjectival D head. Specifically, the number of the genitive construct-internal adjective has already agreed with its genitive construct-external NP and has been specified as

plural before spelling out the entire adjectival genitive construct. Therefore, it is no longer possible to have access to this domain and its specifications, including its number agreement. Therefore, I assume that this is the reason why the examples with partial agreement in (12) are ungrammatical: the number feature of the construct-internal adjective must be specified before shipping to PF.

As for number agreement in constructs with possession clitics, agreement in number is established between the pre-nominal adjective and the construct-internal NP. This agreement is optional in this type of constructs. For instance, the adjectives *al-qadi:r* and *al-qadir-at*, which only differ in gender, are specified as singular in (13a & 14a) and plural in (13b & 14b) whereas their construct-internal NPs *musallimu:ha* and *musallim-a:t-u-ha* are always plural in all the four examples.

(13) a. al-madras-at-u al-qadi:r-u
DEF-school-FEM.SG-NOM DEF-qualified.SG-NOM
mu\$\times\text{allim-u:-ha}
teacher-NOM.3MSG-POSS.FEM

b. al-madras-at-u al-qadir-u:n

DEF-school-FEM.SG-NOM DEF-qualified-NOM.3MPL

musallim-u:-ha

teacher-NOM.3MSG-POSS.FEM

'The school that has qualified teachers'.

(14) a. al-madras-at-u al-qadir-at-u

DEF-school-FEM.SG-NOM DEF-qualified.SG.FEM-NOM

musallim-a:t-u-ha

teacher-PL.FEM-NOM-POSS

b. al-madras-at-u al-qadir-a:t-u

DEF-school-FEM.SG-NOM DEF-qualified-PL.FEM-NOM.

muSallim-a:t-u-ha

teacher-PL.FEM-NOM-POSS

'The school that has qualified teachers'.

A part from the difference in the semantic denotation that is based on the difference in number specification, it seems that the construct with a possession clitic does not form a single spell-out domain. If this construct had a strong adjectival D head that could ship this construct to PF, it was expected that number agreement is obligatory between the adjective and the construct-internal NP: the number of the pre-nominal adjective should have been specified as plural before spelling out to interfaces, and therefore no way to access it and manipulate its number feature.

### 4.3. Syntax-phonology interface: t-liaison<sup>2</sup>

In the following example, t-liaison, which is the realization of the feminine suffix -t, applies at the right edge a lexical word when this suffix is followed immediately by another material, such as the nominative marker -u in (15a). It is normal to suppress the nominative marker or any case marker before a pause. As a result, -t is suppressed or produced as -h, as exemplified in (15b):

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Generally speaking, the previous work that has been done on this process indicates that the feminine suffix -t can be suppressed or pronounced as -h as in  $madrasat \rightarrow madrasa[]\#or madrasa[h]\#$  'school' when it is followed by a pause or a prosodic boundary of a certain strength (Abdelghani, 2010 and Yasin 2012).

(15) a. Feminine + nominative marker:

wa:si\colon -a[t]-u#

wide-FEM.3SG -NOM.

b. After the suppression of the case marker:

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wa:siς-a[h] # or
wa:siς-a[ ] #
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As for the realization of the feminine -t within the constructs under focus, the feminine -t must be realized within genitive constructs, as shown in (16):

(16) a. madi:n-at-un wa:si $\S$ -at al- $\S$ awa:ri $\S$ -i

City-FEM-NOM.SG wide-FEM.SG DEF-road.PL-GEN

'A city has wide streets.'

b. safī:n-at-un ?:lij-a<u>t</u> al-aſri\$-at-i

Ship-FEM-NOM.SG high-FEM.SG DEF-sail-FEM.PL-GEN

'A ship has high sails'.

The example in (17) is ungrammatical due to the fact that the feminine –t is not realized at the right edge of the adjective wa:sis:

(17) \* madi:n-at-un wa:si\(\sigma\)-a[\(\hbrace{h}/0\)] al-\(\frac{\text{awa:ri\(\frace\)-i}}{\text{City-FEM-NOM.SG}}\) wide-FEM.SG DEF-road.PL-GEN

On the contrary, the suppression of the nominative marker and the indefinite marker at the right edge of the adjective of the construct with the possession clitic in (18) results in the suppression of the feminine -t.

(18) a. madi:n-at-un wa:si\u00e9-ah/0 \u00edfawa:ri\u00e9-u-ha

City-FEM-NOM.SG wide-FEM.SG road. PL-FEM-NOM-POSS

'A city has wide streets.'

b. safī:n-at-u-n ?:lij-ah/0 aʃris-at-u-ha

Ship-FEM-NOM.SG high-FEM-NOM.SG sail.PL-FEM-NOM-POSS

'A ship has high sails'.

In (19), the example is ungrammatical since the feminine -t cannot be realized after the suppression of the nominative marker.

City-FEM-NOM.SG wide-FEM.SG

road. PL-FEM-NOM-POSS

'A city has wide streets.'

To account for this variation, I propose that the feminine -t is only realized in a spell-out domain-internal position. I also propose that only adjectival genitive constructs can form spell-out domains. Therefore, the feminine -t is only

<sup>&#</sup>x27;A city has wide streets.'

realized in genitive construct-internal position, as shown in (20). On the contrary, the pre-nominal adjective in (21), for example, does not constitute one spell-out domain with the construct-internal NP, and therefore the feminine -t is not realized at the right of the pre-nominal adjective: the feminine -t does not occupy a spell-out domain internal-position. It is rather at the left edge of a spell-out domain. This spell-out domain contains the construct-internal NP, which has been said to be an island on its own (Guilliot & Malkawi, 2011; Kremers, 2003; Aoun et al., 2010), as shown in (21).

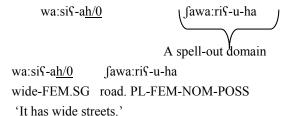
(20) Adjectival genitive construct (the feminine suffix –t occupies a spell-out domain-internal position):

wa:si\(\si\)-at al-\(\frac{1}{2}\) al-\(\frac{1}{2}\)

A spell-out domain

wa:si\(\si\)-at al-\(\frac{fawa:ri\(\si\)-i wide-FEM.SG DEF-road.PL-GEN 'It has wide streets.'

(21) Adjectival construct with a possession clitic (the feminine suffix –t does not occupy a spell-out domain internal position. It is rather to the left of a spell-out domain that contains the adjectival construct-internal NP *fawa:ri\(\varGetau-ha\)*:



### 5. Conclusion

This paper touches upon the difference between two types of adjectival constructs that have been previously considered as full propositional DPs (Kremers, 2003; Fassi, 1999). In this paper, the researcher has shown that the major difference between these two types could be in term of the syntactic representation of each construct. The adjectival genitive construct must have a non-defective adjectival D head that is able to spell out the construct to PF. On the other hand, the embedded NP in the construct with a possession clitic is an island and spelled-out alone. I have shown that the adjectival genitive construct should be considered a spell-out domain. Evidence to this proposal comes from the prohibition of word insertion, obligatory number agreement, realization of the feminine suffix in spell-out domain-internal position. As for the construct with a possession clitic, the same tools have been presented as counter-evidence to the proposal that this construct constitutes a single spell-out domain: it allows word insertion and optional number agreement and the feminine suffix is suppressed in internal position.

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# تراكيب الإضافة الوصفية في اللغة العربية

# عبدالعزيز أحمد جرادات \*

#### ملخص

هَذِهِ الدِّرَاسَةُ تُرَكِّزُ عَلَى نَمَطَيْنِ مِنْ الترَاكِيبِ الوصفِيَّة فِي اللَّغَةِ العَرَبِيَّة. التَّرْكِيبُ الأُوَّلُ يَتَمَيَّزُ بِحَرَكَةِ الجَرِّ عَلَى الااسْمِ المَوْصُوفِ وَالتَّرْكِيبُ الأَوْلُ يَتَمَيَّزُ بِحَرَكَةِ الجَرِّ عَلَى الااسْمِ المَوْصُوفِ وَالتَّرْكِيبُ الأَوْلُ وَلَيْتَ مُوصُولُ بِالإِسْمِ المَوْصُوفِ. مُؤخِّرًا دُرِسَت هَذِه التراكيبُ, وَلَكِنَّ الإَخْتِلَافات بَيْنَهُمَا لَمْ تُتَاقَش بِوُضُوحٍ. فِي هَذِهِ الدِّرَاسَة, إعتبِّرَ التَّرْكِيبُ الأَوَّلُ فَقَطْ أَنَّهُ حَقْلٌ مُسْتَقِل إِذْ أَنَّهُ برَفْض إِدْخَالُ أَيِّ كَلِمَاتٍ جَدِيدَةٍ بَيْنَ مُكَوِّنَاتِهِ و لَا يَسْمَحُ بِغِيَابِ التَّوَافُقِ النحوي في العدد بَيْنَ هَذِهِ المُكُوِّنَاتِ.

الكلمات الدالة: تراكيب الإضافة الوصفية ، اللغة العربية

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