

\textit{fiag}-possessum agreement in Free State construction in Makkani Arabic

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1 Abstract

Makkani Arabic (MA) free state (FS) exhibits gender and number agreement between a possessor and its possessum as in 1. This is a case that does not exist in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) FS as in 2. A full lexical item introduces possessiveness in FS structure in MA instead of a preposition \textit{li}-which also has possessive interpretation. The new structure with \textit{fiag} is optional for MA speakers in 1:

(1) a-ssyara fiag-t xalid
    the-car.3.SG.F fiag-3.SG.F Khalid
    ‘Khalid’s car’

(2) a-ssyara li-xalid
    the-car.3.SG.F prep.-Khalid
    ‘Khalid’s car’

What is interesting about this phenomenon is that the lexical item \textit{fiag} shifts its property from being a single lexical item into a functional category. The word \textit{fiag} simply means something that is owned by somebody or someone’s right. It acquires a possessive function in MA, and it behaves similarly to English possessive ‘s. However, it differs from English possessive ‘s by licensing agreement in $\Phi$-features with its possessum. The lexical item \textit{fiag} checks number and gender features with the head possessum in 3:

(3) al-?walaad fiagg-een al-fiurama
    the-boys.3.PL.M fiag-3.PL.M. the-woman
    ‘the boys belonging to the woman.’
As we can see in 3, it is impossible to treat fiag as a preposition equivalent to MSA as claimed by Bardeas (2008) in MA and it is analogical to some Bantu languages cited by Baker (2008). This phenomenon begs two theoretical questions:

- Is fiag a preposition or a noun?
- Does it have a parallel checking feature configuration as a Tense-Specifier would have?

In the present paper, I propose that fiag is not a vernacular version of the MSA preposition. It enters the derivation as a Noun Phrase (NP) rather than a Prepositional Phrase (PP). I also support my claim with three derivational levels rather than a single one as in PP li-. I postulate that fiag is first merged as a full NP that undergoes movement from head N to head Feature (F). The motivation behind head-head movement is to be inflected with number and gender suffixes. Since fiag has a possessive function, it further moves to the head Determiner Phrase (DP). By landing in the head D, fiag becomes fully interpretable as FS in MA. This final movement is triggered by Adger’s proposal for merging its possessive ‘s in the head D due to possessive function, and Ritter (1989) and Benmaoun’s (2003) argument for head N movement to D for definiteness spread reasons in CS in Semitic languages.

2 References: