
When nominal features split: The case of concord mismatches in Arabic

Feras Saeed

Universität Göttingen

feras.saeed@uni-goettingen.de

Concord mismatches in Arabic are tightly constrained, targeting either [number, gender] or [definiteness, case], but no other combinations. I argue that this restriction follows from the syntactic derivation of adjectives: while some merge as simple adnominals, others originate as predicates in reduced relatives. The latter configuration introduces two agreement domains within DP, rendering these adjectives susceptible to feature-splits. These patterns provide novel evidence for the locus of concord, supporting a syntactic rather than post-syntactic account.

Feature-splits arise when the adjective is embedded in a relative clause (RC) (1) and when it appears between two nouns [N1-A-N2] (2). In (1), the adjective agrees in [number, gender] but not in [definiteness, case]. In (2), it agrees with N1 in [definiteness, case] and with N2 in [number, gender]:

1. ?al-fata-at-a ?al-lati hiya faxuur-at-u-n bi-najaaH-i-ha
 DEF-girl.SG-F-ACC DEF-that pron.SG.F proud.SG-F-NOM-INDF of-success-GEN-her
 ‘The girl who is proud of her success’
2. ?al-walad-ayni ?al-faxuur-at-a ?umm-u-huma bi-najaaH-i-hima
 DEF-boy.M-DU.ACC DEF-proud.SG-F-ACC mother.SG-F-NOM-pron of-success-GEN-their
 ‘The two boys whose mother is proud of their success’

In (1), the adjective is a predicate that agrees with the pronoun in [number, gender]. In (2), it modifies N2 and agrees with it in the same features. This suggests that in both contexts the adjectives are predicates in relative clauses: a non-reduced RC in (1) but a reduced RC in (2). This DP-internal configuration gives rise to two distinct agreement domains, forcing cyclic application of Agree. In their base position, predicates agree in [number, gender], while agreement in [definiteness, case] is subject to a locality condition: only predicates that raise into the agreement domain of the relativised noun can value these features (2); otherwise, default values obtain (1). I further propose that in reduced RCs the predicate raises to a null C head in order to value a definiteness feature on C. This is supported by the contrast between non-reduced RCs, where definiteness is realised on the complementiser (1), and reduced RCs, where the same feature is spelled out on the predicate (2). On this view, the selective accessibility of features follows from cyclic Agree across distinct DP-internal agreement domains and cannot be derived by post-syntactic repair (Cf. Baier 2015; Winchester 2019), which would not predict the strict partitioning of features or their sensitivity to predicate raising.

References: Baier, N. (2015). *Adjective concord in Noon: Evidence for a split theory of noun-modifier concord*. Ms., University of California, Berkeley. • Winchester, L. (2019). Concord and agreement features in Modern Standard Arabic. *Glossa* 4 (1), 1–15.