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THE CHARACTER OF THE HEADS
OF MULTIATTRIBUTIVE NOMINAL GROUPS AND THEIR FREQUENCY
IN MODERN NEWSPAPER ARABIC

Literary Arabic, as many other languages, has at its disposal a special type of syntactic group composed of two or more words which are characterized by the dichotomous attributive relation¹. Most of these constructions are endocentric, in which the form-class of the constitutes is similar to the form-class of at least one of the immediate constituents². The constituents whose privileges of occurrence are matched by those of the constitute is the head or center of the construction³.

The aim of this paper is to point out different types of heads that occur in the contemporary written Arabic language as well as to characterize them and to present some statistical data concerning the frequency of their occurrence in the texts of modern Arabic press. The research is justified by the fact that the problem has, until recently, been very much neglected by linguists. The model of an attributive construction that has been adopted by most of them is a simplified one, in which the head is identified with a single determined element, usually a noun. Thus, looking through most of Arabic grammar books, it is possible to find only the basic syntactic principles which allow one to connect the determinative and the determined element into a single word group either by means of grammatical morphemes (groups of morpho-syntactic type) or, much less frequently, by means of special ordering (positional type). Such a formulation of the problem may be viewed as a correct one but only when no other aspects apart from the syntactic one are taken into consideration. It is also matched by some definitions of the

head, for example: "The head of a syntactic group is this one of its constituents which, if the other elements of the group were removed, would be of the same syntactic type as the whole group (though not of the same structural type)"⁴. It appears, however, that in the Arabic language an attempt to single out the head only on the syntactic basis is not sufficient; in some cases it is even impossible. The two analogically constructed word groups may already raise some doubts:

- (1) ḥaqībat^u 'l-yadⁱ 'ṣ-ṣaḡīra⁵ 'small handbag', and:
- (2) ba'd^u 'l-'anāṣirⁱ 'l-ḡidā' iyya⁶ 'some nutrition elements'.

The head of the first attributive construction is an example of the 'iḡāfa ḥaqībat^u 'l-yad. One might go even further and point to the head of this 'iḡāfa construction, the noun ḥaqībat^u, which is determined by another noun 'al-yadⁱ that functions here as an attribute in the form of the genitive. It should be noticed, however, that this attempt to split the head further appears to be pointless on the semantic level. For any native speaker the 'iḡāfa construction forms a semantic whole which is inseparable to such an extent that in some cases it may even be viewed as the equivalent of a compound⁷. The second example illustrates it even more clearly; here the analysis of a sole syntactic character would lead to singling out the pronoun ba'd^u as the head of the whole group whereas it is obvious that the role of the main semantic vehicle of the pronoun group as well as that of the constitutive member is performed by the noun, which in this case has the form of the genitive ('al-'anāṣirⁱ). A similar problem may be observed in the numeral constructions where the numeral stands in the position of the nomen regens and only indicates the position of the designation of a given noun in the sequence⁸ as well as in the elative constructions⁹ in which the elative only qualifies the feature of the noun that is syntactically dependent on it. As may be seen, there are cases in which the head of the nominal group should not be identified with a single word but with a complex construction whose constituents are inseparable and cannot be analysed in isolation, first of all because of the semantic considerations. Thus, it seems that for the Arabic language the extended definition of the head which could allow for the semantic aspect of a given utterance would be more appropriate. The head might be redefined then as the constitutive member of a

word group which conditions its functioning by giving it its precise meaning.

The researches into the syntax order of multiattributive nominal phrases that I have worked on recently, entitle me, I think, to such a claim. The main task of these researches was to attempt to formulate the principles of attribute transposition and to ascertain to what degree the kind of attributes and other factors - syntactic, semantic, or stylistic - influence the ordering of multiattributive nominal groups occurring in contemporary literary Arabic. The exceedingly interesting phenomenon for me was the order of attributes of the same syntactic category (i.e. two or more adjectives or ordinal numerals). In most cases, the order of such attributes is strictly observed and unchangeable, as perceived by native speakers, even though no such change is prevented by any syntactic contraindications. Studying this phenomenon I have assumed that what determines a specific hierarchy of attributes, whether morphologically homogeneous or any other existing in Arabic, is the extent of the head in a given noun phrase. For proving this proposition, 1951 nominal groups were analyzed; they contained 2139 combinations of the following attributes:

- Adjective (in its broadest meaning);
- Substantival apposition;
- Noun in genitive construction;
- Possessive pronoun;
- Demonstrative pronoun;
- Cardinal numeral;
- Ordinal numeral;
- Prepositional phrase;
- Adjectival relative clause.

The analysis was based in part on methods previously employed in studies on nominal phrases in other languages especially in English¹⁰, and in part on the method of pregramatic analysis, which consists in determining semantic relations between words with particular regard to differences present in those relations and connected with differences in semantic range and content¹¹. This kind of analysis serves to isolate the semantic head in any nominal group and to determine the limits of its extent and the relations between this head and other attributes of the same group. The ana-

lysis has finally proved that it is necessary to look for the heads of nominal groups on the semantic level. Presented below is a sample analysis which leads up to isolating the heads in some most typical noun phrases with adjectival attributes.

(1) To a native speaker, the phrase: 'aš-ši'r^u 'l-ğayyid^u 'l-qadīm¹² 'good old poetry', and a phrase obtained by word order alteration: 'aš-ši'r^u 'l-qadīm^u 'l-ğayyid - have exactly the same semantic value. In this context, both adjectives serve to qualify the noun. The phrase 'aš-ši'r^u 'l-ğayyid 'good poetry', carries the same quality information as 'aš-ši'r^u 'l-qadīm 'old poetry'. In both cases we are dealing with designation of the same kind. No hyponymy exists between the attributes; neither adjective embraces the other in its semantic range. 'Aš-ši'r^u 'l-ğayyid 'good poetry', may be either 'aš-ši'r^u 'l-qadīm 'old poetry', or 'aš-ši'r^u 'l-ḥadīṭ 'contemporary poetry', just as 'aš-ši'r^u 'l-qadīm 'old poetry', may be 'aš-ši'r^u 'l-ğayyid 'good poetry', or 'aš-ši'r^u 'r-rakīk 'poor poetry'. The noun is a head throughout; the attributes describe its properties without creating an additional point of reference that would expand the head's content (i.e. in this case, without information about the kind of poetry, its origin, etc.).

A similar relation may occur among three or more adjectives, e. g. sayfu-hu 'l-qāṣī 'l-aẓīm^u 's-šadīd¹³ 'his great, heavy, sharp sword'. Here, the head is the noun together with its suffixal pronoun sayfu-hu 'his sword'. In relation to the head noun plus possessive pronoun the adjectival attributes may be freely moved about in accordance with the justification given above.

(2) The utterance: 'at-turāt^u 'l-qawmiyy^u 'l-'arabī¹⁴ 'Arabic national heritage', refers the listener's mind to the notion of 'national heritage' 'at-turāt^u 'l-qawmī as that which is the main representational content of the utterance. The adjective 'Arabic' 'al-'arabī is an additional piece of information ascribing the main notion to a certain nationality. By contrast, the phrase 'at-turāt^u 'l-'arabiyy^u 'l-qawmī denotes 'national Arabic heritage'. In the hearer's mind, the central notion is 'at-turāt^u 'l-'arabī, or 'Arabic heritage' not that of any other nationality or any other region, the national character of which is a secondary quality. Thus, the change in the meaning of the phrase is the conse-

quence of an altered conceptual content of the head in relation to the original phrase. It should be noticed that, on the semantic level, the terms "heritage", "national heritage", and "Arabic heritage" possess different lexical values. The last two can be treated as labels, entires forming the heads of their nominal phrases, which is a result of such semantic considerations like speaker's intention or context.

(3) In the example: 'at-ṭabī'at^u 'l-mağribiyyat^u 'l-'arabiyyat^u 'l-'islāmiyya¹⁵ 'Arabic, Islamic nature of Maghrib', there is an additional, interesting phenomenon to be noted. Three adjectives ordered in a way native speakers feel unchangeable make up a semantic privative opposition. Furthest from the head, the attribute 'al-'islāmiyya 'Islamic', is a hyperonym - a sign having a weaker but broader meaning than the hyponym 'al-'arabiyya 'Arabic', the marked member of the opposition, a sign with a richer but narrower content. For both these attributes, the hyponym is the adjective 'al-mağribiyya, meaning 'of Maghrib' - the sign possessing the richest but narrowest meaning among the attributes in the phrase under discussion; it is placed nearest to the noun 'at-ṭabī'a 'of nature'. To put it differently, a sign with a generalizing meaning placed furthest from the noun is qualified by signs having some determining characteristics positioned nearer to the noun, each preceding attribute - together with the noun - acting as a semantic head for the next 'at-ṭabī'at^u 'l-mağribiyya for 'al-'arabiyya; 'at-ṭabī'at^u 'l-mağribiyyat^u 'l-'arabiyya for 'al-'islāmiyya.

In many instances, the first attribute is so closely connected with its head as to permit replacing an adjective construction by an genitive construction with the meaning intact and the principle governing the order of the other attributes unchanged. The discussed phrase could undergo transformation into ṭabī'at^u 'l-mağribī 'l-'arabiyyat^u 'l-'islāmiyya and retain its semantic value. This observation helps underscore the close semantic relation - necessarily leading to a syntactic one - between the noun and the first attribute. The genitive construction should be treated here as a compound word, while the adjectival construction should be construed as a juxtaposition forming a head in its indivisible entirety.

Phenomena like this could be observed in all other phrases combining different types of attributes. The group with demonstrative pronoun and prepositional phrase exemplifies it very well: hādā 'n-naw' min 't-ṭarab¹⁶ 'this kind of music'. The semantic head of this group is the noun together with the prepositional phrase ('an-naw' min 't-ṭarab 'a kind of music'), not only a single noun ('an-naw' 'a kind'). One can prove it, trying to change the place of demonstrative pronoun in this utterance. To a native speaker, transposing the demonstrative pronoun vis-à-vis the prepositional phrase ('an-naw' min 't-ṭarabⁱ hādā) accomplishes only a shift in semantic stress ('the kind of music, this one'); but transposing the pronoun in relation to the noun alone is not possible at all. This kind of transposition produces ambiguity on the semantic level; the phrase 'an-naw' hādā min 't-ṭarab could be understood as a clause with a copula in the form of a demonstrative pronoun ('this kind is that of music'). Both the structural and semantic changes of the utterance were accomplished because of breaking up the semantic head - in this case the noun together with the prepositional phrase.

A detailed semantic analysis of all 1951 nominal groups showed that in modern written Arabic a nominal head may occur in the form of:

- 1) A single noun (e.g. 'aš-ši'r 'poetry', in the example discussed above, see p. 164).
- 2) Pronoun construction (e.g. ba'q^u 'l-'anašir 'some elements', in the example discussed above, see p. 162. Moreover: 'ayy^u gindilⁱ 'l-bahrⁱ 'lladī jaltašiqu bi-l-ḡism¹⁷ 'any jelly-fish, which clings to body'; kull^u 'l-fannānīn fī 'urubba¹⁸ 'all artists in Europe'; kull^u 'd-damⁱ 'l-miṣrī¹⁹ 'all Egyptian blood'; kull^u šayⁱⁿ ḥawla-huma²⁰ 'everything around them'; and so forth;
- 3) Construction with a cardinal numeral preceding a noun (e.g. 'ahad^u 'l-maṣānī' 'l-waṭaniyya²¹ 'one from the national factories').
- 4) Construction with an ordinal numeral preceding a noun (e.g. 'awwal^u ma'riqⁱⁿ duwalī²² 'the first international exposition');
- 5) Elative construction representing an adjective in the superlative (e.g. 'ašhar^u 't-taqāfātⁱ fī dālika 'l-'aṣr²³ 'the most famous culture in that period');

- 6) Noun plus adjective - in Arabic often the equivalent of juxtaposition²⁴ (e.g. 'al-'azmat^u 'l-'iqtisādiyyat^u 'l-'ālamīyyat^u 'r-rāhina²⁵ 'actual world economic crisis'. An example of the lexicalized form which has a similar construction: 'azmat^{un} wizāriyyat^{un} 'cabinet crisis'²⁶);
- 7) Noun plus substantival apposition - in Arabic often the equivalent of concretion²⁷ (e.g. 'as-safīnat^u 'l-'um^u datu-ha²⁸ 'mother ship itself'. An example of the lexicalized form which has a similar construction: nūr^{un} barrāq^{un} 'blinker, flashing light'²⁹);
- 8) Noun plus genitive construction - 'idāfa - in Arabic often the equivalent of a compound word (e.g. ḥaqībat^u 'l-yad 'handbag', in the example discussed above, see p. 162. This form is lexicalized³⁰);
- 9) Noun plus double genitive construction - double 'idāfa (e.g. manātiq^u zirā'atⁱ 'n-naḥīlⁱ 'l-qadīma³¹ 'old areas of palm cultivation'. An example of the lexicalized form which has a similar construction: 'Id^u kullⁱ 'l-qiddīsīn 'All Saints' Day'³²);
- 10) Noun plus possessive pronoun (e.g. sayfu-hu 'his sword', in the example discussed above, see p. 164);
- 11) Noun plus demonstrative pronoun (e.g. hādīhi 'l-'asbāb kullu-hā³³ 'all these reasons');
- 12) Noun plus cardinal numeral (e.g. 'al-fuṣūl^u 'l-'arba'at^u 'l-bā-qiya³⁴ 'four remaining chapters'. An example of the lexicalized form which has a similar construction: mawḍi^{un} waḥid^{un} 'one and the same place'³⁵);
- 13) Noun plus ordinal numeral (e.g. 'al-qarn^u 't-tālīt^u 'l-ḥiḡrī³⁶ 'third century of the Hegira'. An example of the lexicalized form which has a similar construction: ṭabīb^{un} 'awwal^u 'physician-in-chief'³⁷);
- 14) Noun plus prepositional phrase (e.g. ḥawātim^u min^a 'd-dahabⁱ muraṣṣa'at^{un} bi-l-'aḡīq³⁸ 'golden rings inlaid with carnelian'. An example of the lexicalized form which has a similar construction: tawb^{un} min ḥarīr 'a garment of silk, a silk dress'³⁹).

In phrases containing a greater number of attributes, semantic heads of higher complexity can be encountered, e.g.:

- 15) Noun plus adjective plus demonstrative pronoun (hādā 'l-hādāt^u 't-tārīhiyy^u 'd-ḡaḥm⁴⁰ 'this great historic event');
- 16) Noun plus adjective plus possessive pronoun (šaklu-hā 'l-ḡadīd^u hādā⁴¹ 'this its new form');
- 17) Noun plus adjective plus cardinal numeral ('al-mīl^u 'l-murabba'^u 'l-wāhid^u min qā'ⁱ 'l-baḥr⁴² 'one square mile of the sea gulf');
- 18) Noun plus adjective plus prepositional phrase (tilka 'n-namā-diḡ^u 's-sābiqat^u min^a 'r-raḡāba⁴³ 'those previous models of control');
- 19) Noun plus adjective plus adjectival relative clause (hādā 'l-ma-ḥlūq^u 'l-ḡaḡīr^u 'llaḡī huwa 'ana⁴⁴ 'this miserable creature which is me'. An example of the similarly constructed lexicalized form which is made up of a noun and an asyndetic adjectival relative clause: dawrat^{un} lā tu'kas 'the irreversible cycle'⁴⁵);
- 20) Noun plus demonstrative pronoun plus prepositional phrase (tilka 'l-mintagat^u min 'amrīkā 'l-ḡanūbiyya 'llatī kānat tulāḡīqu 's-sāhil^a 'l-ḡarbiyya li-'ifriqiya⁴⁶ 'that region of South America which was adjoining to the west coast of Africa');
- 21) Noun plus genitive construction ('iḡāfa) plus possessive pronoun plus prepositional phrase (kitāb^u zawḡati-hi 'an-hu bi-'unwānⁱ ma'a-ka⁴⁷ 'his wife's book about him, entitled "With You"').

As has been mentioned above, the basis for the discussion was a semantic analysis of 1951 nominal groups, which contained 2139 combinations of attributes. The material was selected from press articles, in a broad range of topics, published in various Arab countries in 70th and 80th years. The examples were put in writing successively, without selecting some special kinds of combinations. It seems that this method of collecting such copious material entitles to draw some conclusions on frequency. Numerical and percentage calculations were performed to determine the distribution of various types of heads as well as their frequency of occurrence in contemporary newspaper Arabic texts. These indicate as follows:

	number of examples	percentage of combinations
- noun plus adjective	1179	55.1
- noun plus possessive pronoun	379	17.7
- noun plus genitive construction	252	11.8

	number of examples	percentage of combinations
- a single noun	108	5
- noun plus demonstrative pronoun	51	2.4
- noun plus ordinal numeral	34	1.6
- noun plus prepositional phrase	31	1.5
- noun plus adjective plus demonstrative pronoun	30	1.4
- noun plus cardinal numeral	28	1.3
- noun plus adjective plus adjectival relative clause	19	0.9
- noun plus substantival apposition	12	0.6
- noun plus double genitive construction (double 'iḡāfa)	5	0.2
- noun plus adjective plus prepositional phrase	4	0.2

Moreover, in the analysed texts I have observed a single examples of the following heads:

- noun plus genitive construction plus adjective;
- noun plus possessive pronoun plus adjective;
- noun plus adjective plus cardinal numeral;
- noun plus demonstrative pronoun plus prepositional phrase;
- noun plus cardinal numeral plus ordinal numeral;
- noun plus genitive construction plus substantival apposition;
- noun plus double genitive construction (double 'iḡāfa) plus prepositional phrase.

The present paper should by no means be viewed as an attempt to investigate comprehensively the problem of nominal heads in Arabic or to present the full list of the constructions possible. My aim was rather to point to the question in order to fill a gap in grammar books of Arabic. It seems that the method of looking for a head and isolating it on the semantic level should be worth noticing by linguists.

Notes

- 1 Z. Gołąb, A. Heinz, K. Polański, Słownik terminologii językoznawczej, Warszawa 1970, p. 222.
- 2 Ch. F. Hockett, A Course in Modern Linguistics, New York 1958, p. 184.
- 3 Ibidem.
- 4 A. Weinsberg, Językoznawstwo ogólne, Warszawa 1983, p. 213 (the quotation was translated from the Polish version of the book).
- 5 'Al-'Arabī, N° 304, March 1984, Kuwait, p. 4, vv. 5.
- 6 Mufakkirat^u 'l-ḥaqlī fī 'l-maḥāṣilⁱ 'l-bustāniyya, N° 77, November 1972, Cairo, p. 9, vv. 17-18.
- 7 Cf. E. Górska, The Process of Compound Lexical Items Formation in Modern Written Arabic, Folia Orientalia XXVII.
- 8 V. Cantarino, Syntax of Modern Arabic Prose, Bloomington/London 1975, vol. II, p. 361.
- 9 Ibidem, p. 467.
- 10 H. A. Gleason, Workbook in Descriptive Linguistics, New York 1955.
- 11 J. Wierzbowski, Semantyka językoznawcza, Warszawa 1980, p. 121.
- 12 'Al-Muṣawwar, December 1976, Cairo, p. 220, vv. 18-19.
- 13 'Al-'Arabī, N° 304, p. 158, vv. 28.
- 14 'At-Taḳāfat^u 'l-'arabiyya, N° 2, February 1980, Tripoli, p. 6, vv. 9.
- 15 'Al-'Arabī, N° 268, March 1981, Kuwait, p. 133, vv. 7-8.
- 16 'Al-Muṣawwar, December 1976, p. 220, vv. 25.
- 17 Maḡallat^u 'l-Kuwayt, January 1981, Kuwait, p. 59, vv. 14-15.
- 18 Maḡallat^u 'l-Kuwayt, November 1980, Kuwait, p. 87, vv. 29-30.
- 19 'Ālam^u 'l-fikr, N° 2, July-August-September 1985, Kuwait, p. 141, vv. 18.
- 20 V. Cantarino, op.cit., vol. II, p. 127.
- 21 'Al-'Arabī, N° 268, p. 79, phot.
- 22 Maḡallat^u 'l-Kuwayt, November 1980, p. 103, vv. 2.
- 23 V. Cantarino, op.cit., vol. II, p. 475.
- 24 E. Górska, op.cit.
- 25 'At-Taḳāfat^u 'l-'arabiyya, N° 2, p. 14, vv. 13-14.
- 26 H. Wehr, Arabic-English Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, Ithaca-New York 1976, p. 14.
- 27 E. Górska, op.cit.
- 28 'Al-'Arabī, N° 284, July 1982, Kuwait, p. 59, vv. 8.

- 29 H. Wehr, op.cit., p. 1009.
- 30 Ibidem, p. 193.
- 31 'Al-'Arabī, N° 268, p. 78, vv. 3.
- 32 H. Wehr, op.cit., p. 661.
- 33 Maḡallat^u 'l-Kuwayt, January 1981, p. 105, vv. 12-13.
- 34 'At-Taḳāfat^u 'l-'arabiyya, N° 2, pp. 23-24, vv. 47-1.
- 35 H. Wehr, op.cit., p. 1055.
- 36 'Al-'Arabī, N° 268, p. 74, vv. 13.
- 37 H. Wehr, op.cit., p. 35.
- 38 Maḡallat^u 'l-Kuwayt, January 1981, p. 102, vv. 25.
- 39 H. Wehr, op.cit., p. 924.
- 40 'At-Taḳāfat^u 'l-'arabiyya, N° 2, p. 8, vv. 5-6.
- 41 Ibidem, p. 24, vv. 4-5.
- 42 Maḡallat^u 'l-Kuwayt, November 1980, p. 16, vv. 35.
- 43 'Ālam^u 'l-fikr, N° 1, April-May-June 1982, Kuwait, p. 169, vv. 13-14.
- 44 'At-Taḳāfat^u 'l-'arabiyya, N° 2, p. 23, vv. 36.
- 45 A. Sh. Al-Khatib, A New Dictionary of Scientific and Technical Terms, Beirut 1982, p. 317.
- 46 Maḡallat^u 'l-Kuwayt, November 1980, p. 15, vv. 25-26.
- 47 'Al-'Arabī, N° 268, p. 32, vv. 1-2.