

The so called Idafa construction is the central means for coding an attributive relation between two nominal phrases in Arabic. The semantics of the relation is rather vague, but it generally corresponds to a typical cross-linguistic concept of possession. This paper presents an analysis of the way this construction is marked, using the fundamental distinction between dependent-marking and head-marking features, which is outlined in Nichols (1986). It turns out that the traditional label classifying Idafa as a genitive construction can be misleading, since the morphosyntactic role of the genitive ending is rather dubious and it is rather the head-marking features that signal the presence of the relation. However, these features seem a little obscure since they do not dwell in adding a affixu to the head noun, but rather in imposing certain restrictions on the head (only bare heads are allowed and the head is left unspecified for the category of definiteness).

In addition, as the analysis is aimed at the natural spoken use of Modern Standard Arabic, I take into account the socio-pragmatic variation presented by the possibility of reducing the nominal endings in speech, approached insightfully in Magidow (2009). These reductions give rise to a slightly different structural view of the morphosyntax of this construction.

In the related theoretical considerations, the problem of the autonomy of the Idafa as a fully gramaticalised head-marking pattern is debated together with the diachronic issue of its origin. For comparison, some equivalent constructions from other Semitic languages are mentioned. In some chapters the paper presents ideas for possible empirical research, pointing mainly to phenomena which are expected to be subject to some variation concerning the morphosyntactic marking. These are for example certain peripheral uses of Idafa, in which a subordinate clause serves as dependent.