On the Structure of Possessives in Palestinian Arabic

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ABSTRACT

This paper demonstrates the compatibility of Ritter's (1988, 1991) analysis of Construct States with Palestinian Arabic. Her conclusions regarding the behaviour of possessive constructions will be shown to explain the grammaticality of Palestinian Arabic Genitive Objects, as well as the idiomaticity of Construct State expressions and non-idiomaticity of the Free Genitive equivalents.

Keywords: Construct State; Free Genitive; Genitive Object.

1   Introduction

In this paper I argue in favour of Ritter's (1988, 1991) analysis of Construct States and Free Genitives by testing it against Palestinian/Levantine Arabic nominal idioms and Genitive Objects. I will show that the idiomaticity of certain Construct State expressions (and the non-idiomaticity of their respective translations to Free Genitives) results from the syntactic differences proposed in Ritter (1991). I will show further that the grammatical behaviour of Genitive Objects in Palestinian Arabic can be accounted for using Ritter's (1991) case-motivated movement of DPs in nominal constructions.

The paper is organized as follows. In section 2 an overview of Construct States and Free Genitives is outlined, in which I go over the relevant assumptions that she makes; in section 3 I illustrate the compatibility of her analysis with the observed number/gender agreement between the Genitive particle and the possessee noun in Palestinian Arabic; in section 4 I show how Ritter's (1988, 1991) analysis fits with the idiomaticity judgements of some selected Construct State expressions and their Free Genitive "equivalents"; in section 5 I give a brief exposition of Genitive Objects, and show that their syntactic behaviour is compatible with her account.

2   Construct States and Free Genitives

2.1   Construct States

The Construct State (also known as the synthetic possessive) is a nominal possessive construction commonly found in Semitic languages in which the possessee noun precedes the possessor DP, as in example (1).

(1)   *beyt   ha-   mora*   (Modern Hebrew)
       beyt   el-   modarres   (Palestinian Arabic)
       house the-   teacher
       "the teacher's house"

Following Abney's DP hypothesis (1987), Ritter (1988) argues that the word order found in Construct States results from the DP-internal raising of the head noun to the determiner head (in a similar fashion to the V-T movement that causes VSO order in Semitic languages.) The N-D movement is shown in Figure 1.
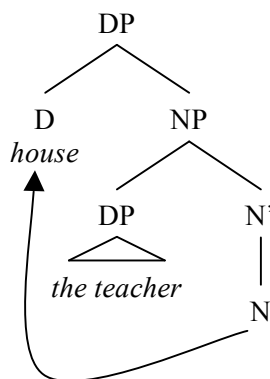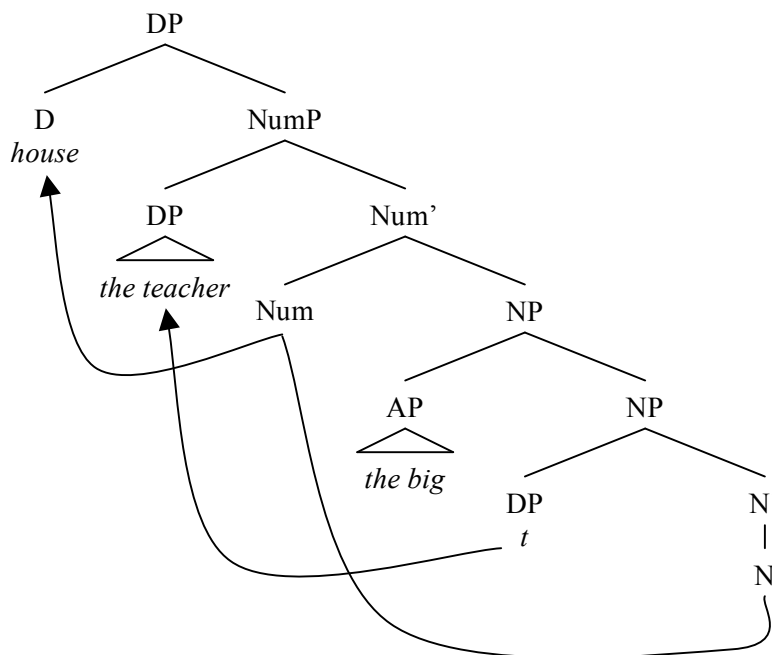

Figure 1
DP-internal N-to-D raising in Semitic Construct State.

Ritter (1991) hypothesizes another functional projection in the DP hierarchy in order to explain the occurrence of post-nominal adjectives. This projection, which she calls NumP, appears between the DP and the NP. The examples in (2) illustrate the position of adjectives in Construct States, and their corresponding syntactic structure is shown in Figure 2.

(2)   *beyt   ha-   mora   ha-   gadol*   (Modern Hebrew)
       beet   el-   modarres   el-   kbiir   (PA)
       house the   teacher   the   big
   "The teacher's big house"

Figure 2
Post-nominal adjectives in Construct States.

An important assumption that Ritter (1991) makes is that the D_{gen} assigns case rightward. The possessor DP, which originates in [Spec,NP], moves to [Spec,NumP] in order to satisfy case-checking requirements. Since D_{gen} assigns case rightward, these requirements are fulfilled in that landing site.

2.2   The Free Genitive

The Free Genitive is another strategy for forming possessive constructions in Arabic and Hebrew. In Free Genitives (exemplified in (3) and shown in Figure 3) the definite article D can co-occur with the theme noun, thus entailing no N-to-D movement of the type found in Construct States. Under Ritter's (1991) analysis, the noun moves only as far as Num and the possessor DP must therefore co-occur with an overt GEN particle from which it can get case.

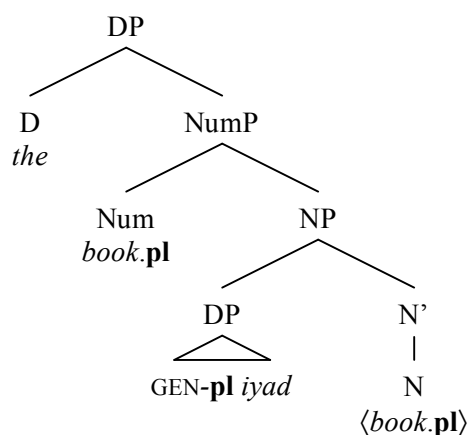| (3)	*ha-*	*beyt*	*(ha-*	*gadol)*	*shel*	*ha-*	*mora*	(Modern Hebrew)
	el-	*beet*	*(el-*	*kbiir)*	*taa'*	*el-*	*modarres*	(PA)
	the	house	(the	big)	GEN	the	teacher	
	"The teacher's big house"							
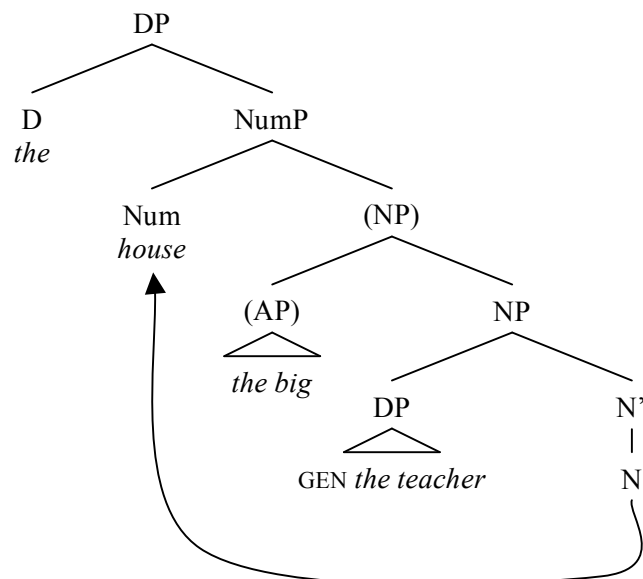
Figure 3
The syntactic structure of Free Genitives. Optional nodes (when adjectives are adjoined) are shown in parentheses. Note that the position of adjectives in the tree matches that of the grammatical DPs in (3).

3   The GEN Particle

In much of the literature on Modern Hebrew, the GEN particle is treated as a dummy marker that does not vary between different settings. But in Palestinian Arabic (hereafter PA), as well as in many other Arabic dialects, GEN agrees in gender and number with the theme noun. Examples are shown in (4). (The nouns 'desk' and 'book' are masculine in Arabic, while the noun 'room' is feminine.)

(4) *el-*   *maktab*   ***taa'***   *iyad*   (PA)
     the   desk:**m**   GEN.**sg**.**m**   Iyad

   el-   *ghorfe*   ***taa'et***   *iyad*
   the   room:**f**   GEN-**sg**.**f**   Iyad

   el-   *kutub*   ***taaiin'***   *iyad*
   the   books:**m**   GEN-**pl**.**m**   Iyad
   "Iyad's desk/room/books"

The possessor DP in (4), [GEN *Iyad*], appears in [Spec,NP], and the head nouns *desk*, *room*, and *books*, all originate in N, as demonstrated in Figure 4.

```
                              DP
                          /        \
                        D            NumP
                       the         /      \
                                 Num        NP
                               book.pl    /    \
                                        DP      N'
                                       /\        |
                                GEN-pl iyad      N
                                             ⟨book.pl⟩
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Figure 4

Number/Gender agreement in PA possessor DPs. Agreement is between the possessee (theme) noun and the Genitive particle that occurs inside the possessor DP, which appears in the head's specifier position.

What we have, then, is an agreement relation between a head and the content of the phrase in its specifier position, a configuration which is not at all unusual and which, in this case, supports the application of Ritter's (1991) account to PA.

4   Idioms

PA idioms provide support for Ritter's (1988, 1991) analysis of Construct States and Free Genitives. The expressions in (5) are idiomatic only as CSs (5a-c). In the Free Genitive (5d-f), the expressions are either interpretable only literally (5f) or simply anomalous (5d-e).

(5)   a.   *shahr   el-   'asal*
           month   the   honey
           "honeymoon" (literally: "the month of honey")

      b.   *njuum   edh-   dhohor*
           stars   the   noon
           "hell/a hard time" (literally: "the stars of noon")

      c.   *ḥaliib   en-   nawar*
           milk   the   gypsies
           "uncivilized behaviour" (literally: "the milk of gypsies")

      d.   *esh- shahr   taa'   el-   'asal*
           the   month   GEN   the   honey
           "the month of honey" (literal; <u>non-idiomatic</u>)

e. *en-   njuum   ta'een edh- dhohor*
    the   stars   GEN   the   noon
    "the stars of noon" (literal; <u>non-idiomatic</u>)

f. *el- ħaliib   taa'   en-   nawar*
    the milk   GEN   the   gypsies
    "the milk of gypsies" (literal; <u>non-idiomatic</u>)

While Ritter (1991) argues for a unified analysis of both Construct States and Free Genitives, it is important to note that the differences she posits between the two constructions do account for the (non-)idiomaticities in (5). Recall that in Construct States, the head noun forms a constituent with the possessor DP (Figure 5a), while the noun takes a genitive DP in its specifier position in Free Genitives (Figure 5b).
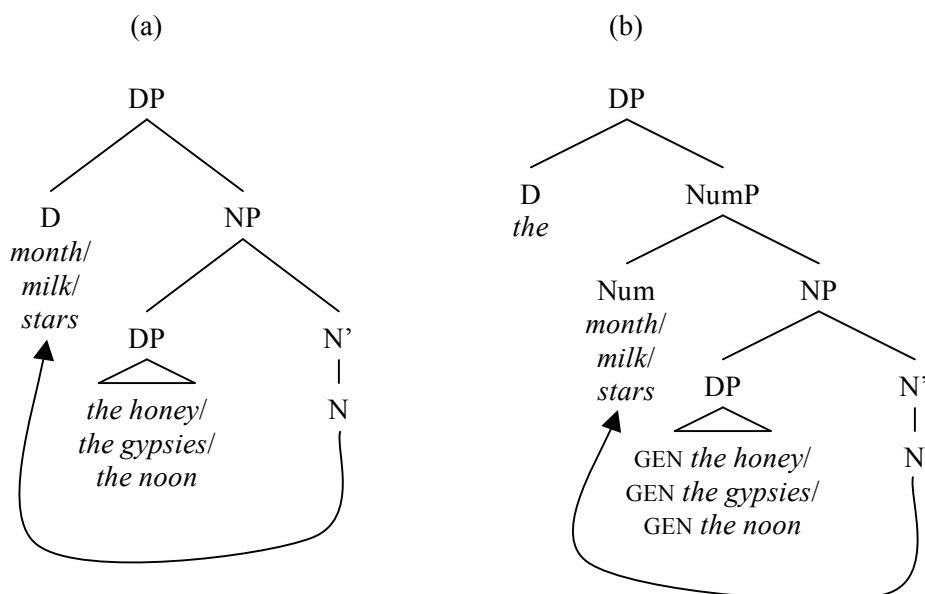

Figure 5
PA idioms in both CS and FG constructions: (a) and (b), respectively. The structural difference explains the (non-)idiomaticity of the expressions.

In both constructions, the lowest projection that groups the head noun together with its possessor is NP. But in FGs, this constituency is not possible without the support of the GEN particle. In other words, before the possessor phrase can merge with the head noun, the possessor noun must merge with the GEN particle. This derivation places the nouns *month*, *stars*, and *milk*, in a strict 'ownership' relation with the DPs *the honey*, *the noon*, and *the gypsies*, respectively, and the resulting meaning may only be literal and not idiomatic. Once again, Ritter's (1988, 1991) analysis stands its ground against PA data.

5   Genitive Objects

Construct States are not limited only to possession relations. Consider the grammatical examples in (6).

(6)   *bee'*   *el-*   *ardh*
       selling   the-   land
       "the selling of the land"

       hazhr   *et-*   *tajawwul*
       prohibition   the-   wandering
       "the curfew"

       hadm   *el-*   *madiineh*
       destruction   the-   city
       "the destruction of the city"

In (6), none of the DPs *the land*, *the wandering*, and *the city* are possessors of the nouns *selling*, *prohibition*, or *destruction*. The DPs are rather the themes of the actions represented by those nouns: *the land* is being sold, *the wandering* prohibited, and *the city* destroyed. Conformity with UTAH requires these DPs to originate in the complement position to the head nouns *selling*, *prohibition*, etc. But if APs are left-adjoined to NP and object DPs remain in situ (as complements to N,) then we would expect the adjectives to precede the object DPs, as shown in the ungrammatical tree in Figure 6. The examples in (7) show that this is not the case.
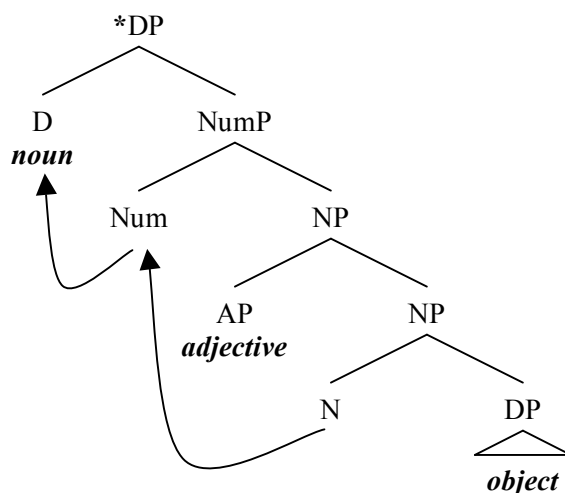

Figure 6
If the theme nouns were to remain in situ in Genitive Objects (which are adjoined with adjectives), then the expected order must be *noun-adjective-object*.

(7)   *bee'   el-   mo'ajjal   el-   ardh
      *selling   the   hasty   the   land
      bee'   el-   ardh   el-   mo'ajjal
      selling   the   land   the   hasty
      "the hasty selling of the land"

      *hazhr   el-   mafroodh   et-   tajawwul
      *prohibition the   enforced   the   wandering
      hazhr   et-   tajawwul   el-   mafroodh
      prohibition the   wandering   the   enforced
      "the curfew"

      *hadm   el-   motawaḥḥesh el-   madiineh
      *destruction the   monstrous   the   city
      hadm   el-   madiineh   el-   motawaḥḥesh
      destruction the   city   the   monstrous
      "the destruction of the city"

The post-nominal position of the APs in (7) indicates that the DPs *the land*, *the wandering*, etc. appear above the NP. We have already seen this in the CSs in section 1, in which the DPs originating at [Spec,NP] raised to [Spec,NumP] to get case (rightward) from D. Fassi Fehri (1993), as well as Borer (1999), offers a raising account of Genitive Objects, which I simplify and show in Figure 7: *object* DPs raise to [Spec,NumP] to get case. This implies that N (unlike its parallel V in VSO clauses) is incapable of assigning accusative case to its complement, and this is in fact confirmed in the transitive nominal constructions shown in (8).
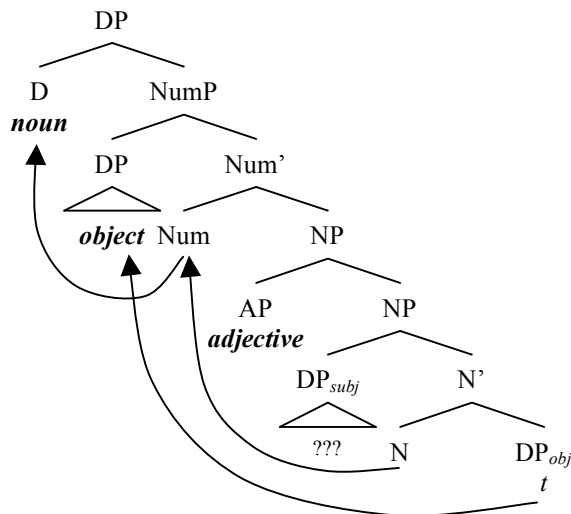
Figure 7
The raising of object DPs to [Spec,NumP] in Genitive Objects.

(8) *hob iyad mart-o
     *love Iyad wife-his
     hob iyad **la** mart-o
     love Iyad **ACC** wife-his
     "Iyad's love for his wife"

Crucial here is the need for the preposition *la* to assign accusative case to the complement DP. But note also that a subject DP (*iyad*) raises from [Spec,NP] to [Spec,NumP] to get genitive case from the determiner head. With both [Spec,NP] and [Spec,NumP] occupied, the raising of the complement DP (when the preposition that would otherwise assign it accusative case is absent,) is an invalid move since no landing sites are available for the object DP. With an overt ACC particle preceding it, however, the object DP can remain in situ since the particle satisfies its case-checking requirements. This explains the (un)grammaticalities in (8) and is demonstrated in Figure 8.
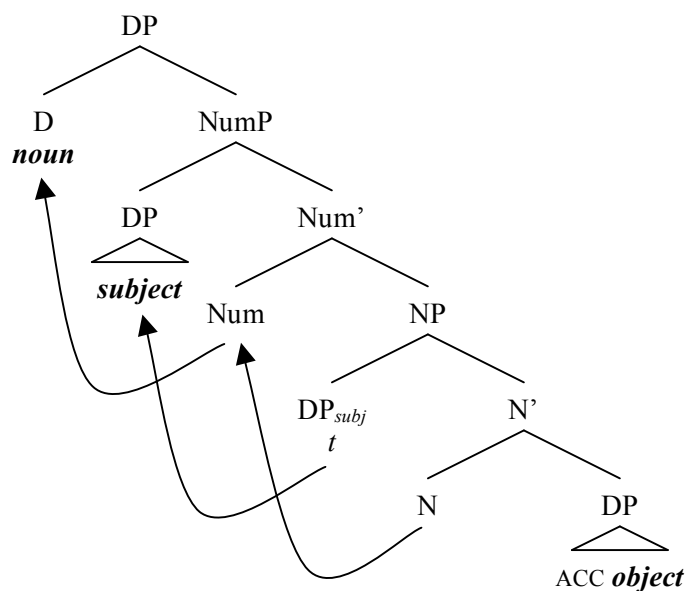

Figure 8
The appearance of the ACC marker on the object noun prevents its raising to [Spec,NumP]; since ACC assigns accusative case to the noun, its case-motivated movement is no longer required.

It was shown that in Genitive Objects, the DP appearing in [Spec,NumP] actually originates in the complement position, while in the transitive nominals in (8), it is the subject DP (originating at [Spec,NP]) that raises to [Spec,NumP]. But what occupies [Spec,NP] in Genitive Object constructions? Fassi Fehri (1993) argues that [Spec,NP] is occupied by a

PRO subject DP, and since PRO is by definition caseless, it has no case-checking requirements to fulfill and, thus, undergoes no raising. This is borne out by the grammaticality in (9).

(9)   *khedmet   nafso   ahamm   shii   'end-o*
      helping   himself   important.sl   thing   for-him
      "helping himself is the most important thing for him"

Note the absence of an overt antecedent to the anaphor *himself*. If [Spec,NP] was empty, then (9) should be ungrammatical as it would violate Condition A. On Fassi Fehri's analysis, however, the PRO appearing in [Spec,NP] prevents the construction from committing that violation, and that explains the grammaticality of the sentence. Figure 9 shows the general structure of Genitive Objects and the movements involved in forming them.
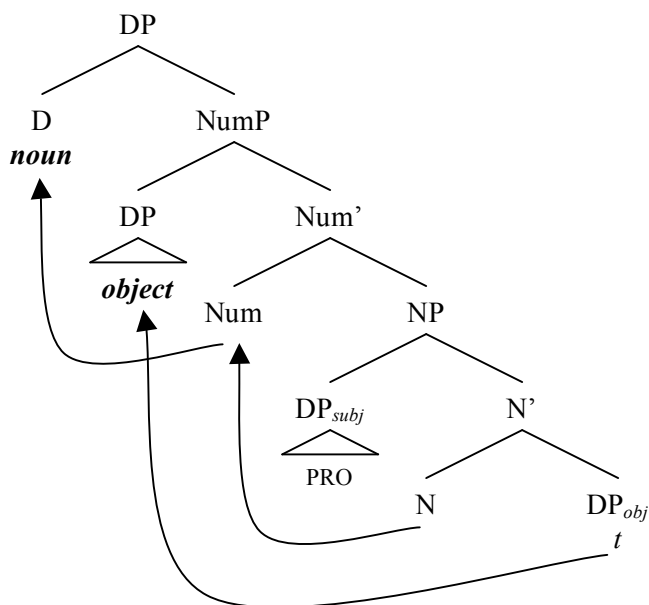

Figure 9
The syntactic behaviour of PA Genitive Objects.

Two points should be made before wrapping up. (1) Because it was Ritter's (1988, 1991) analysis that I set out to examine, I did not explore the possibility of EPP-motivated DP-raising. Ritter (1991) uses case checking to explain the attested DP positions in CSs and FGs, and following Fassi Fehri (1993) and Borer (1999), I offer further verification for her analysis using PA Genitive Objects. (2) Raising to satisfy EPP may apply to a PRO DP, and if it was EPP that caused the raising to [Spec,NumP], then in Genitive Objects, the PRO would raise to check EPP and the object DP would remain in situ. This would produce the incorrect word order shown in (10). (These are the same ungrammatical constructions in (7).)

(10) *bee'   el-   mo'ajjal   el-   ardh
      *selling   the   hasty   the   land
      "the hasty selling of the land"

      *hazhr   el-   mafroodh   et-   tajawwul
      *prohibition the   enforced   the   wandering
      "the curfew"

      *hadm   el-   motawaḥḥesh el- madiineh
      *destruction the   monstrous   the city
      "the destruction of the city"

The discussion in this section followed Ritter's (1991) case-motivated account of DP movement in Construct States, and showed that her analysis is supported by the behaviour of Genitive Objects and transitive nominals in PA. In Genitive Objects, object DPs raise to [Spec,NumP] to check case from D, and the resulting word order matches that of grammatical DPs in PA. In transitive nominals, the subject DP raises to [Spec,NumP] to get case from D, leaving no landing sites for object DPs. It was shown empirically that this scenario produces ungrammatical constructions *unless* the object DP is accompanied by an overt ACC particle that checks its case. Ritter's (1988, 1991) analysis fits well with PA.

6   Concluding Remarks

I have shown that Ritter's (1988, 1991) analysis of Hebrew DP constructions is applicable to PA. This comes as no surprise given the genetic affinity between the two languages. But I'll add that the syntax of DPs has changed during the evolution of Classical Arabic into PA (and the numerous other Arabic dialects that emerged.) Classical Arabic had a rich inflectional system that placed little restriction on word order in comparison to the modern dialects. In DPs, for instance, Classical Arabic allowed transitive CSs without the aid of an ACC particle before the object. What is ungrammatical in PA, (see (11),) was in fact perfectly grammatical in Classical Arabic if the words were properly inflected.

(11) *ḥob   iyad   mart-o
      *love   Iyad   wife-his

      ḥob   iyad   **la**   mart-o
      love   Iyad   ACC   wife-his

      ḥubbu   iyad-en   emra'at-i-hi   (Classical Arabic)
      love   Iyad-GEN   wife-ACC-his
      "Iyad's love for his wife"

Further research may show whether similar changes took place in the development of Modern Hebrew from Biblical Hebrew, or in the development of New Babylonian from Old Babylonian, and may further investigate the corresponding syntactic behaviour of VPs/TPs in each of these languages.

Acknowledgments

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