

TAL SILONI

ADJECTIVAL CONSTRUCTS AND INALIENABLE CONSTRUCTIONS*

1. INTRODUCTION

Semitic nominal construct states, which express a genitival relation between a head noun and a noun phrase without the mediation of a (dummy) preposition (1), have received much attention in the recent generative literature (Borer (1996), (1999), Fassi Fehri (1989), (1993), Mohammad (1988), Ritter (1987), (1988), (1991), Siloni (1991), (1994), (1997), among others).

- (1) yaldey ha-šxenim nixnesu l-a-xeder.
children the-neighbors entered to-the-room
'The neighbors' children entered the room.'

Yet, there is a controversy as to what it is exactly that allows and requires the use of a construct in specific conditions, which, by now, are well-described. In a series of articles, Ritter ascribes the occurrence of a construct to the appearance in D of a genitive determiner that has to discharge genitive Case. For various executions of the same approach, see Fassi Fehri (1989), Mohammad (1988), Siloni (1991). Borer (1996), (1999) proposes that the defining property of the construct state is the lack of definiteness specification, which forces the head noun to head a construct, through which it gets associated with the missing specification. Finally, according to Siloni (1994), (1997), lexical heads that do not bear tense specifications can be endowed with genitive features; such endowment results in the construct state.¹

The distinct approaches make different predictions. While the latter approach, the '[-tense] approach', predicts that other nontensed lexical heads could also form construct states, the '[-definiteness] approach' advanced by Borer associates constructs mainly with nominal heads. Under approaches à la Ritter, the possibility to form constructs hinges upon the projection of a genitive determiner.

Construct states are not limited to nominal heads. A variety of lexical heads seems to be able to appear in a genitival relation with a noun phrase: verbal gerunds (see Siloni (1994), (1997)), adjectives and most probably even prepositions. This paper analyzes two nonnominal occurrences of the construct state in Semitic languages (in particular, Hebrew), which have received very little attention in the generative literature (for short mentions, see Berman (1978), Hazout (1991), Borer (1996));² the construct state headed

by an adjective (for example, *yefat mar'e*, 'beautiful look' in (2a)), and the construct headed by the so-called Benoni form, which is usually a verbal form functioning as a present tense form or as a participle (*nos'ey matanot*, 'carry(BENONI) gifts' in (2b)).

- (2) a. *yalda yefat mar'e nixnesa l-a-xeder.*
 girl(FS) beautiful(ADJ FS) look(MS) entered to-the-room
 'A good looking girl entered the room.'
- b. *yeladim nos'ey matanot nixnesu l-a-xeder.*
 children(MPL) carry(BENONI MPL) gifts(FPL) entered to-the-room
 'Children carrying gifts entered the room.'

The paper adopts and supports the [-tense] approach to constructs, which is the only approach immediately extendable across syntactic categories. Section 2 shows that the constructions in (2) are indeed constructs as they show the typical characteristics of construct states. However, the paper does not focus on these characteristics (for discussion, see the cited references), but rather deals with the peculiarities of the nonnominal constructs in (2). Section 3 is devoted to adjectival constructs. As will become clear in the course of the section, most of their particularities follow from the fact that they are obligatorily inalienable constructions whose possessor is the modified noun. Benoni constructs are analyzed in section 4. Unlike other occurrences of the Benoni form, in constructs it is not verbal nor does it denote an event; rather, it is a derived adjective. The common properties of Benoni and adjectival constructs are derived from the fact that both constructions are adjectival. The distinctions they show follow from the fact that the latter, but not the former, are obligatorily inalienable constructions. Finally, section 5 offers a brief discussion of constructs across categories.

2. CONSTRUCT STATE PROPERTIES

Adjectival and Benoni constructs show characteristics typical of construct states. First, they are head initial. More importantly, their head is a stressless weak form subject to phonological rules that operate in nonstressed environments. Phonologically, it cliticizes onto the nonhead member of the construct, on a par with nominal heads of constructs (that is, the head and the nonhead member must be adjacent). Thus, phonological alternations are observed between the construct state forms *yefat* (2a), *nos'ey* (2b) and the free (nonconstruct) state forms *yafa* (3a), *nos'im* (3b), which are parallel to the alternations their nominal equivalents undergo. For example, compare the construct forms *yaldat* in (3c) and *yaldey* in (1) with the free forms *yalda* (3a) and *yeladim* (3b).

- (3) a. *yalda yafa*
 girl beautiful
 'a beautiful girl'

- b ha-yeladim nos'im praxim.
the-children carry flowers
- c. yaldat ha-šxenim
girl the-neighbors
'the neighbors' girl'

As is well known, nominal heads of constructs can never realize the article (Hebrew has only a definite article) (4). In the unmarked case, their definiteness value matches that of the nonhead member of the construct, as in (3c) for example:³

- (4) (*ha-)yaldat (ha-)šxenim
(the-)girl (the-)neighbors

As Hebrew modifying adjectives show agreement with the head they modify not only in gender and number but also in definiteness, it is appropriate to examine the behavior of adjectival constructs in this regard. As illustrated below, while adjectives must surface with the article when the head they modify is definite (5a), adjectival heads of constructs can never appear with the article (5b). Rather, if the modified noun is definite, it is the nonhead member of the construct which has to bear the definite article. For example, consider the adjectival construct *yefat ha-mar'e* 'beautiful the-look' in (5c): *ha-mar'e* 'the look' surfaces with the article, because the modified noun *ha-yalda* 'the girl' is definite. When the modified noun is indefinite the nonhead member cannot appear with the article (5d).

- (5) a. ha-yalda *(ha-)yafa
the-girl (the-)beautiful
'the beautiful girl'
- b. *ha-yalda ha-yefat (ha-)mar'e nixnesa l-a-xeder.
the girl the-beautiful (the-)look entered to-the-room
- c. ha-yalda yefat *(ha-)mar'e nixnesa l-a-xeder.
the girl beautiful (the-)look entered to-the-room
'The good looking girl entered the room'
- d. yalda yefat (*ha-)mar'e nixnesa l-a-xeder.
girl beautiful (the-)look entered to-the-room
'A good looking girl entered the room.'

Benoni constructs show similar behavior. The nominal member of the Benoni construct (*ha-praxim*, 'the flowers' in (6a)) must bear the article when the noun the construct modifies is definite (*ha-yeladim*, 'the children' in (6a)), and cannot bear it

when the modified noun is indefinite (6b). The Benoni head of constructs can never occur with the article (6c).

- (6) a. ha-yeladim nos'ey *(ha-)praxim higi'u.
 the-children carry(BENONI) (the-)flowers arrived
 'The children carrying the flowers arrived.'
- b. yeladim nos'ey (*ha-)praxim higi'u.
 children carry(BENONI) (the-)flowers arrived
 'Children carrying flowers arrived.'
- c. *ha-yeladim ha-nosey (ha-)praxim higi'u.
 the-children the-carry(BENONI) (the-)flowers arrived

Finally, consider the issue of Case. In Hebrew the nonhead member of adjectival and Benoni constructs does not show morphological Case, just like its equivalent in nominal constructs is not morphologically Case-marked. In Standard Arabic, however, the noun phrase member of all types of constructs shows genitive Case, as is illustrated by the adjectival construct in (7). Reasonably, then, in Hebrew, too, all constructs express genitival relations.⁴

- (7) r-rajul-u l-jamiil-u l-wajh-i
 the-man-NOM the-beautiful-NOM the-face-GEN
 'the beautiful faced man'

(Standard Arabic)

The genitive member of adjectival and Benoni constructs is obligatory (8a-b), as is its counterpart in nominal constructs (8c).

- (8) a. yalda yefat *(mar'e) nixnesa l-a-xeder.
 girl beautiful (look) entered to-the-room
 'A good looking girl entered the room.'
- b. yeladim kotvey *(šira) huzmenu l-a-pgiša.
 children write(BENONI) (poetry) were+invited to-the-meeting
 'Children writing poetry were invited to the meeting'
- c. yaldat *(ha-šxenim)
 girl (the-neighbors)
 'the neighbors' girl'

In sum, the adjectival and Benoni constructions under scrutiny are constructs; they show the typical characteristics of construct states. However, whereas nouns can appear either in the construct state or in the free state, realizing the genitive DP in a *šel* phrase (9a), both adjectival and Benoni constructs do not have *šel* 'of' phrase paraphrases (9b-

c). As *šel* appears only in nominal contexts, it is not surprising that it is disallowed by adjectives. The fact that Benoni forms do not allow it is derived in section 4 from the claim that Benoni constructs are also adjectival constructions.

- (9) a. ha-yeladim šel ha-šxenim nixnesu l-a-xeder.
 the-children of the-neighbors entered to-the-room
 'The neighbors' children entered the room.'
- b. *yalda yafa šel mar'e nixnesa l-a-xeder.
 girl beautiful of look entered to-the-room
- c. *yeladim kotvim šel šira huzmenu l-a-pgiša.
 children write(BENONI) of poetry were+invited to-the-meeting

Moreover, while the genitive member of nominal constructs does not seem to be thematically constrained (it can be the Theme argument, the Agent, the Possessor), adjectival and Benoni forms are more restricted in the formation of constructs. I first discuss the constraints imposed on the genitive member of adjectival constructs, among other peculiarities they show. I return to Benoni constructs in section 4.

3. ADJECTIVAL CONSTRUCTS

Adjectives productively form constructs with noun phrases denoting body-parts, such as eyes, hands, head etc., (10a). Body-part nouns are typically referred to as inalienable nouns because they are intrinsically associated with another object of which they are parts. Alienable nouns are excluded from adjectival constructs (10b). But nouns designating objects that, in an obvious way, are parts of a whole can function as extended inalienables and combine with an adjective to form an adjectival construct. For example, 'ceiling' is an inalienable part of a room (10c), and 'mast' of a sailing boat (10d).

- (10) a. yalda yefat 'eynayim/se'ar
 girl beautiful eyes/hair
 'a girl with beautiful eyes/hair'
- b. *yalda yefat 'ofana'im/mexonit/bayit
 girl beautiful bicycle/car/house
- c. xadarim gvohey tikra
 rooms high ceiling
 'high-ceiling rooms'

Themes in Arabic and Hebrew Syntax

Ouhalla, J.; Shlonsky, U. (Eds.)

2002, IX, 327 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4020-0536-7