

## Some possessive nPs in Arabic

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### I. Possessive nPs in Semitic, an overview

- (1) A large amount of literature on possessive nPs in Arabic, and more generally in Semitic (see among others Benmamoun 2000, Borer 1989, Fassi Fehri 1999, Mohammad 1989, Ouhalla 2000, 2009, 2011, Ritter 1988, 1991, and Shlonsky 2004)

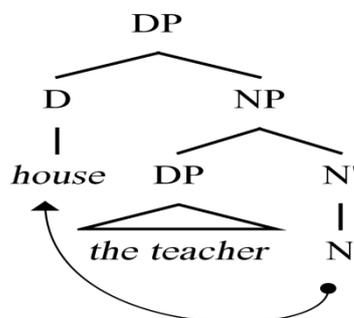
Main issues:

- The structure of nPs and DPs, possessives, and genitive formations.
- Construct State nominal.

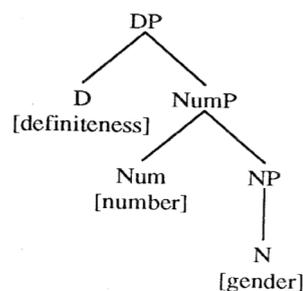
Ritter (1991):

The head of the construct is generated under N and moves to spec D, leading head-initial word order:

e.g. *beit ha-mora* / \**ha-beit ha-mora* 'the house of the teacher'.  
*dar Imoʕallim* / \**ddar Imoʕallim*



- The locus of gender and number (Ritter 1993, 1995, see also Lowenstamm 2008)
  - o Ritter (1995: 417-418): “in Hebrew the gender specification is on the head of NP; the number specification is on the head of NumP; and definiteness is on the head of DP.”



- Analytic (Free State) vs synthetic (Construct State) nPs (Ouhalla 2009, 2011).

- Ouhalla (2011: 128): “[i]nalienable noun phrases derive from a structure (...), where the inalienable possessum is the head noun and the possessor is its internal argument.”

e.g. (p. 114)    xal    al-bnt    /    \*al-xal dyal al-bnt  
                          uncle the-girl                    the-uncle of the-girl

(2) Moroccan Arabic possessives:

- nPs of the form *bu* + possessee.
- Compared with possessives of the form *mul* + possessee.
- They show interesting properties with regard to gender, number and definiteness.
- Also some phonological and prosodic proprieties of the complex *bu* + noun will be examined.

Aims:

- o Determine the morphosyntactic structure of these nPs.
- o Show the properties of *bu* and *mul* in both types of formations:
  - *bu* probably lost its original phonetic form /ʔabu/ and meaning ‘father’
  - *bu* + *N* exhibit compounding proprieties while *mul* + *N* are genuine possessives.

II. Moroccan Arabic

(3)	Singular		Plural	
	Masculine	Feminine	Masculine	Feminine
a. 'stubborn, big headed'	buras	bu or muras	buras	bu or muras
'big-eared'	buwdnin	bu or muwdnin	buwdnin	bu or muwdnin
'short-legged'	burzila	bu or murzilat	burzilat	bu or murzilat
'Potbelly'	bukrija	bu or mukrija	bukrifat	bu or mukrifat
b. 'homeowner'	mul ddar	mulat ddar	mmalin ddar	mmalat ddar
'grocer'	mul lhanut	mulat lhanut	maalin lhanut	mmalat lhanut
'fishmonger'	mul lhut	mulat lhut	mmalin lhut	mmalat lhut

- *bu* + possessee noun: [-number], [-definite], [+/- gender]
- *mul* + possessee noun: [+number], [+gender], [+definite]
- The same word order: possessor + possessee.  
 They differ from other common possessive NPs (see 5), which display the opposite word order possibly with a genitive preposition between them.
- *bu* and *mul* cannot occur in isolation.
- *mul* + *N* = genuine possessives
- *bu* + *N* behave as compounds in which *bu* has lost its original form /ʔabu/ and meaning ‘father’.
- Forms with *bu* are semantically opaque. Their meaning is not compositional: It does not obtain from the meaning of N1 + the meaning of N2.

Some other forms in Moroccan Arabic are invariable and morphologically unmarked for gender and number:

- (4)
- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 'carnival figure dressed in goatskin' | buzlud (also called buləbtʕajn)   |
| 'snail'                               | buzəɣlal (also called babbuɟ)   |
| 'varicella'                           | buħəmrun  |
| 'measles'                             | busʕffirʕ   |
| 'mussels'                             | buzrug  |
|                                       | buyaba  |
| 'dish made of sheep's head'           | buzəlluf  |
| Surnames:                             | budərbala, burzilət, buxobza, etc.                                      |
| Place names:                          | buzniqa, buzdorʕ, etc.  |
| Typical or particular dress:          | mmul lmonto 'dressed in a coat' / bumonto<br>'always dressed in a coat' |
|                                       | mmul tarboɟ 'wearing a hat' / butarboɟ<br>'always wearing a hat'.       |

- (5)
- |    |                   |          |         |                   |
|----|-------------------|----------|---------|-------------------|
| a. | ddar              | djal     | rrazəl  |                   |
|    | the house         | of       | the man |                   |
|    | 'The man's house' |          |         |                   |
| b. | ras               | rrazəl   | /       | *rras djal rrazəl |
|    | head              | the main |         |                   |
|    | 'The man's head'  |          |         |                   |

### III. Eastern Arabic

*ʔabu* 'father' + *Noun*

Egyptian Arabic:

'whiskered'	<i>ʔabu fanab</i>
'bald-headed'	<i>ʔabu batʕħa</i>
'hunchbacked'	<i>ʔabu qubba</i>
'one-eyed'	<i>ʔabu ʕura</i>

Egyptian Arabic also has forms of the type in (3b), but uses *sʕaheb* 'friend, owner' rather than *mul*: e.g. *sʕaheb elbi:t* 'homeowner'.

The same patterns are found in Palestinian Arabic.

### IV. Berber

(6)	Singular		Plural		
	Masculine	Feminine	Masculine	Feminine	
a.	'big headed'	buugajju	mmugajju	id biigʷijja	id mmigʷijja
	'potbelly'	buuħlig	mmuħlig	id biihlgan	id mmihlgan
	'grocer'	buthanut	mmuthanut	id buthuna	istt mmuthuna
				id buthanut	istt mmuthanut
b.		<i>bu +Noun</i>		<i>Noun</i>	
	'hedgehog'	bumħnd	proper name	<i>Mħnd</i>	
	'boar'	butagant	'forest'	tagant	

	'turtle'	buttgra	-	-
c.	surname	buufus	'hand'	afus
	surname	buzzit	'oil'	zzit

All forms are inflected for gender (bu / mmu) and number (id / istt).

The possessee noun is sensitive to gender and number.

Surnames, places names and some other common nouns use bu-:

(7)

Surnames:            buufus    afus 'hand'  
                           buzzit     zzit 'oil'

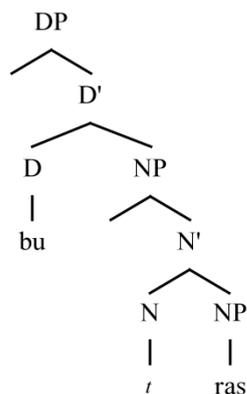
Common nouns:    bumħnd 'hedgehog'    mħnd 'proper name'  
                           butagant 'boar'     tagant 'forest'  
                           buttgra 'turtle'

## V. Structures

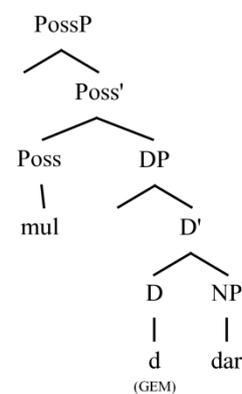
- Standard analyses assign the possessive nPs as in (5) a structure in which the possessee is the head noun and the possessor its specifier.
  - o Head-raising derives the possessee-initial position order (see Ouhalla 2011: 112).
  - o The head noun, which may itself be unspecified for definiteness, inherits it from the possessor (see for instance Benmamoun 2000 and Fassi Fehri 1999).
- Possessive nPs at issue (3) are assigned a structure in which *bu* and *mul* are heads, and the possessee noun the complement (see 8).
  - o The lack of definiteness and number in the forms with *bu* follows from the fact that *bu* is projected lower in the structure than *mul*.
  - o forms like *buras* 'stubborn' are generated inside DP with no functional head for number and gender
  - o Forms like *mul ddar* 'homeowner' contain a possessive phrase projected outside DP and headed by *mul*.
  - o PossP is regarded as the locus of number and gender specifications of the entire construction, since number and gender of the head determines number and gender of the whole form.

(8) Compounds vs genuine possessives

a.



b.



## VI. Phonological domains

- One phonological word
  - *bu / mu* show phonological word properties with the possessee noun: each form behaves as one phonological word though containing two words.
  - *bu* cannot ever be separated from the possessee noun by any other element, while *mul* can.
    - Initial CV hypothesis (Lowenstamm 1999)
      - Each word of major category (N, V, A) has an empty initial CV at its left.
      - This empty CV is the site of cliticization.
      - In certain languages the empty CV hosts determiners: e.g. French *le, la, les*; Hebrew definite article *ha*.

French

CV + CV	CV CV
l ə	b a t o



Hebrew

CV + CV	CV CV
h a	m o r a



- In Moroccan Arabic, the definite article and *bu* compete for the same position, namely the initial CV.

*rras* 'the head'

CV + CV	CV CV
l	r a s ∅

*buras* 'stubborn'

\**burras*

CV	CV	CV	CV
b	u	r	a s ∅

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