Research article
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Adjective + Complement in Semitic Languages

https://doi.org/10.33063/diva-378636

Abstract: The relationship between the two components of the construction known in Arabic as جْمُونَةٌ وَلَجْنَةٌ, e.g., هِ جْ وَل جْ أَنُ، Hebrew ינַיִם יֵיְפֵה ע, and Akkadian damqam īnim 'beautiful-faced/eyed', is commonly held to be one of nexus: 'His/her eyes/face are/is beautiful'. The author of the article argues that the relationship is rather that of a verb/(verbal) root with its complement – similar to Arabic تَمِيز, e.g., ا هً جْ وَنٌ وَ حَ وَ الَّ, 'He is beautiful, as for his face'. A 1996 article by the author used analytical arguments to prove this; the present article, which is a continuation, does not repeat the analytical arguments, but presents examples contradicting the "Nexus Theory" along with examples unequivocally supporting the "Complement Theory".

Keywords: Semitic linguistics, adjective, complement, accusative, genitive

1 Introduction

In 1996 I published an article titled "Adnominal and Adverbal Attributes in Semitic Languages" (Le Muséon 109, pp. 369–393), in which I argued that in the construction called in Arabic جْمُونَةٌ وَلَجْنَةٌ, Hebrew ינַיִם יֵיְפֵה ע, and Akkadian damqam īnim 'beautiful-faced/eyed', the syntactic relationship between the two components of the collocation does not correspond to that of a nexus, but rather to that of a noun or a verb with its complement, i.e. object or "genitive". I based this statement largely on parallels and analogies.

I will succinctly summarize the basic theses of that article and the terminology I use.

The relationship of the object or adverb to its verb is the same as that of the adnominal attribute to its qualified substantive. In other words, the object of the verb and the attribute of the noun are allosyntagms of the same syntagmeme.

To convey this syntagmeme I use the term "complement", and to convey the two allosyntagms I use "object" and "(adnominal) attribute".

The relationship between the different appearances of the (verbal) root with its different complements is one and the same:

(1)

a. 'He shall put on the linen clothes' (Lev. 16:32) – Verb + Object.
b. 'And one man among them, clothed in linen' (Ez. 9:2) – Adjective (Pass. Participle) + Object.
c. 'And he called to the man clothed in linen' (Ez. 9:3) – Adjective (Pass. Participle) + Object.

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d. ‘And behold the man clothed in linen’ (Ez. 9:11) – Adjective (Pass. Participle) + nominal attribute.

(2) מִלְּא יָמִים...(3)

а. ‘The houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with wild beasts’ (Ex. 8:17) - Verb + Object.

b. ‘And the Presence of the Lord is filling the Tabernacle’ (Ex. 40:34,35) – Adjective + Object.

c. ‘The great eagle ... with the full plumage’ (Ez. 17:1) – Adjective + Object (acc.).

d. ‘... the aged [person] with him that is full of days’ (Jer. 6:10) – Adjective + nominal attribute (gen.).

Thus, the relationship between the different appearances of the roots מִלְּא יָמִים and מְלֵא יָמִים and their different complements is that of a lexeme with its complement. Analogically, this is the relationship that exists between similar "genitive constructions" like 'The houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with wild beasts' (Ex. 8:17) – Adjective + Object.

It is difficult to accept that in the collocation 'powerful from the point of view of coldness' it is the day that is qualified as 'powerful' rather than the coldness. This difficulty arises first of all because of our intuitive interpretation of the collocation, and secondly because, as the roots of the adjectives are considered intransitive, they are not expected to govern a complement, especially not an accusative; consequently, the interpretation of the relationship between the two components as one of nexus goes without saying.

In this article I will not repeat my arguments from 1996, but rather will try to make it more convincing that the roots conveying qualities and traits, from which adjectives are derived and which are considered intransitive by modern European speakers, may take the accusative; and consequently that an adjective taking the accusative and a construction parallel to that relationship is not "patently absurd", but merely natural in Semitic languages. To make this thesis easier to accept, I will mainly confirm this statement. These sister-constructions are in a complementary distribution: when the adjective is undetermined it is complemented by the accusative, and the construction is called תמיין;&#0180; some, when the adjective is determined, it is complemented by the genitive and is called תמיין; the relationship between the adjective and its complement is one and the same in both constructions, and the version with the accusative, the תמיין, demonstrates unequivocally that this relationship is one of lexeme and complement (rather than nexus), parallel to that of a verb and its object.

Over the years I have realized that this idea is difficult for many to accept, although I have not seen any reasoned argument contradicting it. Gideon Goldenberg entirely rejects this analysis but his only arguments are as follows: "Similarly, it is patently absurd to construe the Hebrew rabbat bânîm 'she that has many children' (Isam. ii5) as 'she that is many' with a limited applicability of 'many' ... And yet, the explanation of direct attribution with limitation of applicability will still be found everywhere, and ten years after Diem’s article, the unwarrantable claim is found insistently repeated." 3

1 א. גאי
2 Werner Diem, "Alienable und inalienable Possession im Semitischen", ZDMG 136 (1986) pp. 227–291.
3 Gideon Goldenberg, "Two Types of Phrase Adjectivization", in W. Arnold and H. Bobzin (eds), Sprich doch mit deinen Knechten aramäisch, wir verstehen es! 60 Beiträge zur Semitistik: Festschrift für Otto Jastrow zum 60. Geburtstag, 2002, pp. 193–208 (p. 204).
adduce examples illustrating this complex statement; while the first article was an analytical-analogical one, the present article is a didactic one. I will accordingly adduce examples exemplifying (1) "genitive constructions" in which the meaning completely abolishes the possibility of interpreting the relationship between their components as one of nexus, such that their interpretation as adjective + complement is inescapable; and (2) verbs derived from attributive roots – from which the adjectives are derived – and adjectives taking complements.

2 The nomen rectum and the nomen regens are not in a nexus relationship

In this section I adduce examples of "genitive constructions" in which the meaning completely abolishes the possibility of interpreting the relationship between their components as one of nexus. Consequently, their interpretation as adjective + complement is inescapable:

(1) שְׂבַע־רֹגֶז... וָדָה אִד אָדָם יְלוּ 'Man that is born of a woman is ... (and) sated with trouble.' (Job 14:1) – It is the man that is born to a woman, not the woman; the woman is the one who gives birth. It is the man that is sated with trouble; it is not the trouble that is sated.

(2) רֵיכֶם שְׂרֻפוֹת אֵשׁ 'Your cities are burned with fire' (Isa. 1:7) – The cities are burned, not the fire.

(3) מְהִר צֶדֶק... וּשֹׁפֵט מִשְׁפּ 'judging and seeking judgment, and hastening justice.' (Isa. 16:5) – It is not the justice but the person that is quick. Moreover, the syntactic connection between the components of the collocation מְהִר צֶדֶק repeats that of מְהִר מִשְׁפּ: an adjective (a participle is a kind of adjective) + its complement.

(4) ל יָמִים וְזָקֵן 'young (one) [lit. young as for (his) days] and old (one)' (Isa. 65:20) – It is the person that is young, not the days.

(5) רֵלִים מְחֻלְלֵי חֶרֶב 'They are all uncircumcised, slain by the sword ... They are all uncircumcised, pierced through by the sword.' (Ez. 32:25–26) – It is not the sword that is slain or pierced through, but they.

(6) alpu pa-a-šu īpuš-ma i-qab-bi iz-za-kár a-na sīsî na-'-id qab-li “The ox opened his mouth speaking, addressing the horse, glorious in battle.” (Lambert BWL, p. 177 line 24) – It is the horse that is glorious, not the battle.

These examples show that the allegedly necessary and self-evident nexus relationship between the two components of the collocation does not hold.

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4 With a few exceptions, I do not repeat the examples I presented in the 1996 article.
5 W.G. Lambert, Babylonian Wisdom Literature, 1960.
3 The attributive root/lexeme as a verb or an adjective governing an object

While in the first section I exemplified the adjective + complement relationship of the collocations negatively, showing that the relationship cannot parallel that of a nexus, in the following sections I exemplify the relationship positively, by adducing examples of verbs derived from attributive roots – from which adjectives are derived – and adjectives taking complements. That the relationship between the components of the collocations parallels that of lexeme + complement is unequivocal.

3.1 Verbs + direct object

(1) Nevertheless, in the time of his old age he was diseased in his feetacc.

(2) Disease of your bowels’ (2Chr. 21:15)

(3) ‘I have heard that Nana is ill of a carbuncleacc’ (ARM 6 10, 129:4–5)

(4) ‘My body is not good (about) meacc.’ [= I am ill] (El Amarna Tablets, Letter 7, line 9)

Analogously, adjectives derived from those roots take the accusative too; such an accusative is known as تمييز.

Akkadian exemplifies this claim the best, because, like Arabic, it has cases and expresses complementation explicitly and unequivocally; in contrast to Arabic, however, the choice of the complement of the adjective, accusative or genitive, is not conditioned, but rather free. It is instructive to note the difference between Akkadian and Arabic in the phenomenon of the commutation between تمييز and الاضافة غير الحقيقية:

While in Arabic, which has a definite article, the distribution is conditioned by determination – an undetermined collocation taking the form تمييز (ٍنًِ) and a determined collocation taking the form الاضافة غير الحقيقية (ٍالحَ) – in Akkadian, which lacks a definite article, the two constructions are free variations.

Just as the accusative-complement (object) of the verb may precede or follow the verb, the accusative-complement of the adjective in Akkadian may precede or follow the adjective; the two possibilities can appear in parallel alongside each other.

(1) ‘A remarkable young man, of outstanding physique acc, massive in his bodyacc, clothed in a new garmentacc’ [lit. renewed by a new garment] (Lambert BWL p. 48 lines 9–10)

(2) ‘He [the dog] is long of leg acc, quick at running acc, short of sustenance acc, poor in foodacc’ (LB 2001 lines 7–10)
3.2 An indirect object

The attributive root/lexeme may also govern its complement indirectly, by a preposition, in principle parallel to تمييز, the difference between the two adverbal complements being that of a direct versus an indirect one:

(1) רַב לְהוֹשִׁיע (Isa. 63:1), for which see next sub-section.

(2) ט́רגַלְיו כֹּלֵו לֹא יְמַל וְקַל ב́ (Am. 2:15)

(3) יצאו עַיּוֹוַוַוַוַו לְוָוָוַוַו (Ps. 151 from Qumran, lines 7–8)

(4)ומָעֵשַו נָוֵמַו בָּז בָּז (Babylonian Talmud, Ktubbot 22a, seventh line from bottom [= the first line of the long ones])

(5) wa-ru-uq i-na ba-aš-tim 'He [the scorpion] is green-visaged’ [lit. green in (his) visage] (AO 7682 line 7)

(6) Ge'ez የከት፡ ብእሲቱ፡ ሳራ፡ ምስሌሁ፡ ወናዩ፡ በራእይ፡ (ገድለ፡ አዳም፡, p. 149 line 8)

(7) Ge'ez የከት፡ ብእሲቱ፡ ሳራ፡ ምስሌሁ፡ ወናዩ፡ በራእይ፡ (ገድለ፡ አዳም፡, p. 83 line 11)

4 Conclusion

I have shone a spotlight on adjectives and roots/lexemes that take accusative complements (and prepositions), because this is the relationship that is alleged not to exist between them. One should, however, also remember that adjectives may take genitive complements (see also the next example).

11 According to Michael P. Streck and Nathan Wasserman, "Mankind’s Bitter Fate: The Wisdom Dialogue BM79111+", JCS 66 (2014) pp. 39–47.
12 According to Robert M. Whiting, "An Old Babylonian Incantation from Tell Asmar", ZA 75 (1985) pp. 179–187 (p. 181); can be found also in SEAL 5.1.1.2.
13 The similarity and parallelism between the collocations lakāda mād ‘he is abounding in running’ and rabbat bānim (rabbat bānim) cannot be missed; furthermore one cannot deny the predicative state of mād ‘he is abounding’, nor that lakāda ‘running’ is an accusative complement of mād ‘limitation of applicability’ (the “patently absurd”) (see also the next example).
14 According to J. Nougayrol, "Textes Religieux" (II), RA 66 (1972) pp. 141–145, (p. 142).
15 According to D.R. Gurney, Literary and Miscellaneous Texts in the Ashmolean Museum, 1989; also SEAL 5.1.6.13.
damqam īnim 'beautiful-faced/eyed'. The inner relationship between the components of the collocation does not change as a consequence; they do not cease to be in the relationship of root + complement, and they do not acquire a nexus relationship.