

PA4.1 – Nominal concord in Arabic

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I. The form-meaning mismatch

- Nominal concord is a **many-to-one** relation between form & meaning where multiple inflectional markers make a single meaning contribution. E.g. adjectives in Arabic duplicate all the inflectional markers on the noun.
- Puzzle 1:** in some contexts, the adjective doesn't agree in some features with the semantically modified noun.
- Adjectives that occur in between two nouns [N1-A-N2] are semantically modifying N2 but show **split concord**, agreeing with N1 in **definiteness & case** and with N2 in **number & gender**:

(1) al-makaan-ayni al-shadiid-at-a Haraar-at-u-huma
DEF-place.M-DU.ACC DEF-intense.SG-F-ACC heat.SG-F-NOM-pron
'The two places whose heat is intense'

- Puzzle 2:** the split can only target these feature combinations. No other combinations can be the target of feature-splits.

Theoretical questions

- Where does concord take place? Why can't concord track semantic modification?
- How are features dispersed in the nominal system?
- How does Agree operate?

Empirical questions

- How can adjectives occur in between N1 & N2?
- To what extent split concord is present on all adjectives?
- How can split concord be captured syntactically?

II. Methodology and hypotheses

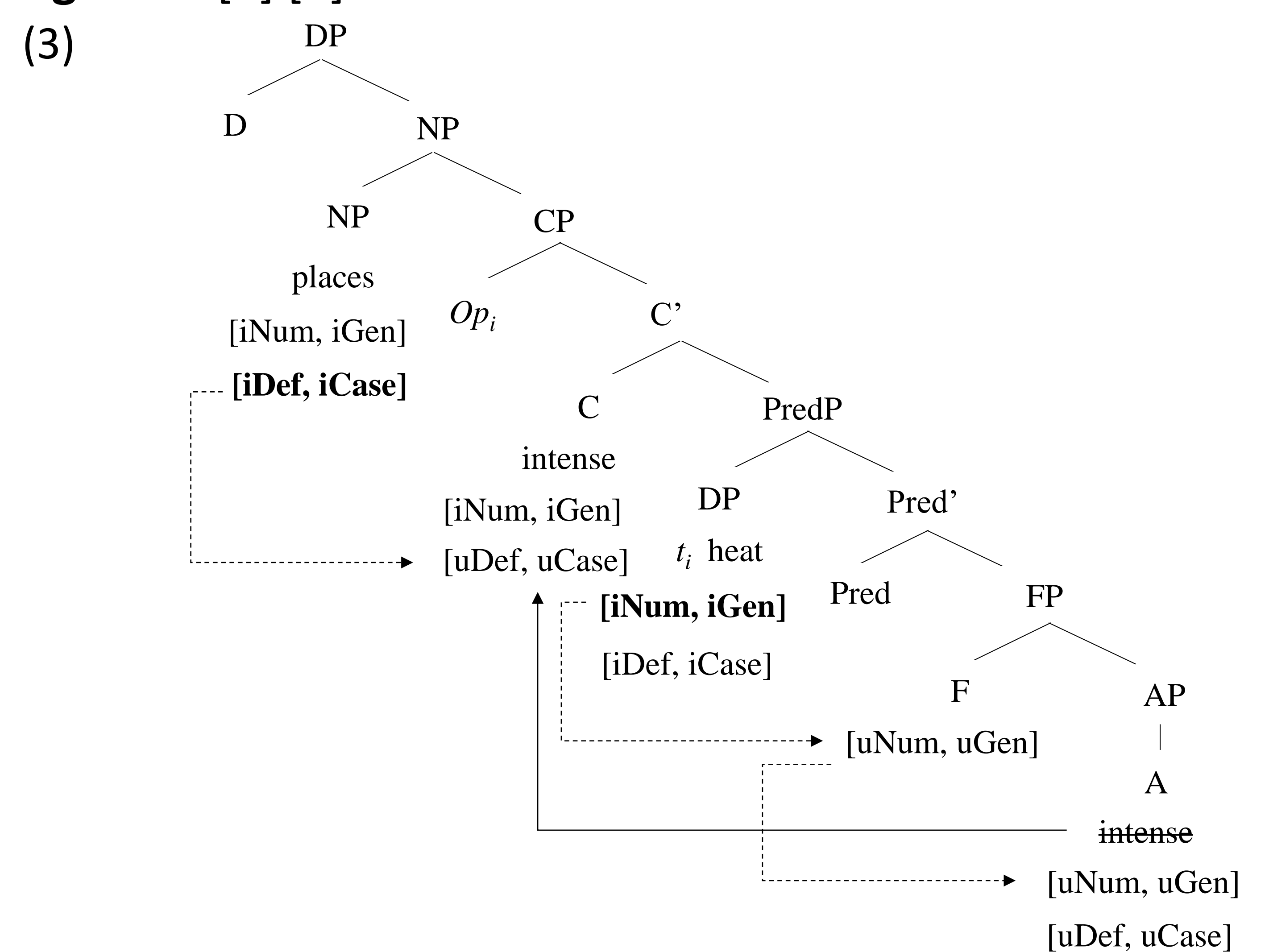
- Methods:**
 - Elicitation of linguistic data from native speakers (online).
 - Previous studies [1] [2].
- Hypotheses:**
 - Given that *predicate adjectives* in Arabic always show split agreement in **number & gender**, adjectives that occur in between N1 & N2 must have originated as *predicates*.
 - Hence, split concord in **definiteness & case** indicates that these predicates are in a *derived* position.

III. Results and discussion

- Observation:** only *intersective* adjectives are subject to split concord. Non-intersective adjectives are not.
- Proposal:** adjectives in between N1 & N2 originate as predicates in a reduced relative clause:

(2) al-makaan-ayni al-lathayni Haraar-at-u-huma
DEF-place.M-DU.ACC DEF-that heat.SG-F-NOM-pron
shadiid-at-u-n
intense.SG-F-NOM-INDF
'The two places whose heat is intense'

- In base-position, the adjective can only agree in **number & gender** [3] [4]:



- Observation:** when Comp is present (2), it shows concord in **definiteness**. When Comp is absent (1), the predicate shows concord in **definiteness (& case)**.
- Proposal:** the predicate raises to null C where it agrees with N1 in def/case. This is driven by a [uDef] feature on C.
- This predicts that split concord can only target **definiteness & case** which is borne out.

IV. Consequences and follow-up questions

- Nominal concord is not only semantically vacuous, but also does not track semantic modification.
- Follow-up: **does morphology on the noun always contribute to its meaning?** Madeline Ladore (cohort 2) addresses this question and investigates the distribution & meaning of number morphology on nouns in Kwa languages.