A Contrastive Study Of Attributive Adjectives In English And Arabic

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Abstract:
This study is an attempt to point out the similarities and differences of attributive adjective, the most common type of adjectives in English and Arabic.
Section one studies the attributive adjective in English; its position, form, semantic features and syntactic function.
Section two investigates the attributive adjective in Arabic; its position, form, and syntactic features.
Section three makes a comparison to show the similarities and differences of attributive adjectives in English Language and Arabic Language.

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Section one studies the attributive adjective in English; its position, form, semantic features and syntactic function.
Section two investigates the attributive adjective in Arabic; its position, form, and syntactic features.
Section three makes a comparison to show the similarities and differences of attributive adjectives in English Language and Arabic Language.
The term "attributive" is used in grammatical description in contrast with the predicative function of adjectives. Attributive adjective is one type of the general class of adjectives that constitutes the part of speech of both languages, English and Arabic. The word "attributive" may refer to position, (the position of the adjective), or to function, in this case the adjective attributes a quality to the head noun. This general idea is shared between the two languages; English and Arabic.

Section One
Attributive Adjectives In English

Chalker (1984:162) states that: "A traditional definition of an adjective is that it says what somebody or something is like."
This definition may be found in any traditional English grammar book, but Chalker has added that, modern grammar books prefer to define adjectives like other major word-class by "[a] position / function and [b] form / inflection." In other words, they have a sort of descriptive meaning.

On the other hand, Crystal (1985: 26 - 27), describes the term "attributive" as: "the term normally used to refer to the role of ADJECTIVES and NOUNS when they occur as MODIFIERS of the HEAD of noun PHRASE."

1.1 Position

Adjectives are usually called, according to their position, either attributive, predicative or post position.

Our concern, here in this paper, is attributive position, which is the most typical common position between a determiner and a noun. Thus adjectives in this position are called "attributive" because they attribute a quality or a characteristic to the noun.

(1.1) All those ----------- houses.

We can put in this position such adjectives as old, attractive, charming, distinguished, etc....

We have to note here that attributive only adjectives mean that the adjective precedes the noun, and however that does not mean
that this noun phrase can not be positioned predicatively in a sentence:
(1.2) What you say is utter non-sense. (Chalker, 1984: 162)
On the other hand, a great number of adjectives can not be
attributive adjectives and predicative adjectives at the same time as is
shown in the following examples:
(1.3) The man was awake / * The awake man
(1.4) * The failure seems utter / An utter failure
"Awake" can only be used as a predicative adjective not as
attributive adjective, while, "utter" can only be used attributively
and not predicatively. (Tallerman, 1998: 43)

Now, sometimes, a change in the position of the adjective
involves a change in meaning as is shown in the two examples below:
(1.5) involved style (complicated)
(1.6) people involved (taking part). (Aziz, 1989: 288)

1.2 Syntactic Function of Attributive Only Adjectives:
Generally speaking, adjectives that are restricted to attributive
position or occur predominately in attributive position do not
characterize the referent of the noun directly, for example:
(1.7) My old friend.
(1.8) My friend is old.

In example (1.7), the adjective "old" means that (one who has
been a friend for a long time), here the adjective does not necessarily
imply that my friend is old.
In this case, we can not relate example (1.7) to example (1.8).
Consequently (1.8) has a different meaning, because here "old"
refers to the person while in the
previous one, it refers to the relationship. The adjective "old" with
this meaning is positioned attributively. (Quirk, et al., 1973: 121)

We have to mention here an important note, that in English,
adjectives do not agree with the noun in number and gender as in
some languages:
(1.9) She is a clever girl – هي بنت ذكيه
He is a clever boy – هو ولد ذكي
They are clever boys and clever girls – هم أولاد ذكياء وبنات ذكيات

1.3 Meaning and Position
Adjectives, that normally occupy the attributive position, define a noun by permanent quality, so according to meaning they are called inherent adjectives:

(1.10) A kind person.

The attributive adjectives can be classified into classes according to meaning:

1. Relationships as in: former, latter, order, upper.
2. Intensifying as in: sole, chief, very.
3. Limiting as in: sole, many.
5. Miscellaneous as in: indoor, outside, up town.
6. Health adjectives, except (poorly), can appear attributively and predicatively, but in British English, when they are attributive, they do not refer to health as in; - A fine person, a better man.
7. Alternative past participle as in: - drunken, sunken.

It is interesting to note that verbs with two forms for the past participle which are regular and irregular, usually take the irregular form to make the attributive adjectives. (Chalker, 1984: 166-168), (see also Quirk, et al, 1985)

1.4 Semantic Features

Adjectives are an open class with numerous semantic features and sub-groups such as (color, terms of value, size, age, weight, etc...). They attribute qualities or properties, and below we are going to discuss the most two important qualities.

Stativity

Most adjectives except for a small part of them share with nouns the same quality of being stative according to meaning.

Stative adjectives mean that they describe permanent inherent qualities.
Stative meaning is a quality especially associated with attributive adjectives when they occur as part of a noun phrase, as in the example below:

(1.11) My old blue jacket.

Usually stative adjectives must come with stative verbs, as is shown below.
(1.12) My jacket is old.
(1.13) *My jacket is being old. (Chalker, 1984: 163)

These properties and qualities which are described as stative, are not subject to willful control as in the following example:
(1.14) This man is tall.
Either a person is tall or not, it is not possible to direct tall
(1.15) *She is being tall today.

Some other adjectives may be dynamic:
(1.16) We are being very careful
It is chiefly dynamic adjectives that can be made into adverbs by adding _ly_
(Gramely and Patzold, 1992 : 132)

Gradability
Another semantic feature of adjectives including attributive adjectives, is gradability. This means that most adjectives can be put on a scale of intensity:
(1.17) old—older—oldest,
or they attribute qualities or properties which are gradable in terms of less or more as in:
(1.18) more intelligent, less intelligent, (Chalker, 1984: 163)

Adjectives that are not inflected can not be gradable, thus we call such adjectives; ungradable adjectives.
Ungradable adjectives include such adjectives as:
1. Attributive only adjectives: former, outright, chemical, etc.-------
2. Nationality adjectives: English, French, etc.-------
3. Adjectives with absolute meaning: alternative, overage, equal, extra, etc....
(ibid)

1.5 Form

According to form, many adjectives have no characteristic form but some adjectives end in typical suffixes, such as: _able, ible, ish, full, less, or ous, which appear in words like desirable, contemptible, childish, helpful, helpless and dangerous respectively.

Adjectives including attributive adjectives, could be attached to two inflectional morphemes – {er}, for comparative degree, and
Section Two
Adjectives In Arabic

In Arabic, the class of adjectives has always been considered as a subclass of noun. Grammarians usually distinguish between the two by calling the noun, (a noun which is not an adjective), and the adjective, (a noun which is adjective).

There are four distinctions, we can recognize between the two classes in Arabic, but yet the similarities between the adjectives and nouns are greater than the differences. (Aziz, 1985: 159)

If we take for an example the noun (Adil-عادل), it may be a proper noun (Adil) or it may be an adjective (fair). This simple example shows the big similarity that exists between the two classes.

2.1 Similarities between the Adjective and Noun:

1. Both adjectives and nouns take the definite article:
   Man – the man, Adil – the fair

2. Both show gender:
   مدرس ذكى – مدرس ذكية
   An intelligent teacher (female)–an intelligent teacher (masculine)

3. Both show number:
   رجل ذكى – رجلان ذكيان
   Two intelligent men – an intelligent man

4. Both show case contrast:
   رجل / رجال – ذكى / ذكياء
   Man/men–intelligent(singular)/intelligent(plural)

2.2 Differences between the Adjective and the Noun

Now the main difference between these two classes, is that those categories, mentioned previously: definiteness, number, gender and case are either selective, (definiteness and case). Or inherent in nouns, (number and gender).

In adjectives they are part of what is known as agreement or concord, this means, that they are subordinate to the nouns they modify and have to agree with them in number, gender, case, and
definiteness, or we can call them dependent adjectives, here the word "dependent" means that the adjective agrees with the properties of the head noun such as those mentioned before.
(Tallerman, 1998: 108)

2.3 Position
Adjectives in Arabic are positioned either attributively or predicatively. Attributive adjectives normally in Arabic post modify the noun head:
(2.19) الولد الذكي – The intelligent boy
Attributive adjectives agree with nouns in definiteness, number, gender and case. (Aziz, 1985: 165)

2.4 Syntactic Function
There are two basic functions which adjectives fulfill, known as the attributive and predicative functions.
Yazigi, (1985: 95), says that attributive adjective is a description for a noun and is supposed to specify some of the noun qualities. We can distinguish two types of the adjective, real and reasonal attributive adjectives.

Real Attributive Adjectives
Real adjectives follow the noun it modifies directly, and it has some conditions that control its uses, and those conditions are:
1. The real adjective must agree with its noun in number, gender, definiteness, or indefiniteness, and also parsed by the same way as its noun:
(2.20) الرجل العاقل ممدوح – The wise man is praiseworthy.
(2.21) الأبناء البررة يكرمون الوالدين العطوفين – The devoted sons honor the compassionate parents.
The real adjective may be one word, sentence or, quasi-sentence. (ibid)

Reasonal Attributive Adjectives
They agree with the preceding noun in parsing, definiteness, indefiniteness, and qualify what follows and agree in gender with the preceding noun and sometimes agree in number.
(2.22) هذا رجل كريم أبوه وفاضله أمه وحق أباه – This is a man whose father is generous, his mother is virtuous and his parents are alive.
I do not accompany a man whose manner is dispraised.

We have to note here that in reasonable adjectives, what follows the adjective is parsed differently. So, (أبواه) in example (2.22), is the subject of the adjective (حلي) and (خلقه) in example (2.23), is an acting subject for the adjective (مذموم). (ibid, 96)

2.5 Reference of the Attributive Adjective

Wright (1974, 283: 2), has explained that any adjective with a vocative form expressed by the nominative, may likewise be put in the nominative or the accusative as in:

العقلاء زيد (2.24) The intelligent Zeid

زيد العاقل (2.25) Zeid the intelligent

The adjective (النعت او الصفه), may refer to the head noun (المتلوع), either directly, in which case, it is a simple adjective as in the example below

(2.26) There came to me a handsome man. جاءنى رجل حسن

or indirectly in virtue of a following word which is connected with it as in:

(2.27) There came to me a man whose brother is handsome. جاءنى رجل حسن أخوه

In the latter case, the adjective called (المسبب -- the connected), belong as a prefixed predicative to the following noun called (the connecting السبب), which is its subject and the two together form a (صفة) or qualifying clause of the preceding substantive, with which the adjective agrees in case only by attraction

رآيت رجلا حسنا أخوه (2.28)

In the following examples we can see, if the noun is in the dual or plural, the adjective is left in the singular as in

مررت بأمرأتين حسن أبواهما (2.29)

I passed by two women whose parents are handsome.

مررت برجال حسنة وجههم (2.30)

I passed by some men whose faces are handsome.

On the other hand, the Arab grammarians acknowledge three classes of what they call (الصفة): the description or descriptive Word, qualifying adjective, (البدل) the substitution, or descriptive word. (ibid)
Sometimes, adjectives just as participles, might take after them a restrictive or limitative genitive as in:

(2.1) Handsome of face. حسن الوجه
(2.32) Pure of heart. طاهر القلب

2.6 Form

As mentioned before, Arabic adjectives are similar to nouns in almost every aspect. Arabic adjectives are mainly derived from verbs.

According to Aziz (1985: 165 – 166), the most common adjectives that are derived from verbs are:

- **مفعول**:
  - عائلاً وفائقًا
  - حاضراً وعاجزاً
  - سلماً وشمالاً

- **فعلين**:
  - نافلاً ولفازاً
  - سلماً وشمالاً

Adjectives that are derived from nouns are formed by adding the suffix (ي) to the noun, as in the following examples

(2.33)

- **رمزي – رمزي**
- **عقل – عقلي**
- **نفس – نفسي**

Section Three

A Comparison of Attributive Adjectives in English and Arabic

3.1 Similarities

1. Attributive adjectives in English and Arabic are considered to be subordinate to the head noun.

   In Arabic this subordination is clear in that the adjective must agree with the noun head in number, gender, and definiteness.
   
   In English this subordination is implicit and not explicit.

2. Both in Arabic and English, attributive adjectives modify the noun.

3. Semantically speaking, both in English and Arabic attributive adjectives can be inherent, so they relate to the head directly as in
3.2 Differences.

1. In English, they pre modify the noun as in
   (3.35) a clever boy  
   In Arabic, attributive adjectives post modify the noun as in
   (3.36) ولد ذكى  
   or, they pre modify what follows and agree only in gender and sometimes with number with the preceding noun, as in
   (3.37) لا أصادق رجلا مذموما خلقه  
   I do not accompany a man whose manner is dispraised.

2. In English, attributive adjectives are related directly to the head noun
   (3.38) a tall man  
   while in Arabic, the attributive adjectives are related to the head in two ways: either directly as in
   (3.39) رجل طويل  
   Or indirectly as in:
   (3.40) رجل طويل القامة  

3. In English, Adjectives are a separate class of parts of speech; while in Arabic adjectives are usually considered to be only as a sub-class, because they are only a part of the class of nouns.

Conclusion

The present study reaches to the conclusion that attributive adjectives are more complicated in Arabic than in English, because in Arabic, they traditionally belong to the class of nouns and they are of different types. From a syntactic point of view, both in English
and Arabic they function as modifiers of the head noun either directly or indirectly.

According to position, in English, they are positioned before the noun, while in Arabic, they are positioned after the head noun. Also, we have studied form, and we can conclude, that in English, adjectives have no special form, but some adjectives are characterized by certain suffixes, and some of them are considered to be irregular past participle forms of verbs. On the other hand, in Arabic, they are derived from certain verbs and nouns.

The study concludes that attributive adjectives in English and Arabic share more similarities than differences.

References