

النعت

The نَعْت, also known as صِفَة, is one of the most common yet important grammatical roles in the Arabic language. Whether one reads vocalized or unvocalized Arabic text, one must be able to distinguish between a نعت and other grammatical roles, such as الخَبَر or الحَال, to understand the precise meaning of a word or sentence.

The نعت is one of the followers (التَّوَابِع), nouns which copy the state of preceding nouns. It is often translated in English as *adjective* and it describes a preceding noun, the مَنعُوت. The نعت must copy the منعوت in four things: 1) grammatical state, 2) definiteness, 3) gender, and 4) number. If the مَنعُوت is مرفوع, the نعت must be مرفوع. If the منعوت is منصوب, the نعت is منصوب. If the منعوت is مجرور then the نعت is مجرور.

Let's look at some examples of the نعت. The نعت in each of these sentences is the last word:

جَاءَ الرَّجُلُ الْعَادِلُ The just man came.

رَأَيْتُ الرَّجُلَ الْعَادِلَ I saw the just man.

مَرَرْتُ بِالرَّجُلِ الْعَادِلِ I passed by the just man.

The نعت must match the منعوت in case but not necessarily in sign (علامة). This is because some nouns have secondary signs of inflection (إعراب), such as sound masculine plurals (المدرسون) which take a واو instead of a ضمة in رفع, or اسم غير المنصرف which take a فتحة in جر instead of a كسرة. Look at the following examples:

خَرَجَ الْمُدْرِسُونَ الْجُدُدُ The new teachers went out.

Both of these nouns are مرفوع. The sign of رفع for the نعت is ضمة and the sign of رفع for the word it describes (منعوت) is واو.

مَرَرْتُ بِفَاطِمَةَ الصَّغِيرَةِ I passed by the young Fatima
A female name takes a فتحة in جرّ because it is غير مُنصَرِف. Both nouns here are مجرور. Here, the sign of جرّ for the نعت is كسرة and the sign of جرّ for the منعوت is فتحة.

رَأَيْتُ أَبَا زَيْدِ الْحَارِسِ I saw Abu Zaid the guard.
Both of أَبَا and الحارس are منصوب with أَبَا taking ألف as a sign of نصب.

Sub-topics

There are three separate topics that are relevant to the نعت. These are 1) definiteness, 2) the relative pronoun, and 3) the derived noun.

1) Definite Nouns المعارف

The نعت must match the منعوت in definiteness or indefiniteness. To understand this we must understand which nouns are definite in Arabic.

Here is a list:

1. Personal Pronouns (هُوَ/كَ/تُ) الضمير
2. Proper names (زيد/مكة) العلم
3. Relative pronouns (الذي/التي) اسم الموصول
4. Demonstrative pronouns (هذا/هذه) اسم الإشارة
5. Nouns connected to ال (المدينة, الولد)
6. Anything that is مضاف to the above five categories (ولده, ولد المدرس)

The نعت must also match what it is describing in gender (masculine or feminine) and number (singular, dual, or plural).

جاءَ الرَّجُلُ الكَرِيمُ The noble man came.

رَأَيْتُ بَنَاتَيْنِ صَغِيرَتَيْنِ I saw two small girls.

مَرَرْتُ بِالطُّلَابِ الجُدِّدِ I passed by the new students.

A general rule in Arabic is that when we are referring to a non-human plural, it is often referred to as singular feminine, such as:

هَذِهِ كُتُبٌ قَدِيمَةٌ These are old books.

اِشْتَرَيْتُ أَقْلَامًا جَدِيدَةً I bought new pens.

مَرَرْتُ بِالْمَسَاجِدِ الجَمِيلَةِ I passed by the beautiful mosques.

2) Relative Pronouns

A relative pronoun in Arabic is called اسم الموصول. Examples are الذي التي الذين. When any of these follow a definite noun, the اسم الموصول is a نعت for that definite noun.

For example,

ذَهَبَ الرَّجُلُ الَّذِي زَارَنَا أَمْسَ The man who visited us left yesterday.

سَأَلْتُ المُدْرِسَةَ الَّتِي وَصَلَتْ اليَوْمَ I asked the teacher who arrived today.

Both الذي and التي are نعت for the word that precedes them.

3) المشتقات - The Derived Nouns (A sarf topic)

The last thing one should know about the نعت is that it is مُشْتَقٌّ, a derived noun that is descriptive. This is discussed in a separate article but we can say the الْمُشْتَقَّاتُ are descriptive nouns such as اسم الفاعل and اسم المفعول, among others patterns you will learn later (اسم التفضيل, صفة مُشَبَّهَةٌ, صيغة). (المبالغة).

Examples:

دَخَلَ الْحَاكِمُ الْعَادِلُ الْمَدِينَةَ The just ruler entered the city.

رَأَيْتُ الرَّجُلَ الْمَسْرُورَ I saw the happy man.

مَرَرْتُ بِالْكَلْبِ الْعَطْشَانِ I passed by the thirsty dog.

A اسم مُشْتَقٌّ is a descriptive noun that indicates an action and a person, unlike مصدر which only indicates the action.