

The Idafa Construction - الإضافة

Part 1 - What is an idafa construction?

A common construction in Arabic is the إضافة. It is made up of two nouns next to each other. The first is called مضاف and can be any grammatical role (e.g. فاعل, مفعول به, etc.). The second of these nouns is called مضاف إليه and is always مجرور, which usually means it ends with a كسرة. Examples of and idafa constructions:

كِتَابُ الطَّالِبِ	The book of the student, or the student's book
رَبُّ النَّاسِ	The Lord of men
أَبُو الْقَاسِمِ	Father of Qasim, or Qasim's father

The مضاف إليه, the second part of the إضافة, is usually a definite noun (see the article on what makes nouns definite). The relationship between the two nouns is often translated as “x of y”, a construction indicating possession, the مضاف being the possessed and the مضاف إليه being the possessor. The إضافة construction by itself is not a full sentence but rather part of a جملة فعلية or جملة اسمية.

Other examples:

رِجَالُ الْمَدِينَةِ	The men of the city
رُسُلُ اللَّهِ	Messengers of Allah
سِيْرَةُ الرَّسُولِ	The biography of the Messenger, peace be upon him
بَيْتِي	My house

Note: The مضاف does not take a ال or تنوين. The مضاف إليه can take either of these.

Part 2 - Details

1) When the مضاف is a sound masculine plural or dual noun you must omit the نون. For example:

مُسْلِمُو الْمَدِينَةِ	The Muslims (masc. pl.) of the city
مُسْلِمَا الْمَدِينَةِ	The two Muslims (masc.) of the city
مُسْلِمَتَا الْمَدِينَةِ	The two Muslims (fem.) of the city

2) The إضافة can be indefinite:

سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ	seven heavens
كِتَابُ طَالِبٍ	a book of a student or a student's book

3) A common mistake by students is calling the noun after a demonstrative pronoun (اسم الإشارة) مضاف إليه, which it is not as it is البدل, a topic which is discussed in the “Foundations of Grammar” course.

For example,

جَاءَ هَذَا الرَّجُلُ
رَأَيْتُ هَذَا الرَّجُلَ
مَرَرْتُ بِهَذَا الرَّجُلِ

In all three cases above the noun الرجل which follows the demonstrative pronoun is changing cases and not always مجرور as a مضاف إليه should be.