12.6 Syntax of the construct chain/bound phrase

1. Fixed/invariant order of nouns (cst followed by abs). Forms a bound unit (hence the term bound phrase) where almost never does anything come between the cst noun and the abs noun; the construct chain functions as a single constituent in its clause.

So Prepositions must attach to the cst noun (Thing 1), not to the abs (Thing 2):

בֵּית הַמֶּ֫לֶךְ the house of the king

בְּבֵית הַמֶּ֫לֶךְ in [the house of the king] (the whole cst chain = obj. of the prep. ב)

Also, attributive adjectives must follow the last noun of the cst chain:

בֵּית הַמֶּ֫לֶךְ הַטּוֹב the good house of the king

2. Definiteness: The cst noun never, never, ever has the article attached! Even if the cst noun is definite, it cannot be articular. So how do you know whether to translate Thing 1 as “the ____ of …” instead of “a ____ of …”? Answer: Look at Thing 2 (the abs noun): its definiteness determines whether Thing 1 (cst) is definite.

בֵּית מֶ֫לֶךְ a house of a king

בֵּית הַמֶּ֫לֶךְ the house of the king (the abs is def. due to article)

הַיְהֹוָה the house of YHWH (the abs is def. due to being proper noun)

Definiteness in cst chains is a “package deal.” Either both are indefinite, or both are definite. But never do you have a real cst chain with one member definite and the
other indefinite. So how do you say something like “a horse of the man”? Hebrew uses a circumlocution with the prep ל and the nouns are in the absolutes state:

סוס לָאִישׁ a horse of the man (lit., ‘a horse belonging to the man’)

הַסּוּס לְאִישׁ the horse of a man (lit., ‘the horse belonging to a man’)

3. Attributive adjectives modifying a noun in the cst chain must go after the nouns of the cst chain and (as you’d expect!) must agree with the noun in Gender, Number, and Definiteness. Remember: the cst noun might be definite, even if it’s anarthrous (no article); look at the abs noun to see!

סוס המלכה השובת

סוסות המלכה השوبرות

צובר המלך השוטב

אֵ֫שֶׁת הַמֶּ֫לֶךְ הָֽרָעִים

אֵ֫שֶׁת הַמֶּ֫לֶךְ הָֽחָכָם

דִּבְרֵי הַשֹּׁפֵט הָֽרָעִים

דִּבְרֵי הַשֹּׁפֵט הָֽחָכָם

דִּבְרֵי הַשֹּׁפֵט הָֽרָעִים

דִּבְרֵי הַשֹּׁפֵט הָֽחָכָם
4. Construct chains can have more than two members. You can conceivably include an infinite number of members (like anyone has time for that!)—but keep in mind, that every member of a cst chain is in the cst state except the last one, which is in the absolute. Therefore, only the last member can have the article!

12.7 Translating the construct chain/bound phrase:

General strategy/formula: “(the) _____ of (the) ______”

Note: Just as in English there are a variety of ways that the second noun semantically relates to the first noun so also with Hebrew. For ex.,

- the horse of the king = the king’s horse (the king is the possessor, so possessive semantics)
- a rod of iron = a rod made of iron (iron is the material of the rod, not the possessor)

Ross provides 6 main semantic categories for the semantics of how Thing 2 (the abs noun, the genitive noun, or the free form) relates to Thing 1 (the cst noun, the head noun, or the bound form). Note: since thing two is sometimes described as the “genitive noun,” these categories of meaning (or semantic classifications) are often referred to as kinds of genitives.

1. Genitive of possession: The genitive noun (Thing 2) is the possessor of Thing 1.

2. Genitive of source/authorship: The genitive noun (Thing 2) is the source/author of Thing 1. Note: Thing 1 must be some kind of a noun denoting communication.

Let’s take #s 3-4 together:
3. **Subjective genitive:** The genitive noun (Thing 2) is the conceptual *Subject* of the verbal idea that Thing 1 represents.

4. **Objective genitive:** The genitive noun (Thing 2) is the conceptual *Object* of the verbal idea that Thing 1 represents.

Note: in these two categories, Thing 1 must be a noun that has an inherently verbal notion, so that Thing 2 can be related to it as the Subject or the Object of that verbal idea.

5. **Attributive genitive** (or Genitive of attribute): The genitive noun (Thing 2) is a descriptive attribute of Thing 1. Note, this is like a noun plus attributive adj, but here we have two nouns side-by-side, not a noun plus adjective.

   - יְשׁוּעַת יְהוָה
   - יְשׁוּעַת אָדָם
   - תָאַרְ יִי
   - תבַּיא (ambiguous)

6. **Genitive of material:** The genitive noun (Thing 2) constitutes the *matter/material* out of which Thing 1 is made.

   - קֶדֶ צֶ֫ ינֵ זְ אָמֹ (the mountain of holiness =)
   - קָדֶ צֶ֫ ינֵ זְ אָמֹ (scales of justness =)

   - דֶ קֹ֫הַ  רהַ (a throne of gold)
   - לזֵ רְ בַּ טבֶשֵׁ֫ (a rod of iron)