

Number System in Arabic and English: A Comparative Analysis

Mohamed .A¹, S. A. Shanavas²

¹Associate Professor (Retired), E.M.E.A College, Kondotty

²Associate Professor, Dept. of Linguistics, University of Kerala

Unlike English and many other languages, Arabic has three numbers: singular, dual and plural. Dual are morphologically marked in Arabic whereas in English the number two plus plural is used to mark the dual. For example two cities, two buildings etc are used while in Arabic 'madiinataani' 'binaa'aani' are used instead of 'ithnataa- mudn-in or ithnataabniyat-in'. In respect of number, Sanskrit is similar to Arabic.

1. Dual Formation in Arabic

In order to form dual in Arabic, a dual suffix is added to a singular stem e.g. مدينة+ان=مدینتان 'madiinat +-aani = 'madiinat-aani'. (two cities). The suffix -aani or ayni depending on case will be used to form dual. If the noun is in nominative case, -aani is used. If it is in accusative or genitive case -ayni is used to mark the dual number. WaSalasafiinaani واصل سفیران two ambassadors arrived. baynasafiirayni سفیرین between two ambassadors. Zaruusafiirayni زاروا سفیرین they visited two ambassadors. The word 'safiiraani' in the first example is the subject of the verb waSala and is in nominative case. But in the second example the word 'safiirayni' is the second term of an annexation structure and in genitive case. The same word in the third example is in accusative case as it is the object of the verb 'zaaruu'. The rule is applicable only if the letters in the base word are regular (sound). e.g. rajlun رجل 'man' rajulaani رجلان 'two men', or defective (منقوصة) with 'ya' ending preceded by kasra e.g. al-qaaDii القاضي judge +aani قاضیان 'qaaDyaani' two judges.

If the base word is defective (مقصورة) with the ending of alif preceded by fatHa, there are two types of duals: in one of which the alif is to be changed into 'ya' ی. It occurs in three cases: one where the alif occurs after three letters as in حلی 'Hublaa' pregnant the dual of which is حلیان 'Hublayaani' two pregnant women. In the second case the alif which occurs as the third letter is a substitute of 'ya' ی as in فتی 'fataa' young man, the alif is to be changed into ی in the dual form e.g. دخل معه السن فتیان 'daxalama ahu -I ssijnafatayaani' 'two young men entered the jail with him'. The third case is that where alif is not a substitute of 'ya' ی but is used for prolongation as in متى 'Mataa' which is used as a proper noun. Its dual form is متیان 'matayaani'. The second type is that where 'alif' is to be changed into 'waa' و which occurs in two cases: the asif is a substitute of 'wa' as in 'aSa' stick whose origin is عصو and its dual is عصوان 'aSawaani' two sticks or the alif is not the substitute of 'waa' and is not used for prolongation e.g. لداي Ladaaif it is used as a proper noun لداوان Ladawaani. Nouns ending with the feminine marker ة take a 'waa' و before the suffix. e.g. حربان chameleon. The

final ی deleted in some nouns will be restored before the suffix ان 'aani'. The dropped و in the five nouns (أخو، حمو، فو،) (أبو) is restored before adding ان 'aani'. e.g. أبوان father. أخ : أبوان e.g. أخوان brother. If the feminine marker ة is added to a singular noun, it will be changed into regular ت e.g. قطة : قطة. 't' marbuuTa is turned into the regular ت.

2. Plural Formation In Arabic

There are two types of plurals in Arabic: the regular and irregular. The regular type is known as جمع سالم jam 'saalim where a suffix ة 'uuna is added to the singular form if the noun is in nominative case. If it is in accusative or genitive case the suffix ین is added to the stem. E.g. مسلمون/مسلمين /muslim-un : muslimuuna / muslimiina / Mualims.

• In order to mark the sound feminine plural أنت is added to the singular form e.g. مسلمات/ muslimaat/ Muslim women. The irregular plural which is known as جمع التذكير (the broken plural) are very many in Arabic. They are known as broken plural because unlike sound plural, the structure of the singular form is not preserved in the plural either by adding something as in صنوان /صنوا: Sinw-un : Sinwan-un / one of twin brothers or subtracting as in تخم: تخم: tuxmat: tuxam 'indigestion' or changing the singular as in أسد: أسد: 'usd 'lion' or by changing the form coupled with addition as inرجل: رجال: rijaal: 'man' or changing is coupled with subtraction as رسول: رسل: rasuul: rusul messenger. (ibnu-Hishaam,264). The most common broken plural patterns are listed here under triptote and diptote categories.

- 1) أفعل /af'ul/ This pattern is used as a plural for fa'l as a noun having the sound 'ayn' irrespective of its 'laam' being sound or defective by ی 'ya' or و e.g. كلب 'kalb' dog, jarw' jarw' cub, ظبي 'Daby' deer. The plural form of 'yun' أعين 'eyes' is irregular. This is the pattern for a feminine noun having four original letters, the third of which is maddah as in ذراع 'Diraa', 'uqaab' forearm, eagle.
- 2) أفعال /af'aal/ This pattern is for trilateral noun to which أفعل cannot be the plural form as its is defective ثوب : اثواب e.g. ثوب
- 3) أفعلة /af'ila/ It is the plural of a masculine quadrilateral noun whose third letter is maddah e.g. اطعمة : أرغفة رغيف food loaf of bread
- 4) ففلة /fi'la/ It is the plural form of 'fatan' فتية فتية
- 5) ففلة /fu'ala/ It is the regular plural form for the adjective of human beings on the pattern فاعل whose 'laam' is defective as in رام: غزاة، رام: غزاة، رام: غزاة

3. Plural Formation of Nouns in English

(1) Most nouns in English form plurals by taking –s or –es.

A book some books

A house a few houses

(2) A noun ending in –y and preceded by a consonant makes the plural with –ies.

A cry cries of helpless people

A city some cities of attraction.

(3) There are some irregular forms of plural.

Woman women

Child children

Tooth teeth

Leaf leaves

Fungus fungi

(4) Same form for both singular and plural.

Sheep sheep

Fish fish

Species species

(5) Some nouns have plural forms but they take singular verbs.

News this is a concocted news

Mathematics Mathematics is an interesting subject.

Billiards billiards is a popular game.

(6) Some nouns in English have plural forms and they take plural verbs. Trousers, jeans and glasses (spectacles) are such words. The rules of pluralisation of English nouns can be summarized as follows:

[Affixation(adding –s/-es/-ies)/internal changes /zero morpheme]

4. Comparison and Contrast

Affixation for plural formation is found both in Arabic and English e.g. طالب/ طالبين , طالب/ طالبين/ Taalib: Taalibuuna , Taalibiina / student: students.

Internal changes as in tooth and teeth are also found in both e.g. كرام/ كرام : kariim : kiraam/ gentle.

Zero morpheme as sheep : sheep is found only in English not in Arabic. There are only two numbers in English: singular and plural. For dual two plus plural form (e.g. two tribes) is used in English. But in Arabic there are three numbers: singular, dual and plural. In Arabic affixation differs in accordance with difference in cases e.g. for nominative case ‘uana’ is added to the singular whereas in accusative/ genitive case ‘ iian’ is added. In English there is no case difference.

References

[1] Al –Ansari,IbnHisham. *AuDaHulMasaalikilaa`Alfiyaibn Maalik* ,Dar al Talaa`i` ,2004,Cairo.

[2] Ryding, Karin. C. *A Reference Grammar of Modern Standard Arabic*,Cambridge University Press,2005.

[3] Wright,W. *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*,Librairie Du Liban,1974,Beirut.

[4] Alish,Mahdi.*Using Arabic A Guide to Contemporary Usage*,Cambridge University Press,2005.