Number System in Arabic and English: A Comparative Analysis

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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 ‘madinataani’ ‘binna aani’ are used instead of ‘ithnataa- mudn-in or ithnataaabniyatin’. 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 noun, e.g. مَدِينَةٌ-أَنْ-مِديِنَاتِي madinat + aani = ‘madinat-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 –aani is used to mark the dual number. واَسَالُ السَّفِينَانِ WaSalasafinaani arrived ‘two ambassadors’. If the noun is regular then the dropped alif is to be changed into –ya. The dropped alif is also to be changed into –ya in the cases: one where the alif occurs after three letters as in rajulaani ‘two pregnant women’. In the second case the alif which occurs in noun is in nominative case, -aani is used. If it is in accusative or genitive case, –aani is used to mark the dual number. The dropped alif is to be changed into –ya. The dropped alif is also to be changed into –ya in the cases: one where the alif occurs after three letters. Zaaaruusafiirayni ‘two ambassadors’.

2. Plural Formation In Arabic

There are two types of plurals in Arabic: the regular and irregular. Regular type is formed by adding مَدِينَاتِي madinat to the singular noun. If the singular noun is in nominative case, it will be changed into regular dual, e.g. مَدِينَاتِي madinat or مَدِينَاتِي لَا مَدِينَاتِي madinat or madinat aani. The dropped alif is to be changed into –ya. The dropped alif is also to be changed into –ya in the cases: one where the alif occurs after three letters. مَدِينَاتِي madinat or madinat aani.

If the base word is defective whose origin is sound form, the dropped alif is to be changed into –ya. The dropped alif is also to be changed into –ya in the cases: one where the alif occurs after three letters. مَدِينَاتِي madinat or madinat aani. The dropped alif is to be changed into –ya. The dropped alif is also to be changed into –ya in the cases: one where the alif occurs after three letters. مَدِينَاتِي madinat or madinat aani.

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If the base word is defective whose origin is broken plural form, the dropped alif is to be changed into –ya. The dropped alif is also to be changed into –ya in the cases: one where the alif occurs after three letters. مَدِينَاتِي madinat or madinat aani. The dropped alif is to be changed into –ya. The dropped alif is also to be changed into –ya in the cases: one where the alif occurs after three letters. مَدِينَاتِي madinat or madinat aani.

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6) /faʿa laa/ It is used as plural of an adjective of human being whose ‘laam’ is sound as in /faʿ laa/ as noun as in /jauhar/: jawaahir / gem.

7) /faʿa laa/ It is used as plural for an adjective used as passive participle in the pattern ‘faʿ il’ as in /jarhi/: jarh/majmua.

8) /faʿa laa/ It is used as plural form of ‘fuʿ l’ pattern as in /Quraṭaṭaṭaṭ/ Dir. درجة: درجة: درجة: درجة: درجة: درجة: درجة. /faʿ il/ as noun as in /jaaz/ : ja’az/ gift

9) /fuʿ al/ Used as a plural form for a singular adjective on the pattern ‘faʿ il’ or ‘faʿ laa’ as in / raʾs/ : rashaʿi.

10) /fuʿ il/ It is used as plural form for an adjective on the pattern /rash/ /shaʿr/ /ashaʿar/ /as in /wax/ : waxaa/ /a lady who menstruates.

11) /fuʿ il/ Used as plural for three singular forms (nouns/adj) /kiʿb/ : kaib/ /kuʿb/ /kuʿba/ /as in /laam/ : laa/ /e.g/ /jalal/ /jimal/ /jaal/ /mataa/ /mataa/ /as in /sm/ /sme/ /taaj/ /taa/ /ja/ /a/ /j/ /jaki/ /ar/ /kariim/ /noble/ /e.g/ /shariif/ : shiraaf/honorable.

12) /foʿ al/ It is general in four forms: One is /foʿ il/ e.g. /naam/ : naam /tak/ /mara/ /maraa/ /as in /laam/ : laa/ /e.g/ /tash/ /thar/ /a/ /faʿlaa/ /as an adjective and its feminine gender /fuʿ ala/ /fuʿ il/ /e.g/ /as in /laam/ : laa/ /e.g/ /as in /sm/ /sme/ /taaj/ /taa/ /ja/ /a/ /j/ /jaki/ /ar/ /kariim/ /noble/ /e.g/ /shariif/ : shiraaf/honorable.

13) /foʿ il/ It is general in four: /foʿ al/ /as in in /laam/ : laa/ /e.g/ /as in /sm/ /sme/ /taaj/ /taa/ /ja/ /a/ /j/ /jaki/ /ar/ /kariim/ /noble/ /e.g/ /shariif/ : shiraaf/honorable.

14) /fuʿ il/ plural in this pattern is used in a noun on the pattern /fuʿ il/ /as in /laam/ : laa/ /e.g/ /as in /sm/ /sme/ /taaj/ /taa/ /ja/ /a/ /j/ /jaki/ /ar/ /kariim/ /noble/ /e.g/ /shariif/ : shiraaf/honorable.

15) /fuʿ aal/ It is regular in /fuʿ al/ /as in /laam/ : laa/ /e.g/ /as in /sm/ /sme/ /taaj/ /taa/ /ja/ /a/ /j/ /jaki/ /ar/ /kariim/ /noble/ /e.g/ /shariif/ : shiraaf/honorable.

16) /af ila/ It is used instead of ‘fuʿ laa’ in /fuʿ laa/ /as in /laam/ : laa/ /e.g/ /as in /sm/ /sme/ /taaj/ /taa/ /ja/ /a/ /j/ /jaki/ /ar/ /kariim/ /noble/ /e.g/ /shariif/ : shiraaf/honorable.

17) /faʿ laa/ /as in /laam/ : laa/ /e.g/ /as in /sm/ /sme/ /taaj/ /taa/ /ja/ /a/ /j/ /jaki/ /ar/ /kariim/ /noble/ /e.g/ /shariif/ : shiraaf/honorable.
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 طالبيون / طالبان/ Taalib: Taalibuuna ,
Taalibiina / student: students.

Internal changes as in tooth and teeth are also found in both
e.g. الكريم كريم / kariim: 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 ‘uuana’ is added to the singular whereas in
accusative/ genitive case ‘ iiin’ is added. In English there is
no case difference.

References

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