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On the Specifics of the Plural Forms in Arabic

Preface. Observation of Arabic language data confirms, that the following morhps act as plural markers (more than one): suffix long vowel, *mīm, nūn*, or markers consisting of more than one component named above. In more details:

D u a l markers

a) in nouns are suffixes -*āni,* -*ayni.*

But, can we assume, that the above thesis is fair for these affixes, if in the first of them we have an additional final short vowel -*i,* and in the other, besides, the diphthong -*ay* appears instead of a long vowel?

Yes, we can, due to the following reasons: the final short -*i* does not represent a plural marker, it does not have the function of indication on any grammatical category proper. It is failed in all forms of speaking language in the diglossive vertical, it is failed even at orthoepyc representation of the Koran. As regards the diphthong *ay*, the descending diphthong in Arabic can practically be regarded a long vowel, since it undergoes monophthongization (even in the literary language it tends to monophthongization). So, with a small degree of conventionality, it can be regarded that *ay = ē*. As a result, the thesis presented above can be considered valid for noun duals.

b) In verbs dual is presented by signs: -*ā,* -*āni.* Here too, the final -*i* is the same vowel, as in nouns.

P l u r a l markers

a) in nouns three varieties of plural are possible: flexional (broken) plural, suffix (regular) plural of feminine and suffix (regular) plural of masculine.

The flexional plural is presented by numerous models, for part of which the sign of the number proper 'practically' coincides with the dual marker: *qird-ān-u* ("monkeys"), *jurḏ-ān-u* ("rats"), the plural marker is the suffix -*ān,* the final -*u* should be considered in the same rank as the aforementioned -*i*.

Regular feminine plural is formed from the corresponding nouns by lengthening the vowel element of the gender marker: *muʿallimatun* ("teacher woman") – *muʿallimātun* ("teacher women"). In other words: from a principled position, this variant of the plural is formed by long vowel, and not by the whole suffix -*ātun,* since the only distinctive point that creates an opposition between the singular and plural forms, is the length of this particular vowel.

Regular masculine plural is formed as follows: *muʿallimun* ("teacher man") – *muʿallimūna* ("teacher men"). In the plural form the final -*a,* here too, does not designates any grammatical category, therefore we can ignore it in the given case. Then, it turns out that the opposition between the singular and plural forms comes as follows: *muʿallimun* ("teacher man") – *muʿallimūn* ("teacher men"); the plural marker is the long vowel: *ū*.

b) in the verbs the plural is denoted by: -*ū,* -*na,* -*m,* -*nna, nā* (in the Perfect forms) and -*ūna, na-* (in the Imperfect forms). In the ending -*nna* the final -*a* has obviously, the same function as in the forms shown above. In all forms, plural

markers are either long vowel, or sonorants *n* or *m*, or markers consisting of more than one of these constituents.

F i n a l l y , once again, plural markers in Arabic can be: (mostly) suffix sonorants, or long vowels, or signs composed of more than one of these morphs.

1. On juxtaposition of number forms in personal pronouns (and pronominal suffixes)

Personal pronouns provide us with interesting material from the viewpoint of expressing the number. Namely, personal pronouns and pronominal suffixes express number like verbs and the observation on it confirms that the source form between the dual and plural, is exactly plural, not dual.

Argumentation of this thesis is easy. Let us recall the pronouns (from the principled position, the situation is similar with pronominal suffixes too):

Singular	Dual	Plural
h-u-wa	h-u-m-ā	h-u-m
h-i -ya	h-u-m-ā	h-u-nn-a
’a-n-t-a	’a-n-t-u-m-ā	’a-n-t-u-m
’a-n-t-i	’a-n-t-u-m-ā	’a-n-t-u-nn-a
’a-n-ā	–	na-ḥ-nu

The initial *h-* expresses the III person.

We have suffix *n-* in both II and I p. forms. At the same time, it should have moved into II p. from I p. Finally, prefix consonant complex *-nt-* in pronouns indicates II p. proper.[1] In singular, III and II p., final vowels or weak consonants that create opposition, additionally indicate gender. In the II p. these vowels are -*a* (Masc.) and -*i* (Fem.), in the III p. – -*w* (Masc.) and -*y* (Fem.). Relationship is noticeable: i – y Feminine, a – w Masculine.[2]

As regards the prefix morphs a) *n-* and b) *’a-* in the II and I p. forms (*’anta, ’anti, ’anā*, etc.):

a) suffix morph *n-* should be sonorant designating the plurality, it is common for II and I p. forms. The source form among them should be I p. form, in which this constituent acts as a marker for more than one.[3] In the I p. pronoun *naḥnu* we have double marking of plurality: two *n*-s. It can be explained as follows: the given marker has lost the function of expressing plurality (especially, in the prefix position), which led to the appearance of the second marker – practically, the same morph. As evidence that in this case one marker is enough, one can recall the dialectal forms of the same pronoun: *eḥna/iḥna*, etc.,

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[1] We have similar designation for II and I persons in verbs too: *katabta, katabti, katabtu,* where -t simultaneously denotes II p. and I p. (the difference is created by the final vowels).

[2] In Arabic, in general, there is a relationship: *y* and *i*, and, on the other hand – *a, u* and *w*. Cf. R$_2$=y verbs – bā‘^{a} باع, yabī‘^{u} بيع, but R$_2$=w verbs – qām^a قام, yaqūm^u يقوم; nām^a نام, yanām^u ينام; Also, R$_3$=y – mašā مشى, yamšī يمشي, but R$_3$=w namā نما, yanmū ينمو.

[3] For comparison, it is accepted in Arabic, when person speaks about himself in the plural.

where one (and not two) *n* appears. And as a confirmation that in Arabic the morph *n* can undergo neutralization, we can recall another dialectal example from the Upper Egyptian speech, where the forms *naf'alu* (< *naf'alū*) are in use, in which the initial *n-* has lost the function of expressing plurality, which led to the addition of another plural suffix *-u* < *-ū*.

I and II p. forms are opposed to the III p.: on the one hand, the speaker and the object of speech, i.e. subjects involved in the process of speech, and on the other – person which is distanced from the speech process (conditionally). Therefore, we can suppose, that the morph *n-* has moved from I p. to II p., in which, additionally, we have sign *t* for differentiation II p. proper; rather, the complex *nt* in pronouns became into II p. marker.

b) as for the initial *-'a*. If take into a consideration synchronic data only, one may assume, that in pronouns it acts only as a prothetic vowel. In I p. sing. pronoun, it could have appeared by analogy with II p. forms. In some Arabic dialects, in sing. I p. forms this *-'a* does not appear, e.g. Mariuti bedouin's dialect: *nā* ("I").[1] B. Grende thinks, that this is one single morph *'an,* that he beholds in particles *'inna , 'anna, 'an*, and recalls an example from the Old Hebrew: *hinnē* "here"; he writes: "it is possible, that *'an* is associated with some indicative particle, the trace of which is notable in other Semitic languages".[2]

If partially develop Grande's thesis and partially reject it, we can suppose that this initial *-'a* comes from indicative pronoun *ha* < *hā*, which functions in literary Arabic and in dialects (by the form *a: ahu* "here it is"). The initial *h* falls out easily, especially if we take in a consideration amorphous character of this consonant in Arabic and Semitic in general. *-n-* component should be marker of II and I p. opposed to III p.

Finally, in personal pronouns, the morph *-'a* stayed with the prothetic function.

Final *-m* and *-n*, or suffix long vowel express more than one; among them: *-m* and *-n* are markers of the plural number; *-ū* also is marker of the plural; Suffix *-ā* is a marker of the dual number. In total, each of them is sign of plurality – more than one.

In the plural forms, replay of sonorants creates an opposition: *-m* express plurality for the masculine gender, and *-n* – for the feminine gender. In the given case, gemination of consonants does not matter (*-nn-* suffixes of feminine forms are implied). The point is, that in some forms of Arabic this gemination is completely absent. E.g., in Mariuti Bedouin's dialect we have *hin* for IIIp., fem., pl., and *intan* for IIp. fem. pl. – in both cases without the geminate. On the other hand, in IIIp., masc., pl., where in literary language geminate is absent, we have *humm* with geminate.[3] The abovementioned confirms, that gemination here does not carry a functional load and it, in the given case, could be attributed to consonant variability.

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[1]   'Abd 'al-'Azīz Maṭar, *lahjat*ᵘ *l-badw*ⁱ *fī s-sāhil*ⁱ *š-šimālīyy*ⁱ *lijumhūrīyyat*ⁱ *Miṣr*ᵃ *l-'arabīyya*ᵗⁱ (al-Qāhira, 1981), 136.

[2]   Б. М. Гранде, *Курс арабской Грамматики в сравнительно-историческом освещении* (Москва, 1962), 387.

[3]   'Abd 'al-'Azīz Maṭar, *lahjat*ᵘ *l-badw*ⁱ*...,* 138.

Unlike the plural forms, dual forms of the pronouns does not distinguish between genders even in the literary language; in other forms of Arabic pronouns do not have dual forms at all. III p., dual pronoun *humā* < III p., masc., pl. *hum* + *-ā*; and IIp., dual pronoun *'antumā* < II p., masc., pl. *'antum* + *-ā*; in both cases final long vowel indicates to more than one (in the given case, to duality).

Obviously, plural forms of the pronouns goes back to the singular forms:

Sing. IIIp., masc. *huwa* > pl. *hum*; sing. IIIp. fem. *hiya* > pl. *hunna*. In both cases, we have common marker *h-* for the III person.

Sing. IIp. masc. *'anta* > pl. *'antum*; sing. IIp. fem. *'anti* > pl. *'antunna*. In both cases, we have common marker *-nt-* for the II person.

As it was noted, in I p. sing. *'anā* > *naḥnu*, is preserved I person marker *n*; the second *n* should be regarded as a sign of plurality.

F i n a l l y, formal analysis confirms that the singular forms of pronouns provide the basis for the plural forms, and these, in turn, provide the basis for the dual forms.

In other words: Sing. > Pl. > Dual, and n o t as follows: Sing. > Dual > Pl.

2. On redundant *mīm*

In some varieties of Egyptian Arabic (Upper Egyptian) in verbs, Perfective, III p., pl., final *mīm* appears (*faʿal-u-m*), the origin and function of which causes the interest. In mid 20th century this *mīm* was regarded by Sharbatov as a remnant of old Semitic *mīmation*,[1] but the supposition was followed by criticism, since *mīmation*, as *nūnation*, is a phenomenon characteristic of nouns and discovery of its trace in verbs was considered doubtful.[2]

On the one hand, in the Arabic dialects, in general, and namely – in Egyptian the fact of facultative mutual substitution of the sonorants *m-n-l* is observable (*ganb ~ gamb, gurnāl ~ gurnān*).

On the other hand, In Arabic orthoepy, final long vowels have tendency to be shorten. This is a rule: *faʿal-ū > faʿal-u, faʿalnā > faʿalna,* etc. We can presume, that in *faʿal-u,* after shortening the final *-ū* (the plural marker), the shortened suffix *-u* lost its plurality meaning, consequently, an additional plurality sign was needed. Thus, the final *mīm* which appeared by analogy with the forms *faʿaltum, entum, hum...*, can be regarded exactly as this additional attribute of the expression of plurality.

As a result, an unified form of conjugation was created with the suffix sonorant as the plural marker (in combination with short vowels, which are of secondary importance in this case).

1   Г. Ш. Шарбатов, *Лексико-грамматическая характеристика египетского диалекта*, автореферат диссертации на соискание ученой степени кандидата филологических наук (Москва, 1955), 10.
2   A. Jordania, *aprik'is aramaghribuli t'ipis aghmosavlet arabuli dialeqtebis shep'-irisp'orebiti analizi (egvip't'is, chadis, sudanis dialektebi),* Dissertation on the partial fulfillment of the Candidate of the philological sciences (Tbilisi, 1999), 158 (in Georgian).

As was noted, Sharbatov presumed that in the form *fa ʿalum* final *-m* is a remnant of old Semitic *mimation*. A thesis was presented above, that this *-m* is a plural marker. Is there a possibility that these two opinions coincide?

In Arabic tradition inflection markers are not distinguished by morphological attachment of the word: *ar-rafʿ* is final *ḍamma*-marked form be it noun (in Nominative) or verb (in the Indicative mood), *an-naṣb* is *fatḥa*-marked form be it noun (in Accusative) or verb (in the Subjunctive mood), etc.[1] We had the opportunity to make sure that plural markers can be the same morphs for different parts of speech. Now let us compare the following pairs:

sing. *muʿallim-un* > pl. *muʿallim-ūn*, sing. *muwaḏḏaf-un* > pl. *muwaḏḏaf-ūn*

we can observe that the long vowel *-ū* is practically the only distinguishing morph between the singular and plural forms; but in both cases (sing. and pl.) final *-n* appears, which functions in the Singular under the name *nunation.* But in fact, it can be regarded that *-n* in plural forms, from the principal point of view, has the same origin as in the singular – *nunation.* One may object, that *nunation* is characteristic of *status absolutus*, as for the plural, final *-n* in the plural remains even if *al-* of *status determinatus* is added (*al-muʿallim-ūn*). Here we must recall the fact that the establishment of *nunation* as a marker of *status absolutus* in Arabic had its development,[2] and not always *nunation* was connected with *status absolutus* (cf. *mani m-qāʿimun* "who is standing" in Yemeni Arabic[3]). In other words, *nunation* is not required to indicate an indefinite status. The above-mentioned also means that *nunation* (/*mimation*) is an attribute that designates not necessarily only (*status absolutus* of) nouns.

Since one and the same marker in Arabic (and Semitic, in general) can be attached to both verbs and nouns, it can also be permissible to suppose that in the form *faʿalum* under the current study*,* Sharbatov's "trace of old Semitic *mimation*" may have a realistic basis.[4]

F i n a l l y , we presume, that final *-m* traced in Egyptian verbs (which functions in verbs as a plural marker) is the same as final *-m* in nouns (also with plural marker function), but on the other hand, it can also be regarded, that it is the same as Semitic *mimation/nunation*, which in some forms of Semitic languages has disappeared, while in some others still functions (in Arabic *al-Fuṣḥā*), even if in a restricted form (cf. Standard Arabic, modern Arabic dialects).

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[1] See, e.g.: *Fatḥī Buyūmī Ḥamūda, al-mawrid*^{u} *fī n-naḥw*^{i} *wa-ṣ-ṣaraf*, al-juz'^{u} l-awwal^u (1985), 107; 'Aḥmad Qabbiš, *'al-kāmil*^{u} *fī n-naḥw*^{i} *wa-ṣ-ṣaraf*ᵉ *wa-l-'irāb*^{i} (n.d.), 6-7 (in Arabic).

[2] See: Al. Lek'iashvili, *brunvata sist'ema semitur enebshi* (Tbilisi, 1970), 28-29, 33; Б. М. Гранде, *Курс арабской Грамматики в сравнительно-историческом освещении* (Москва, 1962), 32-321.

[3] K. Versteegh, *The Arabic Language* (New York 1997), 39-41. Muhammad al-Sharkawi, Pre-Islamic Arabic, *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, v. III (Brill, 2008), 693-694.

[4] See: Al. Lek'iashvili, *brunvata sist'ema semitur enebshi...*, 34 (in Georgian): "*mimation/nunation* is often equated with plural markers -na/i, -m. Cf. also, Al. Lek'iashvili, *arabuli ena,* I (Tbilisi, 1977), 167: "-ni, -na must be regarded as elements of the dual and plural markers of nouns and not as indication on the *status absolutus*".