

Republic of Iraq
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
Mosul University / College of Arts
Adab Al-Rafidayn Journal



Adab Al-Rafidayn Journal

**A refereed quarterly scientific journal
Issued by College of Arts - University of Mosul
Vol. Ninety-Two / year Fifty- Three**

Shabban-1444 AH/ March 10/03/2023 AD

**The journal's deposit number in the National
Library in Baghdad: 14 of 1992**

ISSN 0378- 2867

E ISSN 2664-2506

To communicate:

**URL: radab.mosuljournals@uomosul.edu.iq
<https://radab.mosuljournals.com>**



Adab Al-Rafidayn *Journal*

**A refereed journal concerned with the publishing of scientific researches
in the field of arts and humanities both in Arabic and English**

Vol. Ninety-Two / year Fifty- Three /Shabban - 1444 AH / March 2023 AD

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Editor-in-chief

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Personal Pronouns and Their Relation to Number System in English and Arabic: A Contrastive Study

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Received Date:04/07/2022

Review Date: 10/08/2022

Accepted Date:13/08/2022

Abstract

This research is concerned with studying personal pronouns in English and Arabic syntactically to point out the similarities and differences between the two languages under study as far as the accuracy of personal pronouns in expressing number system is concerned. This research hypothesizes that Arabic personal pronouns show greater accuracy and variety in describing number than English and this is mainly because English and Arabic belong to two different families. Hence, in order to give a clear insight of personal pronouns and their relation to number system, the research presents an adequate explanation of personal pronouns in both English and Arabic, followed by a comparison of the two languages under study by relying on two major descriptive models represented by Quirk, R.; Sidney, G.; Geoffrey, L. and Jan, S. (1985) for English and Aziz, Y. (1989) for Arabic. This research concludes that Arabic is more accurate in describing number system than English and this is simply because English and Arabic belong to two different families.

Keywords:

Gender, Number, Attached Pronouns, Detached Pronouns, Personal Pronouns.

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1. Introduction

Bahatti et al. (2020: 256-257) consider number as a linguistic category that gives information about singularity and plurality in one's language. They propose that number is either expressed by lexical devices "one, two, three.....etc", or grammatical means whose function is basically marking number on nouns, pronouns...etc. Alexander (1990: 1) argues that a grammatical system of number can be identified either explicitly on a pronoun and noun, or implicitly through agreement.

On his turn, Whorf (1945: 1-4) considers number as a grammatical category divided into overt category and covert category. Whorf states that number can be shown overtly through the use of nouns, pronouns...etc, which clearly indicates the number of people and things involved. Number can also be explained covertly by agreement as well as other means. This view is also affirmed by Biber et al. (2002: 78) who state that number contrast is well represented in nouns, pronouns, determiners as well as verbs. Thus, pronouns are considered as one of the word classes to which number system is applied. Quirk et al (1985: 335) say that a pronoun is a member of closed class words that replaces a noun, or a noun phrase position. Quirk et al. (ibid) distinguish pronouns from nouns by saying that they contain certain morphological features that are truant from nouns:

- A. Case: it shows opposition which exists between subjective and objective cases, as in (we/ us, he/him, who/ whom, etc.)
- B. Person: it shows the distinction between 1st, 2nd and 3rd persons like (we, you, he)
- C. Gender: it explains some explicit grammatical oppositions between personal and non-personal gender, masculine and feminine gender.
- D. Number: regularly, nouns mark their plural by adding the plural suffix (-s) or (-es) to the noun endings (e.g. cat, cats) unlike pronouns that lack relative number forms (e.g. they).

2. Aims

This research aims at:

1. Describing the classes of number in both English and Arabic as far as personal pronouns are concerned.

2. Investigating the accuracy of personal pronouns in describing number in both English and Arabic.
3. Highlighting similarities and differences between English and Arabic regarding personal pronouns and their relation to number system.

3. Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that :

1. Arabic personal pronouns are more accurate and precise in describing number system than the English personal pronouns
2. The difference in the accuracy of personal pronouns in describing number in both English and Arabic is due to the fact that the two languages under study belong to two different families.

4. Procedures

This research consists of two separate parts, the first deals with the personal pronouns in English while the second part discusses personal pronouns in Arabic focusing on their relation with number system. Then, the personal pronouns in the two languages are compared and conclusions based on this comparison are pointed out.

5. Personal Pronouns in English

Like nouns, pronouns also have number system, but they differ from nouns in having fixed forms for both singular and plural instead of using the plural morpheme –s as a technique for converting singular nouns into plural.

Alexander (1990: 87) states that personal pronouns refer not only to people as its name implies but they are called so since they indicate the grammatical persons (1st, 2nd and 3rd). Eastwood (1994: 234) adds that they are called so to show that they have the ability to identify the person speaking or being addressed. There is an agreement between these personal pronouns and the nouns that replaced them in number except for (you). Alexander (1990: 87) states that some not all personal pronouns show gender agreement as in the following sentences:

- (1)**John** is a teacher. **He** spends most of his time with his students.
(masculine)
(2)**Maria** is a teacher. **She** spends most of her time with her students.
(feminine)
(3)I bought a **car** yesterday. **It** is rather expensive. (neuter)
(4)**John** and **Bill** have studied well. **They** both pass the exam
successfully.

Eastwood(1994: 233) comments on personal pronouns through a table in which he explains types of personal pronouns:

Number	Person	Subjective Case	Objective Case
Singular	1 st Person	I	Me
	2 nd Person	You	You
	3 rd Person	He/She/It	Him/Her/It
Plural	1 st Person	We	Us
	2 nd Person	You	You
	3 rd Person	They	Them

Table (1) Singular and Plural Personal Pronouns

It is noticed that personal pronouns have different forms depending on their number and case; therefore, two types of personal pronouns are identified (ibid: 234-235):

1.Subject pronouns: They replace the name of the subject in statements and can be:

A. First person singular "I" which is identified by its spelling, as a capital letter.

B. First person plural "we" which refers to two or more people, as in:

(5)**We** are happy with our results. (plural/neuter)

C. The second person singular and plural "you" which is used in referring to one or more people, as in:

(6)Have **you** got what I said, Bill/Jane?

(7)Have **you (both/all)** got what I said?

D. Third person singular "he, she, it":

(8)Ask John if **he** knows? (masculine)

(9)Ask Maria if **she** knows? (feminine)

E. Third person plural "they" which is usually used with human and non-human entities, as in:

(10)I have **two cars**. They are rather expensive.

(11)I have many friends. They are from England.

2.Object pronouns: They take the place of the object in the sentence and are used as direct /indirect objects or objects of prepositions and they include "me" (1st person singular), "us" (1st person plural), "you" (2nd person singular and plural), "him/her/it" (3rd person singular) and "them"(3rd person plural), e.g.:

(12)They show **me** the way to the city centre.

(13)We went to the supermarket with them.

Schrock (n.d.: 62) identifies the third personal pronouns "he, she, it" from the rest as having gender distinction indicating masculine, feminine and neuter, respectively.

Kadim (2020: 2) comments on this classification by saying that the grammatical category of case is a common feature of nouns and pronouns referring to their grammatical relation or function. English has two cases as far as personal pronouns are concerned, namely the nominative "subjective" case and the accusative "objective" case.

It is important to mention that the pronouns "you" and "it" can be used as subject as well as object in a sentence, as in:

(14) A: Have you seen that car? **It** is beautiful. (Subject)

B: I bought **it** yesterday. (Object)

(15) A: **You** drive quickly. (Subject)

B: I will give **you** some money. (Object)

6. Personal Pronouns in Arabic

Most grammarians, Haywood and Nahmad (1965: 44,71-72), Aziz (1989: 138) among them divide personal pronouns mainly into two types: explicit pronouns and implicit pronouns. As for explicit pronouns, Ahmed (2008: 21) classifies them into what he calls attached and detached pronouns:

1. Attached personal pronouns: Ahmed (ibid: 23) says that these pronouns are characterized by their disability to occur initially in clauses or sentences. Attached pronouns are either attached to the verbs or to the nouns/prepositions with possessive functions.

i. Attached pronouns to verbs: They are used in accusative case. This type of pronouns includes the following:

Person	Singular	Dual	Plural
1st	-ي ساعدني (he helped me)	-نَا ساعدنَا (he helped us)	-نَا ساعدنا (he helped us)
2nd	-كَ ساعدك (he helped you)	-كما ساعدكما (he helped you)	-كم ساعدكم (he helped you)
2 nd	-كِ ساعدكِ (he helped you)	-كما ساعدكما (he helped you)	-كنَّ ساعدكنَّ (he helped you)
3rd	-هُ ساعدهُ (he helped him)	-هما ساعدهما (he helped them)	-هُم ساعدهم (he helped them)
3rd	-ها ساعدها (he helped her)	-هما ساعدهما (he helped them)	-هُنَّ ساعدهنَّ (he helped them)

Table (2): Attached Personal Pronouns Suffixed to Verbs functioning as Objects.

As for attached pronouns with verbs functioning as subject, they are occurring in the nominative case, represented by (تاء الفاعل، ألف الاثنين، واو) (الجماعة، نون النسوة، ياء المخاطبة ونا المتكلمين).

(16) قرأتُ الدرسَ. (I read the lesson)

(17) الولدانُ قداما الى المدرسة. (The two boys came to school)

(18) الأولادُ قداموا الى المدرسة. (The boys came to school)

(19) العاملاتُ اكملن عملهن (The workers (fem.) completed their work)

(20) استشيرني والديك (Consult your parents)

(21) قرأنا الكتاب (We read the book)

ii. Attached personal pronouns with possessive relations:

Ahmed (2008: 22) claims that if the attached pronoun occurs after a noun, it indicates possession like (كتابها) (her book), whereas after a verb, it refers to the object, as in (ساعدني) (help me).

Table (3): Attached Personal Pronouns with Possessive Relations

Person and Gender	The Number	pronoun	Examples
1 st person (m./f.)	Singular	-ي	كتابي my book
1 st person (m./f.)	Dual/Plural	-نا	كتابنا our book
2 nd person (m.)	Singular	-ك	كتابك your book
	Dual	-كما	كتابكما your book
	Plural	-كم	كتابكم your book
2 nd person (f.)	Singular	-كِ	كتابكِ your book
	Dual	-كما	كتابكما your book
	Plural	-كنّ	كتابكنّ your book
3 rd person (m.)	Singular	-ه	كتابه his book
	Dual	-هُما	كتابهُما their book
	Plural	-هُم	كتابهُم their book
3 rd person (f.)	Singular	-ها	كتابها her book
	Dual	-هُما	كتابهُما their book

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			book
	Plural	-هُنَّ	كتَابُهُنَّ their book

These pronouns carry the meaning of possession and sometimes called bound suffixes since they rely on the ending of nouns to which they are added.

2. Detached personal pronouns: Ahmed (2008: 21-22) presents a list of the pronouns that clauses or sentences can start with. These pronouns are:

Case		Gender	Number
Subjective	Objective & Genitive		
أنا (I)	إياي (to) me	Masculine/Feminine	Singular
نحن (we)	إيانا (to) us	Masculine/Feminine	Plural
أنت (you)	إياك (to) you	Masculine	Singular
أنتِ (you)	إياكِ (to) you	Feminine	Singular
أنثما (you)	إياكما (to) you	Masculine/Feminine	Dual
أنتم (you)	إياكم (to) you	Masculine	Plural
أنثنَّ (you)	إياكنَّ (to) you	Feminine	Plural
هو (he)	إياه (to) him	Masculine	Singular
هي (she)	إياها (to) her	Feminine	Singular
هُما	إياهما (to) them	Masculine/Feminine	Dual

(they)			
هُم (they)	إِيَاهُمْ (to) them	Masculine	Plural
هُنَّ (they)	إِيَاهُنَّ (to) them	Feminine	Plural

Table (4): Detached Personal Pronouns in Subjective, Objective and Genitive Cases

It can be inferred from the above table that gender is identified in both 2nd and 3rd persons, whereas in 1st person it is difficult to identify whether such pronouns refer to masculine or feminine.

Most grammarians, Haywood and Nahmad (1965: 44, 71-72), Aziz (1989: 138), Ryding (2005: 312) and Al-Hawary (2011: 105) state that the separable/detached pronouns are affected by number system since they agree with their complement nouns in being singular, dual and plural, e.g.:

(22) أنا مُعَلِّمٌ (I am (m.) a teacher)

(23) أَنْتِ مُعَلِّمَةٌ (You are (sing/m.) a teacher)

(24) أَنْتُمَا مُعَلِّمَانِ (You are (dual/m.) teachers)

(25) أَنْتُمْ مُعَلِّمُونَ (You are (pl./m.) teachers)

Number system has also an impact on separable personal pronouns when the pronoun employed decides the number of the verb used; therefore, singular pronouns need singular verbs, dual pronouns need dual verbs and plural pronouns require plural verbs, e.g.:

(26) A: أَنَا سَاعَدْتُ وَالِدِي (I helped my father)

B: أَنْتِ سَاعَدْتِ وَالِدَتَكَ (You (sing/f.) helped your mother)

C: هِيَ سَاعَدَتْ وَالِدَتَهَا (She helped her mother)

(27) A: أَنْتُمَا سَاعَدْتُمَا وَالِدَتِكُمَا (You (dual/m./f.) helped your mother)

B: هُمَا سَاعَدَا وَالِدَتَهُمَا (They (dual/m./f.) helped their mother)

(28) A: أَنْتُنَّ سَاعَدْتُنَّ وَالِدَتِكُنَّ (You (pl./f.) helped your mother)

B: هُنَّ سَاعَدْنَ وَالِدَتَهُنَّ (They (pl./f.) helped their mother)

Inseparable personal pronouns are also affected by number system since they agree with their antecedent nouns /pronouns in number (singular/dual/plural), as in:

(29) A: الطالبةُ نجحت في الامتحان (The student (f.) succeeded in the exam)

B: الطالبتان نجحتا في الامتحان (The two students (f.) succeeded in the exam)

C: الطالباتُ نجحنَ في الامتحان (The students (f.) succeeded in the exam).

(30) A: أنتَ نجحتَ في الامتحان (You(sing/m.) succeeded in the exam)

B: أنتما نجحتما في الامتحان (You dual/m./f.) succeeded in the exam)

C: أنتمُ نجحتمُ في الامتحان (You (pl./m.) succeeded in the exam)

Concerning implicit pronouns, Aziz (1989: 138) states that these pronouns are expressed with imperfect verbs to show number, person, and gender distinctions, for instance:

(31) A: يَقْرَأُ القِصَّةَ (He reads the story)

B: تَقْرَأُ القِصَّةَ (She reads the story)

C: أَقْرَأُ القِصَّةَ (I read the story)

D: نَقْرَأُ القِصَّةَ (We read the story)

Aziz also claims implicit pronouns can also be expressed with perfect verbs when the pronoun refers to 3rd person singular, as in:

(32) A: شَاهَدَ الفِلمَ (He watched the film)

B: شَاهَدَتْ الفِلمَ (She watched the film)

7. Comparison between English and Arabic Personal Pronouns

English is similar to Arabic in that it possesses multiple forms of personal pronouns in an attempt to give an adequate explanation reflects the number, gender and case of such pronouns. English and Arabic are also similar in having three grammatical persons: 1st, 2nd and 3rd.

Arabic also becomes more like English when 1st person personal pronouns present only two pronouns one for singular (أنا) and the other for plural (نحن), i.e., Arabic utilizes the personal pronoun (نحن) in referring to two or more people, and in this use it is similar to (we) which denotes two or more people. In addition, (أنا) and (نحن) in Arabic, unlike other personal pronouns, resemble the English 1st person personal pronouns in showing no gender distinction.

It is noted that the differences between English and Arabic are greater than the attributes that two languages may have in common. The first of these differences is well-illustrated in English by the presence of only one type of personal pronouns which is the explicit separable/detached personal pronouns (he, she, it, we), whereas two types of personal pronouns are identified in Arabic: explicit personal pronouns represented by separable and detached pronouns, which are independent pronouns that

can stand alone, such as (هو, هي, هم, هن, انت, نحن-هن, انا) and inseparable/attached pronouns, such as (-ها, -هم) in (ساعدها) and (ساعدهم) as well as implicit personal pronouns.

In English, the 2nd person pronoun (you) is used for both singular and plural, masculine and feminine. But in Arabic, (أنت), (إياك), (إياكِ) and (ت) are used for a singular masculine person, while (أنتِ), (إياكِ), (إياكُ) and (تِ) are used for singular feminine person, (أنتما), (إياكما), (إياكُما) and (تِ) are used for dual masculine and feminine, while (أنتم), (إياكم), (إياكُم) and (ت) denote plural masculine, and finally (أنتن), (إياكن), (إياكُن) and (ن) to indicate plural feminine. Thus, Arabic is different from English in being more specific in using personal pronouns taking into account whom you are addressing, as in the above examples where there are different ways to say (you) in Arabic, since many choices are available (أنت), (أنتِ), (أنتما), (أنتم), (أنتن), (إياك), (إياكِ), (إياكُما), (إياكُم), (إياكُن) and using the correct pronoun needs to consider number, gender and case.

Hence, it is clear that Arabic has the features of clarity and accuracy in explaining number when using personal pronouns which distinguish Arabic from English while the shortcoming and limitations of the pronouns used in English leads to the fact that ambiguity is absolutely inevitable.

In English, personal pronouns also have a limited role in affecting verbs and making them agree with these pronouns in terms of number. This role is best observed with verb (be) where subject-verb concord is best expressed, e.g.:

(33)A: **She** is a teacher.

B: **We** are teachers.

C: **It** is a long table.

D: **I** am upset with the news.

Although there are examples like the following, the plural verb (are/were) does not agree with the subject (you) when it indicates one person, e.g.:

(34) **You** are a good student.

Subject-verb concord is also identified when the subject is a 3rd person pronoun and the verb is present. In this case, the verb is confined to singular and agrees with the singular subject:

(35) A: **He** studies well.

B: She plays tennis.

While no concord is seen between the subject and verb when the verb is past or when the sentence contains an auxiliary verb, e.g.:

(36) A: I cleaned the room.

B: **We cleaned** the room.

C: She will clean the room.

D: They will clean the room.

In Arabic, on the other hand, pronouns have undoubtedly an important role in determining verbs and making them often congruent with them in terms of number, and this clearly appears with the following examples:

(37)A: أنتَ درستَ بجد (You (sg./m.) studied well)

B: أنتِ درستِ بجد (You (sg./f.) studied well)

C: انتما درستما بجد (You (dual) studied well)

D: أنتم درستم بجد (You (pl./m.) studied well)

E: أنتنَ درستنَ بجد (You (pl./f.) studied well)

F: هو درس بجد (He studied well)

G: هما درسا بجد (They studied well)

H: هم درسوا بجد (They studied well)

English and Arabic are also different as far as pronoun-antecedent agreement is concerned, where Arabic presents many pronouns referring to singular, dual and plural antecedents and agree with them in number, whereas English presents pronouns describing only singular and plural numbers. Thus, Arabic is more accurate and precise in describing the number of the antecedent than English. This is merely due to the abundance of pronouns used in Arabic where each pronoun has a specific number and gender, whereas English has many neutral pronouns (you, we, they) whose number and gender are not well explained.

The agreement between the pronoun as a subject and its complement is evidently clearer in Arabic than it is in English since the three different numbers (singular, dual, plural) are explained with high precision than English, as in the following sentences:

(38) A: I am a teacher.

B: We are teachers.

C: He is a student.

D: They are students.

(36) A: هو معلم (He is a teacher)

B: هما معلمان (They are two teachers)

C: هم معلمون (They are (pl/m.) teachers)

8. Conclusion

In the light of the foregoing description and based on the comparison that took place between English and Arabic, the followings are the final results of this comparison:

1. English and Arabic have two different number systems where English has a binary system (singular and plural) while Arabic has a ternary system (singular, dual and plural).
2. English and Arabic also differ in that English uses only explicit detached pronouns while Arabic makes use of explicit pronouns with its two types detached and attached pronouns as well as the implicit pronouns to express number.
3. The number of personal pronouns in Arabic is more than that in English since Arabic is more precise in describing number and gender than English, i.e., almost each one of the personal pronouns in Arabic has a singular, dual and plural forms.
4. The precision of Arabic personal pronouns in describing number system in comparison with that of English is due to the fact that Arabic and English belong to two different families.

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الضمائر الشخصية وعلاقتها بالنظام العددي في اللغتين الانكليزية والعربية:

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المستخلص

يختص هذا البحث بدراسة الضمائر الشخصية في اللغتين الانكليزية و العربية نحوياً لبيان اوجه الشبه و الاختلاف بين اللغتين قيد الدراسة من حيث دقة الضمائر الشخصية في التعبير عن النظام العددي. يفترض هذا البحث بأن الضمائر الشخصية العربية تظهر دقة أكبر في وصف العدد مما هي في اللغة الانكليزية و هذا يرجع بشكل اساس الى أن اللغة الانكليزية و العربية تنتمي لعائلتين مختلفتين. و بناء عليه و من اجل اعطاء فكرة واضحة عن الضمائر الشخصية و علاقتها بالنظام العددي يقدم البحث شرحاً مناسباً عن الضمائر الشخصية في اللغتين الانكليزية و العربية متبوعاً بمقارنة اللغتين قيد الدراسة من خلال الاعتماد على النموذجين الوصفيين الرئيسيين اللذين يمثلهما كويرك و رفاقه (1985) للإنكليزية و عزيز (1989) للعربية. و قد خلص البحث إلى أن اللغة العربية هي أكثر دقة

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في وصف النظام العددي من اللغة الانكليزية و هذا يعود الى أن اللغة الانكليزية و العربية تنتميان لعائلتين مختلفتين.
الكلمات المفتاحية: الجنس، العدد، الضمائر المتصلة، الضمائر المنفصلة، الضمائر الشخصية.