



Affixation across Arabic and English languages

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26648717.2019.v1.i1a.1>

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to explore the affixation phenomenon in English and Arabic languages. All major parts of speech, nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs are implied in this paper, and differences as well as similarities are demonstrated as a part of contrastive linguistic studies. This contrastive study illustrates to what extent different languages are distinguished with regard to the affixation issue. Through contrastive analysis, it is discovered that there are significant differences rather than similarities in terms of affixation particularly infixes and suffixes. Moreover, Arabic seems unique in the employment of infixes as well as the multiple number of suffixes. Being aware of all these variations might help learners and speakers to comprehend the different uses of words properly.

Keywords: english, arabic, affix, prefix, infix, suffix

Introduction

Understanding what contrastive linguistics and contrastive analysis is a paramount important prior to the discussion and analysis of affixation in Arabic and English. This paper is based on the results came out from Saeed and Fatihi (2011) comparative study on two systems of the inflectional affixes in Arabic and English where certain areas of similarity and differences were present. So here could we question that languages are analogous in the affixation, derivation and inflection, of words or are they absolutely different? If they are different, then what are these differences and how do they occur? This paper is mainly concerned with affixation; inflections and derivations other than affixation are not covered in this paper. Let us, at first, refer to what is meant by 'Affixation'. Affixation refers to the attachment of some morphological affixes into the roots of words. These could be prefixes, infixes and suffixes. They are described as almost meaningless, they cannot stand as words by themselves and their number is relatively small compared with total number of roots. It is very noticeable that affixation is the most common way of creating new words in all languages. There are two types of affixes: inflectional and derivational. Inflectional ones happen after the stem and cannot transform the word type. Conversely, derivational affixes create new words and can affect or change the word class. In this part we will look at each of them in details considering the variations between English and Arabic in this respect. This contrastive analysis is very helpful for L2 learners and speakers to understand the similarities and differences as well as recognizing the difficulties and reducing interferences.

Research Method

Data are taken from the books and studies available in the search websites and materials in both languages in which the different kinds of affixes are found. This data collection lies within the qualitative research tradition (Heigham and Croker, 2009). Studies demonstrate that qualitative research is concerned with structures and patterns and how something is. In this case, the researcher studies the data and interprets them to explore how

different are the two languages and illustrate any similarities in terms of prefixes, infixes and suffixes.

Affixation across languages

Prefixes, infixes and suffixes are different types of affixation phenomenon in languages. These morphemes are represented mostly in varied ways and different occurrences as well as frequencies. Affixation is one of the main ways of enriching the vocabulary of all languages without exception. In fact, it is one of the most productive ways of word building in languages. Its main function is to form one part of speech from another. Another function is to change the lexical meaning of the same part of speech. The awareness of such affixations and the contrastive analysis of their occurrences across languages would reveal to learners and users the way in which languages are structured and employed in their production.

Prefixes in English and Arabic

The word prefix refers to the morpheme occurring earlier to the word root. Studies illustrate that languages have peculiar morphology as well as affixation systems; there are some universal features among languages as well. It has been claimed that some languages are derivational while others are concatenative, Arabic said to belong to the former type whereas English to the later. This could be viewed as one of the major differences between the two languages. In this part, in English if any prefix has been removed from the word may reverse or alter the meaning of that word, however, this is not so in Arabic since prefixes' removal doesn't reverse the meaning of words.

For example, take the English words '*disobey*', *unhappy*, *rewrite*, *misunderstand*, *irregular*, *inanimate*, *immature... etc*, different examples of different parts of speech, if we remove the prefix in each word *dis*, *un*, *re*, *ir*, *in*, *im ... etc*, the whole meaning would change into reverse with maintaining the same part of speech. Unlike English words, in Arabic for example, '*Alkitab*' **الكتاب** means 'the book', *Al* **ال** is the prefix that occurs with almost

all proper names especially place names. *Al* ال equals to the definite article 'the', once it is removed, meaning will keep the same without change or reverse meaning. Neither meaning nor word class would change. Other more examples of the Arabic prefixes are the addition of 'Ista' such as *Istakbr* استكبر which means show proud, *Sa* س like 'sa' *azhab* ساذهب means 'I will go' and 'Ya' ي usually added to the past tense verb to form present tense like 'Yanam' ينام to sleep. The stem, in the first example, is 'KABAR' كبر (v) and the noun is 'KIBR'. Removing the prefix 'ist' است doesn't create any change in the meaning of words. In the case of 'Ya' prefix, it is said that this prefix could be used as a stable sign of the present tense in Arabic, you could hardly find any past tense started with 'Ya' prefix. For example the past tense of the verb 'qara' قرأ read (past) becomes 'yaqra' يقرأ read (present) with the attachment of the prefix 'ya' to mean doing the act of reading at the present time. It is important, here, to notice that removing the ist, sa, and Ya, from the pre-verb position merely modifies the tense without any change in the part of speech or word class. Accordingly, I could argue that English prefixes work differently than Arabic prefixes, thus, the two languages show obvious distinction in this respect. These examples of prefixes are grasped and utilized from the standard Arabic since there are other prefixes denoting various dialects of Arabic language we do not cover in this paper.

Infixes in English and Arabic

Moving on to the second type of affixation i.e. infix, they are morphemes placed inside the stem and located regularly. I might assume that this kind of affixation could be interesting in the research field as it seems unusual and even less observable than any other kinds. Studies demonstrate that this type of morphemes is limited and rare in most languages (Russelle, 1975), particularly English; and students are less familiar with it than other affixes. However, despite their rarity infixes are available in a diverse set of locations within words and morphological formatives, Yu (2006). Yu adds, the infixes predominantly locate close to the stem or root of the words. In the same token Greenberg (1966) states that no language employs infixes exclusively, in the sense that their occurrence in any language implies the occurrence of prefixes and suffixes.

On the other hand, unlike English, infixes are not very limited in Arabic. In other words, they are more frequent in Arabic than English. For instance, the word *k-t-b* كتب (wrote) the root is 'k-t-b' and the noun derived from the root is *katib* كاتب (writer), so, *a-i* are infixes attached into the root to form a noun (Nida, 1949). Another example is the Arabic word *quarrel* 'quarrel' the 'q' letter in the middle is taken as an infix denoting a present tense since the root of the verb is *qarab* ضرب 'quarrelled'. Different kinds of infixes in Arabic language often appear in the form of letter or morpheme grown in the middle of the word. Another common infix in Arabic is the {t} ت, said to be the common affix and usually a reflexive of form {I}. It is placed after the first consonant of the root; an epenthetic {l} prefix is added since words cannot begin with a cluster in Arabic. An example is *Ijtahada* اجتهد 'he worked hard' from *jahada* جهد 'he strove'.

Unlike many other languages Arabic makes use of infixes to express notions as tense, number and gender. Conversely, English language said to have no infix system, though English speakers create words in which some forms have been inserted

for the sake of swearing or being emphatic, as in *kanga-bloody-roo* (Crystal, 1997). Studies refer to that almost no true infixes available in English and those, if any available, are marginal either heard in colloquial speech or found in technical terminologies. Overall, we could say that English has a process of infixation of certain words, even limited, but there are no bound morphemes that qualify for infix status. Another form of infixation in Arabic language is the broken plural. Studies refer that broken or irregular plural in Arabic is more frequent than English. For example, *sha'eb* شعب (people), pl شعوب *'shu'oub* (peoples); *nafs* نفس (soul), pl نفوس *'nufuus*; the morpheme *wu* و is infixed in the root to represent plural form. Another form of plural infixation is the addition of 'aa' in such examples *bi'er* بئر (well), pl ابار *'abaar* (wells), *rajulun* رجل (man), pl رجال *'rijaal* and so forth.

Suffixes in English and Arabic

One more step towards the third and most common kind of affixation, i.e. suffix, which can be defined as a group of letters (one or more morphemes) attached to the end of the word that results mostly in a change of meaning or alter the grammatical function of the original word. I could emphasize here that suffixes are very frequent kind of affixes in almost all languages especially these two languages being contrasted here. Both English and Arabic languages utilize these suffixes and employ them in different ways. I may argue here that these suffixes can be utilized as clues to the meaning of words where learners should make use of them pointing out their function in order to facilitate using the language. This type of affixation is so important in understanding the derivation and inflection of words; therefore, we intend to take it in more thorough details.

In English some examples like *less, ence, ness, ic, ion, al, ly, ism, ist, s, ify, sion, ed, ate, ful, ing, less, er, ish, able, dom, ant, hood, ship...* etc, play a major role in figuring out the formation and meaning of words. The first function of most of them, but not all, once attached to the end of roots is to change the word class (part of speech). Meanwhile, not all suffixes function in the same way, some of them change the verb forms into nouns, for instance, *treat* (v) becomes *treatment* (n), *maintain* (v) becomes *maintenance* (n). Other suffixes like 'hood' and 'ship', called class-keeping derivational suffixes, do not change the word class. They are attached to names with the function of keeping the same class. Some suffixes clearly signify nouns; once they occur at the end of any word refer to that kind of word class. Similarly, other suffixes occur to change the nouns into adjectives, for example the word *wonder* (n) becomes *wonderful* (adj), *interest* (n) becomes *interested* and so forth.

The presence of these suffixes at the end of words helps learners of language to easily recognize what part of speech they are and facilitate putting them in use. One point needs to be mentioned here is that English roots can accept more than one suffix in a time such as this word '*person-al-ity*' in which two suffixes are added to the word end to form a noun (Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989). Similarly, Arabic language is featured with the frequent occurrence of two basic forms of suffixes attached to the verbs and nouns or to both of them. Furthermore, this feature in Arabic allows up to three suffixes simultaneously to be added to the word stem. For instance, the word *fasqina* فاسقينا *'fa'* is a prefix attached to the verb *asfi* اسقى *'irregated'*, *na* نا is the first suffix functions as a subject, *kmu* كمو is the first object of the transitive verb *asfi* اسقى

'irregated' and 'h' is the second object. Some linguists state that this kind of complexity in the formation of Arabic words put its grammar, morphology and word inflections among the most difficult languages even for native speakers rather than other languages learners and speakers.

Another kind of suffixation is the plural morpheme such as the aforementioned verb 'يُضْرَبُ' *he quarrels*, if we changed the subject into 'they quarrel' *يُضْرَبُونَ* we find the suffix 'ون' *uun* is added to state plurality. It deserves noting here that plurals in Arabic are two, sound plural and broken plural. The former is the most common whereas the latter is less common. Sound plurality in Arabic is formed by adding 'ون' *uun* to the masculine or 'ات' *aat* to the feminine such as 'هم جالسون' *they (males) are sitting* and 'هن جالسات' *they (females) are sitting*. More details about plurality in both languages are considered in the next part. Another form of suffixation in Arabic is the dual formation such as 'two books' *بين كتابين* (accusative case) or *كتابان* (nominative case). The suffix *ein* *بين* and *aan* *ان* are attached to the end of nouns to form the duality and seen as more frequent kinds of affixation. Duality is one more peculiar characteristic of Arabic language because it is not found in other languages; this formulates a distinction between Arabic and English, and many other languages as well.

Other forms of affixation in Arabic are the possessive pronouns attached at the end of the names to refer ownership or property of this thing or item. For example, his house *بيته* *'beitahu* in which 'hu' is a suffix added to the name 'house' to be like this 'his house'. Another possessive pronoun used as a suffix is 'hum' as in *بيتهم* *'beitahum* means 'their house'. One more possessive pronoun is 'unn' which refers to that the owner is feminine not masculine as in *بيتهم* *'beitahunn*. Another kind is the 'tu', this suffix usually added to the verbs in the nominative case to prove that the speaker really did the action e.g. *كُتِبَ الدرس* 'I wrote the lesson'.

Plural as a Suffix in Arabic and English

I like to present plurality as a separate kind of suffixes for its enormous occurrences in both languages. Each of these languages deal with this type of affixes differently in spite of the considerable similarity between them regarding what might be called regular and irregular kinds of plural. The issue of plurality is more complicated in Arabic than it is in English, and talking about it in such a small area is not sufficient to cover its broad dimensions; even though, we will try to touch some aspects of relevance to the issue under studying in both languages. In Arabic, plurals are suffixes occurred and applied to a wide range of classes, human and inhuman; verbs and adjectives as well. They can be either sound or broken; the broken plural primarily involves internal modification of the singular stem e.g. *كنز* *kanzu* *كنوز* *kunuuz* 'treasure/pl. The sound plural is formed by suffixation of masculine +*uun* or feminine +*aat* to a usually unchanged stem. Let us start with the plurality in nouns and then move to verbs and adjectives subsequently. As we mentioned earlier noun plural can be either sound or broken but not both. An example of the sound plural is the word *لاعب* *'laa'ib* the plural *لاعبين* *'laa'been*, the plural in this noun is comprised by adding the suffix 'ين' *een* to form masculine gender, whereas, in the feminine 'ات' *aat* is added in the case of sound plural only, e.g. *لاعب* (female) *لاعبة* *'laa'betun*, pl *لاعبات* *'laa'bat* (Al-Galayani, 2011). We might notice here that to derive the feminine gender from masculine noun in Arabic we just need to add 'eh' (ة) and

this can be considered as one case of affixation (suffix) and a feature of single feminine gender; and to form the plural of feminine add 'ات' *aat* suffix. Another example, teacher *'mudarris* مدرس (male), feminine *'mudarrisa* مدرسة and *'mudaresuun* مدرسون (masculine pl) and *'mudarrisat* مدرسات (feminine pl) in which the suffix 'ون' *uun* denotes masculine plural and the suffix 'ات' *aat* denotes feminine plural as we mentioned above. One more suffix in Arabic nouns is the 'ي' *ey* this plural morpheme is added to the nouns at the word end in the nominative case like *اللاعبين* *الفريقين الى الملعب* 'اتي' *'la'abi* 'ي' is the suffix attached to the noun *لاعب*. This suffix can be replaced by another suffix 'و' *wa* in some nominative cases according to the Arabic parsing of word (noun) location in the sentence.

Moving on to the adjectives, Arabic adjectives are subject to the plurality phenomenon in contrast to English ones. These adjectives are pluralized in the same way as nouns. McCarthy and Prince (1999) declare that Arabic nouns and adjectives has a gender, they employ different inflectional suffixes to form the plurals and usually do not have any internal change. For example, the adj. *طيب* *'tayyib* for masculine singular, kind pl, *طيبون* *'tayyibuun*, the *ون* *uun* is suffixed here to refer masculine plurality. In the same way, feminine plurality is formed by attaching 'ات' *aat* to the end of an adjective as we have seen in nouns, e.g. *طيب* *'tayyib* *طيباتون* *'tayyibatun* (feminine) pluralized as *طيبات* *'tayyibaat* and so forth.

Verbs plurality is another major difference between Arabic and English in the sense that Arabic verbs can be pluralized whereas English cannot. English verbs can only be inflected by adding some suffixes to show tenses but not gender as is the case of Arabic. For example, the verb *يقطع* *'yaqta* can be suffixed by 'ون' *uun* to be 'they cut' *يقطعون* *'yaqta'uun*; here in the case of verbs, the feminine plural is formed by adding one letter 'ن' *na* like 'they cut' *يقطعن* *'yaqta'na*. One point deserves noting here is that the verb plural feminine suffix is not the same as that of nouns and adjectives; it is 'ات' *aat* in the case of nouns and adjective, whereas it is 'ن' *na* in verbs. The second type of plurals in Arabic is the broken plural. Al-Ghalayani (2011) states that forming the Arabic broken plural is due to the reduction of the letters of the language. Unlike the English irregular plural which rarely occurs, the Arabic broken plurals (irregular) are frequently and mostly used (Abu-Chacra, 2007). For example, the noun *رجل* *'rajul* (man), *رجال* *'rijaal* (men) is the broken plural; *نفس* *'nafs* (soul), *نفوس* *'nufiis* (souls). The plural in these two examples is formed by the infixation of 'aa' and 'uu' subsequently as we have stated in previous part (infixation). Whereas English proved not to possess any exact patterns for irregular plurals, Arabic has numerous strict rules to form this plural.

Plurality in English is not the same as Arabic. Yes there are some aspects of similarity but still there are distinctions. Plurality differs in that it can function only in nouns but no other parts of speech like that of Arabic. The English plural nouns are either regular or irregular (Azaar, 1999). The regular forms are more common than irregular. In regular forms the inflectional morphemes -s or -es are simply added to the singular noun. The ways which determine how these suffixes are attached to the end of names according to the ending letter of each noun need to be studied more thoroughly in other special derivational and inflectional studies. What concerns us here is that some nouns accept the morpheme -s such as *book* (sing), *kooks* (pl), while others -es like *box* (sing) *boxes* (pl). It is clear here that the plural

morphemes *-s* and *-es* are suffixes added to the end of the regular nouns to form plurality. Another point deserves mentioning is that the plural *-s* or *-es* can be attached to another prior suffix to form as second suffix e.g. weak-ness-es or work-er-s.

The second type of plurals is the irregular; this type is more complicated than regular one as it might employ morphemes other than *-s* or *-es*, internal stem changes and occasionally does not exhibit any suffix (Leiber, 2009). Usually these inflectional suffixes such as *-I*, *-ae*, *(r)en* are borrowed from other languages like Latin and Greek. They are employed in such examples: *mouse, mice; vertebra, vertebrae; child, children. etc.* One more point need to mention here, some nouns are originally plural like sheep and deer and others carry neither suffix nor vowels so they are treated as zero-suffix (Carstairs, 2002). In English the irregular form of plural is much more limited than is the case in Arabic language.

To summarize, plurals in Arabic and English are employed as a kind of affixation, both languages function regular (sound) and irregular (broken) plurality and use suffixes and/or infixes for it. Arabic differs in the enormous number of irregular plurals compared with English limited forms; and characterized in that it allows more parts of speech to be pluralized (affixed) such as adjectives and verbs, the feature that is absent in English language.

Conclusion

This paper is concerned mainly with the phenomenon of affixation in Arabic and English languages. Through this paper we have explored that there are numerous different forms of affixation in both Arabic and English languages. Yes, there are similarities in some features in terms of regular and irregular forms of plural affixation, yet still exist many differences. We have seen that there are no universal clear-cut rules for the employment of affixation phenomenon in both languages, rather each language sounds to be characterized by its peculiar way of affixation formation. Several distinguishing features of Arabic kinds of affixes have been illustrated in details with reference to, and contrast with, English counterparts as well. This paper has dealt with the data collected qualitatively and sorted out to meet the purpose of contrasting and exploring variations between languages. Through this contrastive analysis, it is discovered that there are numerous significant differences rather than similarities in terms of affixation in general and infixation in particular. Moreover, Arabic has some uniqueness in its plural affixes in relation to gender and regularity.

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