

# SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT IN ARABIC

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## **Abstract:**

Agreement in grammar refers to formal relationship between elements, whereby a form of one word conforms to the form of another. The preservation of agreement between a controlling phrase and a controlled phrase under various conditions provides a clear indication that agreement relations are sensitive to linear or directional properties, otherwise, we would expect agreement to be affected by word order changes.

In this paper I shall work on subject-verb agreement in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) whose rich inflectional agreement system is fascinating. I intend to examine its rich agreement patterns in the minimalist framework and find out the structural mechanism of the assignment system followed by a detailed study of the three phi- features in Arabic, i.e. person, number, and gender.

This paper will address the following issues of subject-verb agreement in Arabic: a) why the verb in VSO order does not show the person and number agreement and only shows gender agreement with the post-verbal subject and b) the ambiguity of the first person in Arabic that is unspecified.

## INTRODUCTION

Crystal (1995) defines agreement as a traditional term used in GRAMMATICAL Theory and description to refer to a formal relationship between elements, whereby a form of one word requires a corresponding form of another. The term CONCORD has been more widely used in linguistic studies, but in recent Generative Linguistics “Agreement” has resurfaced with a new range of application. In Government and Binding Theory, agreement marking (AGR) of person, gender or number in FINITE VERBS play an important role in Binding Theory and Case Theory. In Generalized Phrase-Structure Grammar, The Control Agreement Principle (CAP) is a semantically based principle governing the distribution of agreement marking.

As the language of the Holy Qura’an, poetry and literature, Classical Arabic (CA) has survived to the present. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it went through a process of revival, and developed into a linguistic medium appropriate for all areas of modern life. Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the official language of all Arab countries. MSA differs from CA only in vocabulary and stylistic features; the morphology and the basic syntactic norms have remained unchanged.

In this paper I shall work on Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) whose rich inflectional agreement system has fascinated us, to investigate and examine its rich agreement patterns with a view to finding out the structural mechanisms of the assignment of agreement systems operating in Arabic.

This paper will also be assigned to agreement in Arabic where we shall provide a theoretical account on agreement system followed by a detailed study of the three phi-features in Arabic, i.e. person, number, and gender. We shall also try to show the treatments of subject-verb agreement in the Minimalist framework. We shall also attempt to find out the impact of Arabic word order (VSO and SVO) variation on agreement mechanisms in Arabic.

According to the Arab grammarians, the verbal sentence plays a role in determining the agreement between the gender of the subject and the verb. That is, if the verb is masculine, the subject is masculine and vice versa. This happens when the verb precedes the subject. However, in a verbal sentence

the precedent verb is not only third person singular but commonly third masculine singular. The only situation when the verb must be third feminine singular (according to a dominant school of Classical Arabic grammarians) is where the subject is truly feminine and immediately follows the verb. This will be further elaborated below.

There were two schools of Arab grammarians, Basra and Kufa (both in Iraq), disagree on the issue of whether or not the subject can precede the verb. This shows that they have already identified in word order but in a descriptive and taxonomic manner. They have also noted cases where the normal word order is violated and have argued that other alternative orders are also possible in Arabic. On the other hand, they have not accounted for the reasons that make the speaker/writer of Arabic sometimes choose the SVO order rather than the VSO order (or the verbal-initial order). They have also not accounted for why the verb in VSO order cannot exhibit full agreement with its respective subject NP. They have explicitly distinguished “verbal”, or verb-initial sentences from “nominal”, or noun-initial sentences on the basis of word order. Al-jarim (1953: 347) states that “*al-jumla al-fi<sup>ʿ</sup>liyya ?asasu al-ta<sup>ʿ</sup>bi:r fi al-lugha al ʿarabiyya*” (the verbal’; sentence is the basis of expression in Arabic).

Furthermore, Modern Arab linguists have attempted to offer analyses on the subject. Hussein (1998: 45-64) points out that Arabic VSO order is the basis normal order whereas the SVO order is the derived order and emphasizes that the former is more preferred in Arabic than the latter. However, we argue, along the lines with Fassi Fehri (1989), Aoun et al. (1994), Ouhalla (1991), Koopman and Sporiche (1991), Benmamoun (1997) and (2000), Hussein (1998), among others, that Arabic underlying has SVO order while it has VSO order at the S-structure.

The early Arab grammarians have described and identified various constituents of the simple Arabic clause in diverse ways, using diverse terms, in such a way that some of these seem to overlap and some have different denotations, depending on the grammarians and the school he belongs to. To illustrate this issue, let us consider the following in (1):

- 1(a) kataba            zaid-un            qissat-an  
 wrote-3m.sg    zaid-nom        indef-story-acc  
 ‘Zaid wrote a story’.
- b.      zaid-un            kataba            qissat-an  
 Zaid-nom        wrote-3m.sg    indef.story-acc  
 ‘Zaid wrote a story’.

According to the grammarians of Basra school, the postverbal NP *Zaid* ‘Zaid’ in (1a) has a function which is different from the preverbal NP ‘Zaid’ in (1b). That is, the postverbal NP ‘Zaid’ in (1a) is assigned the function *fa:ʕil* ‘Agent’, whereas, the preverbal NP ‘Zaid’ in (1b) is given another distinct function, namely *mubtadaʕ* defined by Wright (1896: 251) as ‘that with which a beginning is made’ or “inchoative”. Basra grammarians argue that if a lexical NP (which control the phi-features of the verb endings, and is definite as well as in nominative case) precedes the verb and is placed sentence-initially that lexical NP is no longer called an ‘Agent’ but only “inchoative”; thus each having a different semantic function. However, when subject NPs occur sentence-initially, the ‘Agent’ is understood as an implicit pronoun cliticized to the verb. Once the sentence initial NP is recognized as the *mubtadaʕ* “inchoative”, the rest of the sentence functions as *Xabar* ‘announcement’ to the “inchoative”.

On the other hand, descriptive grammarians of the Kufa school emphasized that both the post- and preverbal NP *zaidun* ‘Zaid’ in (1a-b) have the same function and semantic denotation, namely *fa:ʕil* ‘Agent’ and *fa:ʕil muqaddam* ‘fronted Agent’ respectively (Aljarim 1953: 347; Ibn Hisham 1981: 136), among others.

In what follows we examine subject-verb agreement where the analysis covers the three phi-features in Arabic, i.e., person, number, and gender.

## SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT IN ARABIC

### 1. Person Agreement

Unlike English, person agreement is overtly shown in all pronouns

(i.e., in the first, second and third person). Moreover, distinction of person are usually marked in the verb and the associated pronouns (personal pronouns). Since we investigate person agreement in Arabic, we first examine the first person, then second and third person pronouns. We also shed some light on the inflectional suffixes, attached to the verbs, which may be involved in person agreement.

### Agreement in First Person Pronouns

The rich inflectional system of Arabic makes an apparent distinction between the first person masculine and feminine pronouns. To illustrate this, let us consider the following in (2):

- 2 (a) ?ana                      qatal-tu                      ?asad-an  
 I-1.m.sg.nom              killed-1.m.sg.              indef-lion-acc  
 ‘I (m) killed a lion’.
- (b) ?ana                      qatal-tu                      ?asad-an  
 I.1.f.sg.nom.              killed-1.f.sg              indef.lion-acc  
 ‘I (f) killed a lion’.
- (c) nahnu                      qatal-na                      ?asad-an  
 we.1.m.pl.nom              killed.1.m.pl              indef-lion-acc  
 ‘We (m) killed a lion.’
- (d) nahnu                      qatal-na                      ?asad-an  
 we.1.f.pl.nom              killed.1.f.pl              indef-lion-acc  
 ‘We (f) killed a lion.’

From the sentences in (2), we find that the first person pronouns in Arabic exhibit overt morphological markers attached to the verbs which agree with their subject pronouns. (2a, b) show that the suffix marker *-tu* can be used for both masculine and feminine singular pronoun *?ana* ‘I’ as it is unspecified for gender. In this case, the hearer can distinguish between male and female speaker. So, how to resolve this pronoun ambiguity? We propose that such pronoun ambiguity can be sorted out when the pronoun *?ana* ‘I’ is used in a phrase or a sentence in which the morphological marker is no longer suffixed or cliticized to the verb as in (3):

- 3 (a) ?ana                      tabi: b – un                      ma:hir-un

- I.m.sg      indef.physician.m.sg      indef-professional-m.sg  
 'I (m.sg) am a professional physician'.
- (b) ?ana      tabi:b -at-un      ma:hir-at-un  
 I.f.sg indef.physician.f.sg      indef-professional-f.sg  
 'I (f.sg) am a professional physician'.
- (c) nahnu      atibba:?- un      ma:hir-u:na  
 we.1.m.pl      indef-physicians.m.pl      indef.professional.m.pl  
 'We (m) are professional physicians'.
- (d) nahnu      tabi:b- a:t-un      mahir-a:t-un  
 we.1.f.pl      indef-physicians.f.pl      indef.professional.f.pl  
 'We (f) are professional physicians'.
- (3) shows a clear-cut distinction between masculine and feminine suffixes with regard to *?ana* 'I' and *nahnu* 'we'.

### Agreement in Second Person Pronouns

To illustrate how agreement is in second person pronouns, let us see the following in (4):

- 4 (a) ?anta      qatal-ta      ?asad-an  
 you.2.m.sg.nom      killed.2.m.sg      indef-lion-acc  
 'You (m.sg) killed a lion'.
- (b) ?anti      qatal-ti      ?asad-an  
 you.2.f.sg.nom      killed.2.f.sg      indef-lion-acc  
 'You (f.sg) killed a lion'.
- (c) ?antum      qatal-tum      ?asad-an  
 you.2.m.pl.nom      killed.2.m.pl      indef-lion-acc  
 'You (m.pl) killed a lion'.
- (d) ?antunna      qatal-tunna      ?asad-an  
 you.2.f.pl.nom      killed.2.f.pl      indef-lion-acc  
 'You (f.pl) killed a lion'.

The overt inflection suffixes show the apparent agreement in second person pronouns in (4). That is, (4a and b) exhibit complete agreement between the subject pronoun *?anta* 'you (m.sg)' and *?anti* 'you (f.sg)' and their suffix markers – *ta* and *ti* respectively (4c and d) indicate an overt

agreement in second person plural pronouns where the subject pronouns *?antum* ‘you (m.pl)’ and *?antunna* ‘you (f.pl)’ control agreement with the morphological markers – *tum* and –*tunna*.

### Agreement in Third Person Pronouns

In the agreement of third person pronouns Arabic exhibits a striking phenomenon in which a non-human third person singular pronoun can take the morpho-syntactic properties of the human third person singular pronoun *huwa* ‘he’. The same holds between *hiya* ‘she’ and non-human third person singular pronoun meaning ‘it’ in English. To illustrate this issue, let us consider the following in (5):

- 5 (a) *huwa*                      *qatal-a*                      *?asad-an*  
 he.3.m.sg.nom              killed.3.m.sg              indef.lion-acc  
 ‘He killed a lion’.
- (b) *ha:tha*              *huwa*              *hisa:n-i*,              *huwa*              *qatal-a*  
 this.m.sg              he              horse.my              he-3m.sg.nom              killed-m.sg.  
*?asad-an*  
 indef-lion-acc  
 ‘This is my horse. It killed a lion’.
- (c) *hiya*                      *qatal-at*                      *?asad-an*  
 she-3-f.sg.nom              killed.3f.sg                      indef-lion-acc  
 ‘She killed a lion’.
- (d) *hathihi*              *hiya*                      *siyya:rat-i*,              *hiya*  
 this.f.sg              she                      car-myshe.3.f.sg.nom  
*qatal-at*                      *?asad-an*  
 killed-3.f.sg              indef-lion-acc  
 ‘This is my car. It killed a lion’.
- (e) *hum*                      *qatal-u*                      *?asad-an*  
 they.m.pl.nom              killed-3-m.pl                      indef-lion-acc  
 ‘they (m.pl) killed a lion’.
- (f) *hunna*                      *qatal-na*                      *?asad-an*  
 they.f.pl.nom                      killed-3.f.pl                      indef.lion-acc

‘They (f.pl) killed a lion.’

(5a,b) show that third person singular subject pronoun *huwa* ‘he’, whether human or non-human is in agreement with the inflectional marker *-a* which is suffixed to the verb *qatal-a* ‘killed’. Thus, Arabic has no separate third person singular pronoun as in the English pronoun ‘*it*’; this is simply because Arabic has no neuter gender. (5c and d) are paralleled to (5a, b) but it has a slight different that is (5a,b) refers to third person masculine singular for both human and non-human and (5c, d) refers to third person feminine for both human and non-human. (5e and f) exhibit overt third person plural agreement. That is, (5e) indicates that the pronoun *hum* ‘they’ holds agreement with its morphological marker *-u* which is cliticized to the verb *qatal* ‘killed’. (5f) holds feminine plural agreement in which the third person feminine plural pronoun *hunna* ‘they’ (f.pl) controls agreement with the suffix *-na*. To clarify what we discussed above, let us select (5e and f) to be given in (6) for analysis:

- 6 (a) \**hum*                                  *qatal-na*                  ?*asad-an*  
           they.3m.pl                              killed-3.f.pl          indef.lion-acc  
           ‘They killed a lion.’
- (b) \**hunna*                                *qatal-u*                  ?*asad-an*  
           they.3.f.pl                                killed.3.m.pl                indef-lion-acc  
           ‘They killed a lion’.

The ungrammaticality of (6) can be explained in terms of the wrong choice of the inflectional suffix markers. That is, the third person feminine plural marker in (6a) cannot be used with a third person masculine plural pronouns in the subject position. The same is true with (6b). This evidence supports the analysis above that Arabic inflectional markers are strong enough to distinguish the third person pronouns in such a way that agreement is overtly shown.

## 2. Number Agreement

Arabic grammarians posit three numbers in Arabic: *mufrad* ‘singular’, *muθanna* ‘dual’, and *jamʕ* ‘plural’. However, the singular denotes one referent, the dual denotes two (exactly) and the plural refers to three or more. In what



follows, we seek to examine number agreement in Arabic, as follows:

## 2.1. The Singular Agreement

Singular agreement can be illustrated in (7):

- 7 (a) ?ana                      ba:hiθ-un  
I.1.m.sg.nom              indef-researcher.m.sg.nom  
'I am a researcher'.
- (b) hiya                      ba:hiθ-at-un  
she.3.f.sg.nom              indef.researcher.f.sg.nom  
'She is a researcher'.
- (c) ?anta              insa:n-un                      latif - un  
you.2m.sg.nom              indef-person-m.sg.nom              indef-kind.m.sg.nom  
'You (m.sg) are a kind person.'
- (d) ?anti                      insa:n-at-un                      latif-at-un  
you.2.f.sg.nom              indef-person-f.sg.nom              indef-kind.f.sg.nom  
'You (f.sg) are a kind person'

After examining the singular NPs in (7), we observe that they exhibit singular agreement. That is, the first singular masculine pronoun ?ana 'I' agrees in number with its complement predicate noun *ba:hiθ-un* 'researcher'. (7b) shows complete number agreement, the feminine singular pronoun *hiya* 'she' controls agreement with the feminine suffix *-at* which is cliticized in the complement noun *ba:hiθ-at* 'female researcher' (7c and d) indicate number agreement where the singular subject pronouns ?anta 'you (m)' and ?anti 'you' (f) hold agreement with their predicate nouns. To illustrate singular agreement, let us look at the following in (8):

- 8 (a) \*?antum              insa:n-un                      lati:f-un  
you-2m.pl              indef-person-2.sg.              indef-king-m.sg  
'You (m.pl) are a kind person'.
- (b) \*?antunna              insa:n-at-un                      lati:f-at-un  
you-2.f.pl              indef-person-2f.sg              indef-king-f.sg.  
'You (f.pl.) are a kind person.'

The ungrammaticality of both (8a and b) is that the plural subject pronouns

?*antum* ‘you’ (m.pl) and ?*antunna* ‘you’ (f.pl) respectively, cannot hold number agreement with the inflectional markers is the complements since such inflectional markers are all singular. Let us use the correct examples with ?*antum* ‘you’ (m.pl) and ?*antunna* ‘you’ (f.pl) as their respective subjects for the sake of comparison as illustrated in (9):

- 9 (a) ?*antum*                      ?*una:s-un*                      *lutafa:?-un*  
 you-2.m.pl.nom      indef-people-m.pl.nom      indef-kind-m.pl.nom  
 ‘You (m.pl) are kind people’.
- (b) ?*antunna*                      *niswat-un*                      *lati:fa:t-un*  
 you.2.f.pl.nom      indef-people.f.pl.nom      indef-kind-m.pl.nom  
 ‘You (f.pl) are kind people’.

Let us consider the following to examine singular agreement in nouns as illustrated in (10):

- 10 (a) *muthanna?*                      ?*ahbb-a*                      *al-sarf-a*  
 Muthanna-nom      liked-3.m.sg      def-morphology.acc  
 ‘Muthann liked morphology’
- (b) *fa:timat-un*                      ?*ahabb-at*                      *al-sarf-a*  
 Fa:tima-nom                      liked-3.f.sg      def-morphology-acc  
 ‘Fatima liked morphology’.
- (c) *al-tilfa:z-u*                      *baθθ-a*                      *barna:maj-an*  
 def-television-nom      transmitted.3m.sg.      indef.programme-acc  
 ‘The television transmitted a programme.’
- (d) *al-siyya:rat-u*                      *sa:r-at*                      *bi-sur<sup>ʔ</sup>at-in*  
 def-car.f.sg.nom.      went.f.sg      with.fast.gen  
 ‘The car went fast.’

Having observed (10) we find that in (10a) the morphological marker *-a* agrees with singular subject NP ‘Muthanna’. The same hold with (10b) but the only difference is being feminine. (10c) and (10d) refers to inanimate nouns where the subject NPs *al-tilfa:z* ‘television’ and *al-siyya:rat* ‘car’ respectively reflect singular agreement with the suffix markers realized as *-a* in (10c) and *-at* in (10d).

## 1.2.

## 1.2. The Dual Agreement

The richness of the Arabic inflectional system can be seen in its dual agreement system. Since a dual noun refers to exactly two referents, the inflections for the dual are *-ani* for the nominative and *-aini* of the accusative and genitive. In what follows, we examine dual agreement in nouns, pronouns, adjectives, demonstratives and verbs.

### 1.2.1. Dual nouns

To illustrate dual agreement in nouns, let us consider the following in (11):

- (11) (a) *al-kita:b-ani*                      *mufi:d-a:ni*  
 def-two books.m.d.nom    indef.useful.m.d.  
 ‘The two books are useful’.
- (b) *qara?a*                                      *zaid-un*                      *kita:b-aini*  
 read-3.m.sg                      Zaid.nom                      indef-two books.m.d.acc  
*mufid-aini*  
 indef-useful.m.d.acc  
 ‘Zaid read two useful books’.
- (c) *al-bint-a:ni*                                      *jami:l-at-a:ni*  
 def-two girls-f.d.nom                      indef-beautiful-f.d  
 ‘The two girls are beautiful’.
- (d) *zaid-un*                      *qa:bal-a*                      *al-bint-aini*                      *al-jami:l-at-aini*  
 Zaid-nom    met-3.m.sg    def-two girls.f.d.acc    def-beautiful-f-d.acc  
 ‘Zaid met the two beautiful girls’.

Dual agreement in nouns is apparently seen in (11a). The dual noun *al-kita:b-ani* ‘two book’, which is in nominative case, shows agreement in number with its complement *mufi:d-ani* ‘useful (m.d)’. (11b) shows the agreement in terms of dual number as that in (11a) but it has a slight difference in that the dual marker *-aini* cliticized in *kita:b-aini* ‘two books’ and *mufi:d-aini* ‘useful (m.d)’, indicates the accusative case – note that the NP *kitab-aini* *mufi:d-aini* ‘two useful books’ is the direct object of the verb *qara?a* ‘read’ in (11b). (11c) and (11d) illustrate that the animate dual NPs can be treated the same way as the inanimate dual NPs as given in (11a and b). That is the dual

subject NP *al-binta:ni* ‘the two girls’ controls dual agreement with the dual marker suffixed to the dual adjective *jami:lat-ani* ‘beautiful (f.d)’ in which case both dual markers *ani* indicate nominative Case. The same is true with (11d) but it is slightly different from (11c) in that the dual NP *al-bint-aini* ‘two girls’ occurs in the DO position as the dual suffix marker *-aini* denotes accusative Case.

### 1.2.2. Dual adjectives and Demonstratives

To illustrate dual adjectives, let us consider the following in (12):

- 12(a) al-kita:b-ani            al-qadi:ma-ani            ʔala    al-kurs-i  
 def-two books-m.d.nom    def-old.m.d.nom    on    def-chair-gen  
 ‘The old two books are on the chair’.
- (b) al-bint-a:ni                      al-jami:lat-ani                      fi    al-bayt-i  
 def-two girls-f.d.nom    def-beautiful-f.d.nom    in    def-house.gen  
 ‘The two beautiful girls are in the house.’

(12a) and (12b) exhibit overt dual adjectival agreement, that is, the qualifying adjectives modify their nouns and are in dual, definiteness and Case agreement with them. The masculine dual marker *-ani*, suffixed to the adjective *al-qadi:m-ani* ‘old (m.d)’, agrees with the head masculine dual noun. (12b) holds the same as that of (12a) but it is slightly different in that it has a feminine dual agreement. Since the feminine marker *-at* agrees with its head noun *al-bint-a:ni* ‘the two girls’. As we observe in (12), adjectives qualifying dual nouns are always in the animate plural forms. That is, an adjective (including a demonstrative) qualifying a dual noun is always in the animate plural form, even when the noun itself is inanimate as in (12a) above. The dual demonstrative agreement in Arabic is a reflex of its rich inflectional system. To shed more light on this, let us examine the following in (13):

- 13 (a) hatha:ni                                      al-rajul-a:ni  
 these two m.d-nom    def-two men.m.d.nom  
 al-hindiyy-ani  
 def.two Indians-m.d.nom  
 ‘These are the two Indian men’.
- (b) hat-a:ni                                      al-bint-a:ni                                      al-hindiyy-at-a:ni

these two.f.d.nom def.two girls-f.d.nom def-two Indians-f.d.nom  
 ‘These are the two Indian girls’.

(13a) and (13b) exhibit-overt dual demonstrative agreement to the dual demonstrative markers *hatha:ni* and *hata:ni* trigger dual agreement with their following head nouns. The difference between(13a) and (13b) is that of gender.

### 1.1.3 The Dual Agreement in Pronouns

The second and third independent pronouns are made dual by the addition of *-a* to the masculine plural forms: *?antum-a* ‘you’ (d.m/f)’ and *hum-a* ‘they (d.m/f.)’. There are, however, no first person dual forms. The dual pronouns show no distinction in gender or Case. To illustrate dual agreement in terms of pronouns, let us consider the following in (14)

- 14 (a) *?antum-a*                      *talib-a:ni*  
 you.m.d.nom                      indef-two students.m.d.nom  
*thakiyy-a:ni*  
 indef-intelligent.m.d.nom  
 ‘You (m.d) are (two) intelligent students’.
- (b) *?antum-a*                      *talib-at-a:ni*                      *thakiyy-at-a:ni*  
 you.d.f.nom    indef-two students-f.d.nom    indef-intelligent-f.d.nom  
 ‘You (f.d) are (two) intelligent students’.
- (c) *huma*                              *wazi:r-ani*  
 they.m.d.nom                      indef-two ministres.m.d.nom  
*yamaniyy-a:ni*  
 indef(two) Yemenis-m.d.nom  
 ‘They (m.d.) are (two) Yemeni ministers’.
- (d) *huma*                              *wazi:r-at-a:ni*  
 they.f.d.nom                      indef-two ministers.f.d.nom  
*yamaniyy-at-a:ni*  
 indef.(two) Yemenis-f.d.nom  
 ‘They (f.d) are (two) ‘Yemeni ministers’

The dual pronouns in (14) show markers *-ani* for dual masculine and *-at-ani* for dual feminine, which are cliticized in the complements, reflect

dual agreement with the dual subject NPs. (14a & b) refer to the second independent dual pronoun *?antuma* ‘You (m.d.f.d), regardless of gender. (14c&d) denote third dual pronoun whether it is masculine or feminine.

#### 1.1.4. Dual of Verbs

The inflectional marker of the dual in verbs is *-a*. There are only three duals in verbs: Second person (masculine or feminine), third person masculine and third person feminine. In what follows, we will investigate dual agreement in verbs where the analysis covers both the perfect and the imperfect tense.

##### (a) The Perfect Tense

As the perfect tense in Arabic denotes a finished action, the dual suffix *-a* is added to the singular of the third person forms as it is illustrated in the following table in which illustrative sentences are given:

Third person singular verb-forms of *daras* ‘to study’ in the perfect tense

Third person	Masculine	Feminine
Singular	daras-a ‘he studied’	daras-at ‘she studied’
Dual	daras-a ‘they (d) studied’	daras-at-a ‘they (d) studied’

But it is added to the masculine plural of the second person, for both genders as in (15):

- 15 (a) *daras-tum* (plural masculine)  
studied-you.m.pl.nom  
‘You studied’.
- (b) *daras-tuma* (masculine/feminine dual)  
studied-you.d.nom  
‘You (two) studied’

The following table summarizes the perfect dual

	Pronoun	Verb	Gloss
3m.	<i>huma</i>	<i>daras-a</i>	They (two) studied

3f.	huma	daras-at-a	They (two) studied
	?antuma	daras-tuma	You (two) studied

### (b) The Imperfect Tense

Arabic verbs have two stems: a perfect stem used only in perfect-tense verbs, and an imperfect stem used in the jussive (and also in the imperfect indicative, subjunctive, and imperative). This will be illustrated in the following table.

Dual Pronoun	Indicative	Subjunctive	Jussive
3m. huma 'they (two)'	yadrus-a:ni 'they (two) study'	yadrus-a 'they (two) study'	yadrus-a 'they (two) study'
3f. huma 'they (two)'	tadrus-a:ni 'they (two) study'	tadrus-a 'they (two) study'	tadrus-a 'they (two) study'
2 ?antuma 'You (two)'	tadrus-a:ni 'You (two) study'	tadrus-a 'you (two) study'	tadrus-a 'you (two) study'

It is observed that the second person is identical to the third person feminine dual. The dual verb is used only when a dual subject (human or non-human) has already been mentioned or referred to. Consider the following in (16):

- 16 (a) *ijtimaʕa al-qaʕid-a:ni* (VSO order)  
*met-m.sg def-two leaders.m.d.nom*  
 'The two leaders met'.
- (b) *al-qaʕid-a:ni ijtimaʕa* (SVO order)  
*def-two leaders.m.d.nom met.m.d.*  
 'The two leaders met'.

### 1.2. The Plural Agreement

Like English, Arab grammarians points out that Arabic has various ways of making nouns plural. Most nouns in English, for instance, are made plural by the plural suffix spelled *s*, or *es* as in *cat: cats*, *pig: pigs* and *class: classes*. Other devices are: special suffixes, as in *ox: oxen*, vowel change, as in *man: men*; combination of vowel change and suffix as in *child/children*;

or none at all as in *sheep: sheep*. However, Arabic plurals, whether nouns or adjectives, are formed by adding special suffixes as in *muʿallimun* ‘teacher’: *muʿallimu:na* ‘teachers’ *mashhurun* ‘famous’: *mashhuru:na* and by vowel change as in *ta:libun* ‘student’: *tullabun* ‘students’, *jadidun* ‘new’: *jududun* ‘new (pl)’, or combination of vowel change and suffix as in *?usta:thun* ‘professor’ and *?asa:tithatun* ‘professors. Arabic plurals formed by means of vowel change (with or without suffixes are called ‘external’ or “sound plurals”. Sound plurals are of two kinds masculine and feminine. We examine agreement in both “sound plurals” (m and f) and ‘broken plural’. Let us consider the following in (17):

- 17 (a) *al-mudarris-una*                      *daxal-u*                      *al-madrasat-a*  
 def-teachers.m.pl.nom    entered.they.m.pl.nom    def.school.acc  
 ‘The teachers entered the school’.
- (b) *ha:?aula:?i*    *mudarris-a:t-un*                      *nashit-a:tun*  
 those-pl    indef-teachers.f.pl.nom.    indef-active-f.pl.nom  
 ‘Those female teachers are active’.

We observe that (17a) shows overt “Sound plural” agreement in which the overt inflectional masculine plural suffix *-una* reflects masculine plural agreement with the morphological marker *-u* attached to the verb *daxl-u* ‘entered-they’. The same is seen in (17b) but it is slightly different in that the suffix marker *-atun* indicates feminine sound plural which is in agreement with its adjective *nashitatum* ‘active’.

Broken plurals of nouns and adjectives are derived from their singular forms by internal vowel changes (like English *foot: feet*) and in some cases by the doubling of a consonant or the addition of a prefix or suffix as well. To illustrate “broken plurals” agreement, consider the following in (18):

- 18 (a) *ha:?ula:?i*    *?asdiqa:?-un*                      *qudama:?-un*  
 these-pl    indef-friends.m.pl.nom    indef-old.pl.nom  
 ‘These are old friends.’
- (b) *nisa:?-un*                      *jamila:t-un*                      *fi al-bayt-i*  
 indef-women.f.pl.nom    indef-beautiful.f.pl.nom    in def-house-gen  
 ‘Beautiful women are in the house.’



(18) exhibits overt “broken plural” agreement in which the plural inflectional markers in (18a) and (18b) suffixed to the adjectives *qudama:ʔun* ‘old’ and *jam:ilatun* ‘beautiful’ respectively agree with their head nouns. The following table shows some ‘broken plurals’:

Singular	Plural	Gloss
Rajulun	Rija:lun	Man
Xabarun	ʔaxba:run	News
Kita:bun	kutubun	Book
Sadi:qun	ʔasdiqa:ʔun	Friend

### 3. GENDER AGREEMENT

The terms given by the Arab grammarians to the two genders of Arabic are *muthakkar* ‘masculine’ and *muʔannath* ‘feminine’.

In what follows, we discuss agreement in personal/independent pronouns and in nouns.

#### 3.1 Gender Agreement in Personal Pronouns

To illustrate gender agreement in pronouns, let us consider the following in (19):

- 19 (a) huwa                      katab-a                      risa:lat-an  
 he-3.m.sg.nom      wrote-3m.sg              inde-letter-acc  
 ‘He wrote a letter’.
- (b) hiya                      katab-at                      risa:lat-an  
 she-3.f.sg.nom      wrote-3f.sg              inde-letter-acc  
 ‘She wrote a letter’.
- (c) ha:thihi      siyya:r-at-i,      hiya                      fa:zat  
 this.f.sg      car-myshe.3.f.sg.nom      won-3.f.sg  
 fi      al-siba:q-i  
 in      def-race-gen  
 ‘This is my car. It won the rally’.
- (d) ʔanta              katab-ta                      risa:lat-an  
 you.2.m.sg.nom      wrote.2.m.sg              indef-letter-acc

'You (m.sg) wrote a letter'.

- (e) ?anti                      katab-ti                      risa:lat-an  
 you.2.f.sg.nom      wrote.2.f.sg                      indef-letter-acc

'You (f.sg) wrote a letter'.

- (f) ?ana                      katab-tu                      risa:lat-an  
 I.1.m.sg.nom      wrote.1.m.sg                      indef-letter-acc

'I (m) wrote a letter'.

- (g) ?ana                      katab-tu                      risa:lat-an  
 I.1.f.sg.nom wrote.1.f.sg                      indef-letter-acc

'I (f) wrote a letter'.

(19) shows overt morphological gender agreement in singular personal pronouns. In (19a) the third person singular pronoun *huwa* 'he' holds agreement in gender, number and person with the inflectional suffix *-a* cliticized to the verb *katab* 'wrote'. the same holds in (19b) where *hiya* 'she' controls overt agreement with the inflectional marker *-at*. (19c) refers to an inanimate object, yet the subject pronoun *hiya* 'she' agrees with its morphological suffix *-at*. (19d) and (19e) on the other hand exhibit overt agreement where the pronoun *?anta* 'you' triggers singular masculine agreement with its verb-ending *-ta* which is suffixed to the verb *katab* 'wrote'. In (19e) the second feminine singular *?anti* 'you' agrees with the inflectional ending *ti* (19f and g) shows that the subject pronoun *?ana* 'I' can be used for both the first person masculine and feminine singular, in both situations *?ana* does agree with the same morphological marker *-u*, it depends on the speaker. Let us move to the plural pronouns to illustrate gender agreement as in (20):

- 20 (a) hum                      katab-u                      risa:lat-an  
 They.3.m.pl.nom      wrote.3.m.pl.                      indef-letter-acc

'They (m) wrote a letter'.

- (b) hunna                      katab-na                      risa:lat-an  
 they.3.f.pl.nom      wrote.3.f.pl.                      indef-letter-acc

'They (f) wrote a letter'.

- (c) ?antum                      katab-tum                      risa:lat-an

- |     |                           |               |                  |
|-----|---------------------------|---------------|------------------|
|     | you.2.m.pl.nom            | wrote-2.m.pl. | indef-letter-acc |
|     | 'You (m) wrote a letter'. |               |                  |
| (d) | ?antunna                  | katab-tunna   | risa:lat-an      |
|     | you.2.f.pl.nom            | wrote-2.f.pl. | indef-letter-acc |
|     | 'You (f) wrote a letter'. |               |                  |
| (e) | nahnu                     | katab-na      | risa:lat-an      |
|     | we.1.m.pl.nom             | wrote-1.m.pl. | indef-letter-acc |
|     | 'We (m) wrote a letter'.  |               |                  |
| (f) | nahnu                     | katab-na      | risa:lat-an      |
|     | we.1.f.pl.nom             | wrote-1.f.pl. | indef-letter-acc |
|     | 'We (f) wrote a letter'.  |               |                  |

(20a-f) exhibit overt gender agreement. (20a) shows masculine plural agreement between the pronoun *hum* 'they' and its morphological suffix *-u* (20b) denotes a feminine plural agreement as the subject pronoun *hunna* 'they' and the inflectional suffix *-na* control gender agreement. In (20c) the inflectional marker *-tum* is in agreement with the masculine subject NP *?antum* 'you'. The plural feminine pronoun *?antunna* 'you' holds agreement with the suffix *-tunna*. Like (19f and g) above, (20e and f) shows the same, where the plural subject pronoun *nahnu* 'we' is in gender agreement with its morphological suffix *-na* which is attached to the verb *katab* whether it is in masculine or feminine.

Now we will discuss gender agreement in the dual pronouns as it is in (21):

- |        |                                |            |                   |
|--------|--------------------------------|------------|-------------------|
| 21 (a) | ?antuma                        | katab-tuma | risa:lat-an       |
|        | you.m.d.nom                    | wrote-m.d. | indef-letters-acc |
|        | 'You (two m) wrote a letter'.  |            |                   |
| (b)    | ?antuma                        | katab-tuma | risa:lat-an       |
|        | you.f.d.nom                    | wrote-f.d. | indef-letters-acc |
|        | 'You (two f) wrote a letter'.  |            |                   |
| (c)    | huma                           | katab-a    | risa:lat-an       |
|        | they.m.d.nom                   | wrote-m.d. | indef-letters-acc |
|        | 'They (two m) wrote a letter'. |            |                   |

- (d) huma katab-at-a risa:lat-an  
 they.f.d.nom wrote-f.d. indef-letters-acc  
 ‘They (two f) wrote a letter’.

(21a-d) exhibit gender agreement in dual pronouns. (21a and b) show that, the verb suffixes and the subject pronoun look the same.

### 3.2 Gender Agreement in Nouns

We noted that Arabic nouns have two gender: masculine and feminine. That is, if the noun refers to an animate being, then its gender agrees with the natural gender of the referent. To illustrate gender agreement in nouns, let us see the following sentences in (22):

- 22 (a) darrasa al-mudarris-u al-nahw-a  
 taught-3.m.sg def-teacher.3.m.sg.nom def-syntax-acc  
 ‘The teacher (m) taught syntax.’
- (b) darras-at al-mudarris-at-u al-nahw-a  
 taught-3.f.sg def-teacher.3.f.sg.nom def-syntax-acc  
 ‘The teacher (f) taught syntax.’
- (c) saqat-a al-ba:b-u  
 Fell.3.m.sg def-door.3.m.sg.nom  
 ‘The door fell’.
- (d) saqat-at al-zuja:j-at-u  
 fell.f.sg def-glass.f.sg.nom  
 ‘The glass fell’.

(22a-d) exhibit overt gender agreement between the gender of the subject NPs and its respective suffix attached to each verb. Thus, (22a) shows that the masculine singular subject *al-mudarrisu* ‘the male teacher’ agrees in gender with its verb *darras* ‘taught’. In (22b) the subject NP triggers gender agreement with its verb inflectional marker *-at*. The same of inanimate nouns, (22c and d) show gender agreement between the gender of the subject NP and its verb ending. That is, the masculine subject NP *al-ba:b-u* ‘door’ agrees in gender with its respective verb ending suffix *-a* in *saqata* ‘fell’. (22d) exhibits feminine singular agreement between the subject NP *al-zuja:jat-u* ‘the glass’ and morphological marker *-at* suffixed in *saqatat* ‘fell’.

#### 4. Subject Verb Agreement and the Minimalist Approach

This section attempts to analyze subject-verb agreement in Arabic within the assumptions of the Minimalist framework. It provides a brief survey of the parametric treatments of subject verb agreement followed by a Minimalist account of the same. Due to parametric variations in human languages, Ouhalla (1988c) indicates that the order of 1-element (TNS, AGR, NEG) varies from one language group to another. In Arabic, for instance, the order of TNS and AGR differs from that of English. That is, AGR appears inside TNS in Arabic, whereas it appears outside TNS in English. To illustrate the issue, let us consider the following in (23):

(23)    *sa*            *ya*            *nshur-u*    *zaid-un*    *kita:b-an*  
           will (TNS)        3m.sg(AGR-Publish)    Zaid-nom    indef-book-acc  
           ‘Zaid will publish a book’.

(23) shows that the TNS marker *sa* ‘will’ precedes the AGR marker *ya*. The fact that in Arabic TNS appears outside AGR will follow if the verbal complex is assumed to derive from an underlying structure such as (23) where TNS is higher than AGR. In this respect, languages tend to divide into two typological groups depending on whether AGR is inside or outside TNS Ouhalla 1991: 105).

However, Benmamoun (1989) has pointed out that in negative clauses in Arabic tense is realized on the NEG element, while the AGR element appears attached to the verb. This is shown in (24):

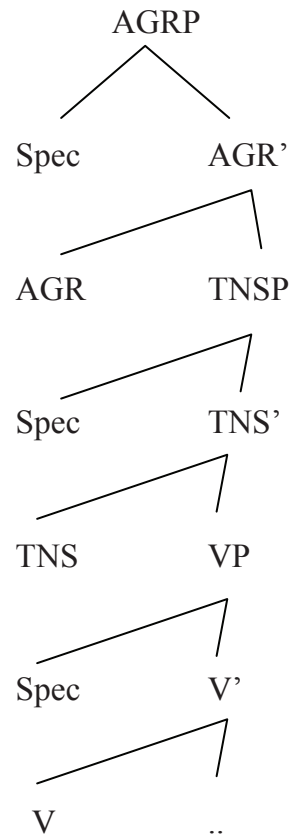
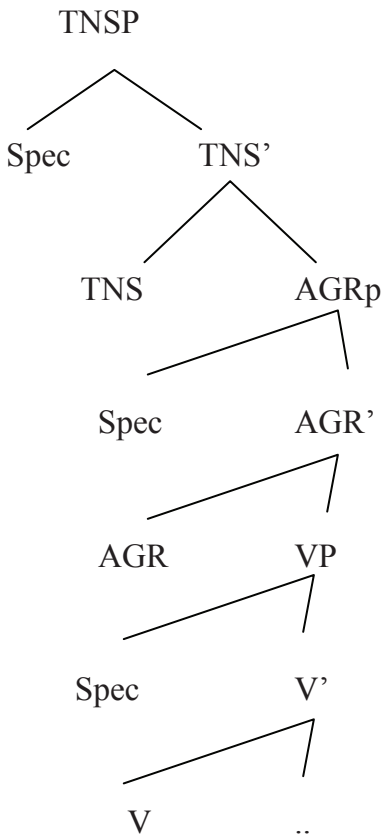
(24)    *al-ʔawlad-*        *lam*            *ya-thhabu:*  
           def-boys-nom    NEG-past (TNS)    Imperf. (AGR)-go-3.pl-AGR  
           ‘The boys did not go’.

Thus, the correlation drawn between the order of AGR/TNS and the order of the subject can be expressed in a generalization that in VSO languages AGR is inside TNS, while in SVO language AGR is outside TNS. Ouhalla (1991: 113) argues that in the first language group, TNS C-selects AGR while in the second language group AGR C-selects TNS. on this basis, Ouhalla formulates the AGR/TNS parameter as in the following in (25):

- 25 (a) TNS C-select AGR  
 (b) AGRC-select TNS

(25) yields (26a), while (25b) yields (26b)

- 26(a) (26b)



According to Ouhalla (ibid), languages which have structure (26a) are referred to as TNS-initial language and to languages which have structure (26b) as AGR-initial languages. Moreover, TNS-initial languages tends to have the verb in the initial position, AGR-initial languages tends to have the subject in the initial position.

On the other hand Benmamoun (2000) views the agreement asymmetries in Arabic as one of the long standing puzzles in Standard Arabic. That is, agreement between the verb and subject in Standard Arabic varies according to the word order. When the subject follows the verb, the latter carries person and gender agreement only, we refer to this as partial agreement. This is illustrated in (27):

### Partial Agreement (Person and gender) in the VSO Order

- 27 (a) katab-at                      al-ta:liba:t-u  
       write.3.f.sg                def-students.f.pl.nom  
       ‘The students wrote’.
- (b) \*katab-na                    al-ta:liba:t-u  
       write.3.f.pl.                def-students.f.pl.nom  
       ‘The students(f) wrote’.

When the subject preceded the verb, the latter carries all features: number, person and gender, we refer to this as full agreement. This is illustrated in (28):

### Full agreement (person, gender and number) in the SVO order

- 28 (a) al-ta:liba:t-u                      katab-na  
       def-students.f.pl.nom            wrote.3.f.pl  
       ‘The students (f) wrote’.

Benmamoun (2000) raised a question that says ‘why number agreement does not surface in the VSO order with an overt subject?’ He answered this question by arguing that the suffix is absent because at the point of spell-out, the verb does not carry the (plural) number feature for various syntactic reasons. The answer of this question must be in terms of how morphosyntactic features are spelled-out in the morphology. The answer suggested assumes that the verb always carries plural agreement features when the subject is plural.

In Minimalist program (terms), one could capitalize on the weak versus strong feature specification to account for the correlation between a particular agreement pattern and word order. For example, in Modern Standard Arabic, the partial agreement could be capitalized as a weak feature, while full

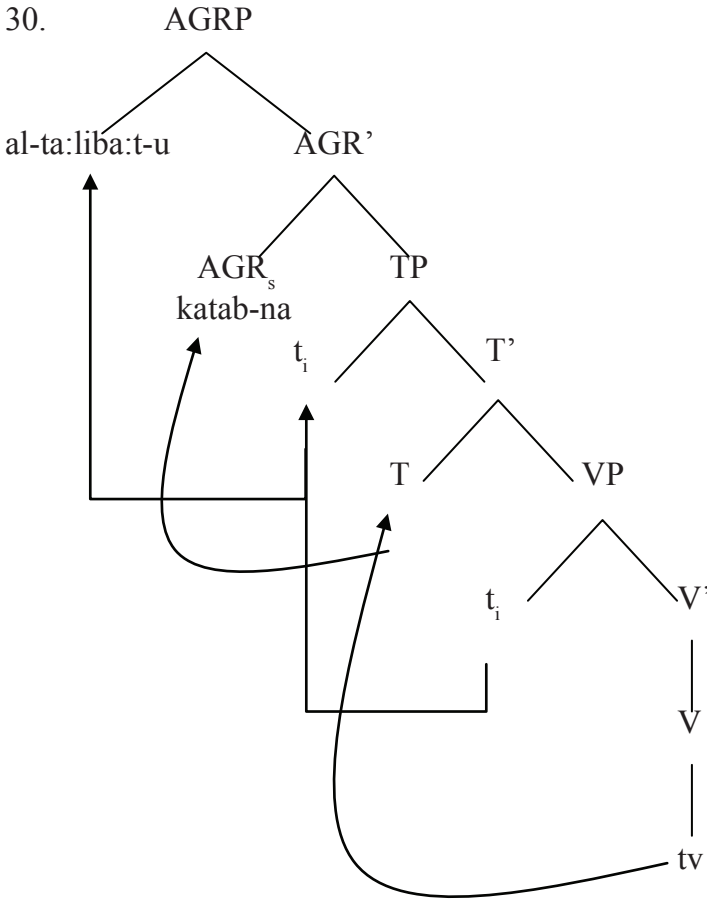
agreement could be capitalized as a strong feature. This can be shown in (29):

29 (a)  $V_s + \text{AGR}_{[\text{weak}]}$       Subject<sub>pl</sub>      (VSO)

(b) Subject<sub>pl</sub>       $V_{pl} + \text{AGR}_{[\text{strong}]}$       (SVO)

Consequently, the fact that full agreement obtains in the SVO order could be attributed to the requirement that strong features must be checked overtly, a situation that presumably obtains in the SVO order but not in the VSO order.

This is illustrated in (30) and (31):



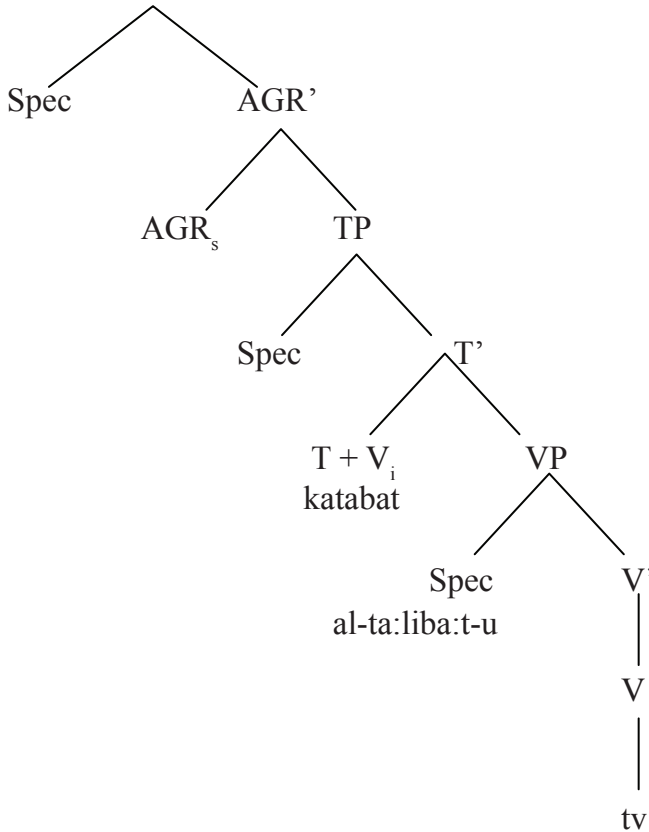
In (30) the SVO order (full agreement) is accounted for by the assumptions that AGR is strong, thereby the subject moves overtly upward from its base-position (Spec-VP) to (spec TP) and then to (Spec-AGRP) to check its features. At the same time the verb moves up through head to head movement from its base-position dominated by V to the head T and ends up at the head



AGR<sub>s</sub> where the verb enter into spec-head relationship with the subject that has already substituted in the spec of AGR.

VSO is another pattern of word order in (MSA) which shows up the partial agreement that illustrated in (31):

31. AGRP



In (31), the VSO order (partial agreement) is accounted for by the assumption that AGR is weak, therefore it can not attract the subject that remains in-situ, in its base-position (spec-VP). In order to satisfy the requirement of the word order VSO, the verb moves past the subject to the head T and then to the head AGR at the moment of Spell-out. So, in order to check the AGR features, the subject has to play its role through LF raising, or the verb cannot check strong features (full, AGRS) before it raises past the subject.

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