

PATTERNS OF REPETITION IN ARABIC FORCED BY MORPHOLOGY WITH REFERENCE TO ARABIC-ENGLISH TRANSLATION

ABDULLAH TALAL SHUNNAQ
Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan

I. Introduction

I will use the phrase 'Repetition Forced by Language' to refer to the repetition given by language¹ (i.e. built in the Arabic system) which is used automatically by language producers. Some linguistic studies consider this type of repetition as a 'redundancy' of language. It is safe to assume that this category is more prevalent in Arabic than in English and that it is more used in spoken than in written discourse². It is hoped that our examples will shed some light on the above assumption, irrespective of the fact that these examples are only based on written texts of selective kinds³ (no statistical analysis is attempted). It goes without saying that this type of repetition is used without choice, i.e. the language producer has no choice but using it. For instance, in conversations; impromptu speeches, telephone exchanges, informal chats, etc. much of the repetition might be of the type given by language and the language producer uses it as part of the language system without much intention. In linguistics, morphology is usually defined as the branch of grammar which studies the forms, structure, and word-classes. As for Arabic grammar, it emphasizes morphological structures as a basis for verb-classification⁴.

¹ This type of repetition is categorizable into: (a) Patterns of repetition forced by morphology; and (b) Patterns of repetition forced by syntax.

² See examples given below in this paper, and also compare the source language (Arabic) with the target language (English).

³ In our quest for representative examples of repetition forced by Arabic language, we examined a set of political speeches, delivered by Arab leaders or diplomats, mainly at the United Nations.

⁴ There are fifteen forms of Arabic verbs derived from the basic trilateral root (ف), (ع) and (ل). We have the following forms:

I. fa^cala, fa^cula, fa^cila.
II. fa^{cc}ala

III. fa^cala
IV. 'af^cala

2. *Feminine singular (inanimate)*

(5) **bi-raghm hādhih al-ṣūra al-ḥālika wa-bi-raghm al-waḍḍ al-ma'sāwī al-muḥzin...**

(5) Despite *this bleak picture* and despite the tragic situation of...

Here, the demonstrative *hādhih* and the adjective *ḥālika* are in gender (fem.) and number (sing.) agreement with the modified noun *ṣūra* (fem. sing. inanimate)⁹.

3. *Masculine dual (inanimate)*

(6) **wa-ʿaradnā ʿalaihīm fikrat liqāʾ al-wafd al-mushtarak waʾ l-khaṭwatāin al-tāliyyatāin al-mutaratibatain ʿalā liqāʾ al-ḥiwār.**

(6) and presented them [the American officials] with the idea of meeting the joint delegation in preparation for the *next* two steps *which would follow as a result* of the meeting's dialogue.

In this example, the dual morpheme *-ain* is repeated three times as a result of gender-number agreement. These morphemes are usually attached to nouns in the genitive or the accusative case.

4. *Masculine dual (animate)*

(7) **wa-min hunā fa-inna bilādī tataṭallaʿ bi-kull amal ilā al-ijtimāʿ al-murtaqab baina al-zaʿimain al-kabirain, Runāld Rijan wa-Mikhaīl Ghurbāt-shūf, rājiya li-ijtimāʾihima kull taufiq wa-najāḥ.**

(7) consequently, my country looks forward with great hope to the forthcoming meeting between the *two great leaders*, Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, and it wishes their meeting every success and luck.

In this example, the dual morpheme *-ain* is repeated twice as a result of number-gender agreement between the modified noun *al-zaʿimain* (masc. dual) and the modifier *al-kabirain* (adj. masc. dual.)

5. *Masculine plural (inanimate)*

(8) **kamā annanā najid anfanā fi khiyār baina misdāqiyyat wa-faʿ bliyyāt Majlis al-amn wa-baina ittikhadh al-ijraʾāt al-faʿala waʾl-darūriyya li-waqf al-ʿudwān wa-tahqīq al-silm fi manṭiqat al-khalij.**

(8) we find ourselves facing a choice: we can either do harm to the credibility and effectiveness of the Security Council, or take *the necessary effective measures* to put an end to the aggression and achieve peace in the gulf Region.

6. *Feminine plural (inanimate)*

(9) **wa-li-dhālika fa-inna tilka al-siyāsāt waʾl-mumārasāt al-mutasalliba al-ʿanīda hiya al-masʿūla ʿan tadāhwur al-audāʿ wa-tafaqum al-azma ilā tilka al-ḥudūd al-khaṭira.**

(9) Therefore, their *stubborn and arrogant policies* and practices are responsible for the deterioration of the situation and the exacerbation of the crisis to its present dangerous levels.

7. *Feminine plural (animate)*

(10) **iltaqait bi-cadad min al-ḥlibHt al-ʿArabiyyHt al-FilisviniyyHt qabla usbūʿ.**

(10) I met a number of *Palestinian Arab students* (female) a week ago.

8. *Masculine plural (animate)*

(11) **fa-qad dabbarat majmuʿa min al-masʿūlin al-ʿaskariyyin al-Amrikiyyin fi Majlis al-Amn al Qawmī...**

(11) A group of *American army officers* within the National Security Council has arranged...

There is a repetition of the three plural morphemes created by the number-gender agreement in this example. The morpheme is *-in* suffixed to nouns in the genitive case.

(B) *Verb Agreement*

Having listed some examples of adjectives in agreement in section (A) above, in which there are various morphological types of repetition caused by number-gender-case agreement, I shall now turn to consider verb agreement. I attempt, in this paper, to make the following points, which involve some rules regarding singular verbs with singular and plural adjectives.

1. *Singular verbs agree with singular and plural subjects, as in:*

(12) **Yumārisu al-Filistīnī ḥaqqah**

(12) the Palestinian exercises his right and:

(13) **Yumārisu al-Filistīnīyy ūn ḥaqqahum**

(13) the Palestinians exercise their right.

And now let us consider some condition where the subject comes after the verb. A singular verb agrees with a singular subject even when the subject comes after the verb, e.g.

(14) **al-Filistīnī yumārisu ḥaqqah**

(14) the Palestinian exercises his right.

However, the verb becomes plural if it comes after a plural subject, as in:

⁹ There is no difference in morphological agreement if the modified noun is animate.

(15) al-Filistīniyyūn yumarisūna haqqahum**(15) the Palestinians exercise their right.**

2. *The verb in a clause (containing predicate with a noun subject) is always in the third person, as in:*

- a) *yumārisu al-Filistīnī haqqah* -3rd person sing. masc.
- b) *tumārisu al-Filistīniyya haqqahā* -3rd person sing. fem.
- c) *yumārisu al-Filistīniyyūn haqqahum* -3rd person pl. masc.
- d) *tumārisu al-Filistīniyyāt haqqahunna* -3rd person pl. fem.

3. If the subject of a clause is masculine, the verb is always masculine, as in (a) and (c) above.

4. If the subject is feminine and adjacent to the verb or to its pronominal enclitic, the verb is always feminine, as in examples (16) and (17) below:

(16) tumārisu al-Filistīniyyāt haqqahunna**(16) the Palestinians (fem. pl.) exercise their right.****(17) tumārisuhā al-Filistīniyya****(17) the Palestinian (fem. sing.) exercises it.**

Before concluding this section, we may support the above discussion on gender-number agreement in Arabic by citing the summary of J. Stetkevych (1970: 95 f.) regarding this grammatical device:

There is a clear trend in Modern Arabic toward a simplification and standardization of the gender-agreement between verb and noun in sentences where the verb precedes the noun. A grammatically masculine nouns produces a masculine gender agreement of the verb, and a feminine noun a corresponding feminine agreement. Masculine broken plurals, too, agree in gender with preceding verbs. Thus whereas a classical author writes *wa rubbamā taṭrabu 'ila aklihā al-muluku* (and often kings are delighted to eat them), a modern writer would almost invariably say *yaṭrabu al-mulūku*.

III. Repetition Created by 'Definiteness' and 'Indefiniteness'

In this sub-section, I shall attempt to sort out this point by:

- (1) Using Beeston's discussion to make the point that Arabic may use the definite article for cases which would be expressed in English by either zero marker (∅)¹⁰ or definite marker.
- (2) Pointing to definition/indefiniteness of adjectives in Arabic, contrasted with English.

¹⁰ This is a recognized marker symbol in Linguistics.

- (3) Noting that English uses one definite or indefinite marker to cover a succeeding list of items.

A.F.L. Beeston discusses definition in Arabic, contrasting it to that in English. He points out that the Arabic definite article *al* has two distinct functions: the particularizing one, and the generalizing one. Whereas the English contrast between 'a' and 'the' is a contrast in the relevancy of individualization, the Arabic contrast between the article and zero marking is one of unambiguousness versus ambiguousness¹¹. So, for instance, *al-qarya* (the village) could be expressed in English by zero marker or the definite marker 'the'. In Arabic, the definite article *al* is a morphological marker which is prefixed to common nouns (as in *al-qadiyya* 'the problem') and adjectives (as in *al-^cIādila* 'the just' (fem.)). *English, on the other hand, uses the functional marker 'the' as a definite article (as in 'the minister'). The term 'unmarked' in Arabic is the 'indefinite' case (as in qadiyya and qaḍaya) where a zero marker is used.*

In saying *walad dhakī* (a clever boy), there is an overt indefiniteness (but covert definiteness because of case ending that could imply a zero marker of definiteness); but in saying *al-walad al-dhakī* (the boy the clever -lit., i.e. the clever boy), we observe that the definite article 'the' is only used explicitly once. In *al-ḥall al-silmī al-^cādil* (the solution the peaceful the just (lit.)), each item is marked with the definite article *al* and the last two items (*al-silmī al-^cādil*) are marked with *al* to define the headword *al-ḥall*, but in *al-ḥall silmī ^cādil* there is a ∅ marked in the adjectives *silmī* and ^c*ādil*.

The article *al* is the communist way of marking nouns and adjectives in Arabic. Also, it could be said that it is far more used in Arabic than the definite article 'the' in English, because adjectives qualifying defined nouns require to be marked for definition. For instance, consider the following example.

(18) wa-istinadan li-muqarrarāt al-qimam wa'l - majālis wa'l-mu'tamarāt wa'l-ijtimā'āt al -^cArabiyya wa'l-Islāmiyya wa-^cadam al-inḥiyāz wa'l-hai'āt wa'l-tajammu^cbt al dauliyya al-muta^cbqiba.

(18a) and based on resolutions adopted by *the* summits and *the* councils and *the* conferences and *the* meetings of *the* Arab and *the* Islamic countries and *the* non-aligned and *the* organizations and *the* bodies *the* international *the* successive. (lit.)

(18b) and based on resolutions adopted by Arab, Islamic, and non-aligned summits, councils, and meetings, as well as by other successive international bodies.

In the Arabic version, the morpheme *al* is repeated eleven times, i.e. it is prefixed to eleven words out of the fourteen words of the utterance. Comparing the two renderings (18a and 18b), one observes that the definite article is repeated eleven times in (18a), which is the literal translation, whereas it does not appear

¹¹ The Arabic Language Today (London, 1970), p. 36-38.

at all in (18b), which could be considered an adequate rendering¹². This example points to the following two factors:

- (1) definition of adjectives in Arabic;
- (2) a string¹³ of English nouns may be defined by one 'the'.

It may be safely assumed that such use of the definite article *al* in Arabic is perhaps (in some cases) the reason for reproducing the same in the English texts translated from Arabic. In this respect, it could be argued that Arabic prefers using the definite article more than English does. The repetition created by the morpheme is also observable in the following examples.

(19) *al-mustaqbal al-muzlim al-majhul*.

(19) *the dark, the unknown, the future* (lit.), i.e. *the dark unknown future*.

Here the definite article *al* is repeated three times, prefixing the three words. Repetition could also be created by indefiniteness, as in *mustaqbal muzlim majhul*, where there is a triple Ø indefinite markers.

(20) *fī zill daula dimuqrāṭiyya taqaddumiyya ya'ishu fihā al-Masīhī wa'l-Yahūdī wa'l-Muslim fi kanaf al-musāwāt wa'l-^cadl wa'l-ikhā'*.

(20a) in one democratic progressive state where *the Christian, the Jew, and the Muslim* live in justice, *the equality and the fraternity* (lit.), i.e. where the Christian, Jew, and Muslim live in justice, equality, and fraternity.

(21) *fī zill daula dimuqrāṭiyya taqaddumiyya ya'ishu fihā al-Masīhī wa'l-Yahūdī wa'l-Muslim fi kanaf al-musāwāt wa'l-^cadl wa'l-ikhā'*.

(21) In one democratic progressive state where Christians, Jews and Muslims live in justice, equality and fraternity.

Considering examples (20) and (21) above, it could be said that in the generic use the prefixed definite article *al* in Arabic, if used with singular substantives, has equal correspondence when translated into English, where it has a Ø equivalent if it is used with plural substantives. So, the problems that an Arab translator encounters when rendering the Arabic definite article into English is due to the fact that the generic Arabic definite article, whether it will be with singulars or plurals, is phonetically realized, whereas the English one surfaces only when used with singulars. Further, the English generic definite article is subject to optional progressive ellipsis whereas it is not in Arabic. In example (20), above, six definite articles are repeated in the literal English version. None occur, however, in the non-literal English version of example (21) above.

¹² The same comment is also applicable to other examples listed in this paper.

¹³ The term word-string, as it is used in the present paper, refers to two or more different lexical items strung together to constitute a stretch of speech. The lexical items are of the same syntactic category.

IV. Repetition Created by Nisba Suffix

The *nisba*¹⁴ suffix term is used in the present paper to refer to the morpheme *-iyya* which is attachable to nouns or adjectives to suggest an adjectival connection to it, as in *Yaman, Yamānī* (Yemen, Yemeni) and *qarya, qarawiyya* (village, villager (fem)).

The *nisba* suffix creates a morphological repetition. This type of repetition is numerous and familiar in our texts. The following are just a few examples.

(22) *innahā bidāya na'malu lahā an tastamirra wa-tatasi^ca li-tantazimu qitā^cbt iqtisādiyya wa-tiqniyya wa-naqdiyya hayawiyya.*

(22) it is a beginning we hope to continue and expand, to include vital sectors of economy, technology, and money.

(23) *wa-mundhu inṭilāq al-sharāra al-ulā li-hādha al-nizā^c fa-qad nushīṭat kull al-juhūd al-fardiyya wa'l-jamā^ciyya wa'l-iqlīmiyya wa'l-dauliyya li-wa'd lahibih.*

(23) and ever since the eruption of the first fire of this conflict, all individual, collective, regional, and international efforts were activated to douse its flames.

(24) *innahā aidiyulujiyya isti^cmāriyya istiṭbniyya ^cunṣuriyya tamyiziyya raj^ciyyataltaqī ma^ca al-lāsāmiyya fi munṭaliqātihā, bal hiya al-wajh al-ākhar li'l-'umla nafsihā.*

(24) it [Zionism] is an ideology that is imperialist, colonialist, and racist. It is profoundly reactionary and discriminatory, it is united with anti-semitism in its retrograde tenets, and is, when all is said and done, another side of the same basic coin.

An examination of the above three examples reveals the following points:

1. The type of repetition in these examples (20 - 24) shows a series of *nisba* strings that agree in number and gender and show adjectival connection.
2. In example (24), for instance, we observe a string of seven *nisba* substantives of which the first six are conjoined asyndetically¹⁵ in one string. However, these seven *nisba* substantives do not appear in the same order in the English version; instead they are divided among three sentences.
3. These *nisbas* provide a clear indication of morphological parallel repetition and it is in a sense 'forced by language'. But it is basically a matter of lexical choice; some adjectives do not have *nisba*, so it is not really forced by grammar.
4. The most significant point to observe about the *nisba* repetition is that it could be considered as a transition from forced repetition to functional repetition. Because the *nisba* suffix may, as a morphological item, initiate a phonological

¹⁴ For further information about the *nisba* suffix, see J. Stetkevych (1970) p. 27 f.; A.F.L. Beeston (1970) p. 36; and Sirhan (1985) p. 138 f.

¹⁵ When the constituents of the word-strings are joined without a conjunction.

patterning, the speaker/writer begins to use what is given for his own purposes, to create a special effect, e.g. remarkably in example (24) above.

Conclusion

Having discussed the main ideas regarding the type of repetition in Arabic forced by morphology with reference to Arabic English translation, and having given our own illustrations and comments on the main points related to this type we find it useful to finish this paper by pointing out the following points:

1. Morphological repetition in Arabic is normally given by Arabic.
2. Case, gender, number, definiteness and *nisba* suffix are patterns of repetition forced by the system of Arabic.
3. The system of case, gender, and number is so complex that it makes it difficult to give a full account within the limited scope of this paper. It is hoped, therefore, that further studies should be done regarding these grammatical categories.
4. The definite article *al* is far more used in Arabic than the definite article "the" in English. This is perhaps the reason behind reproducing the same in the English texts translated from Arabic.
5. Discrepancies in case, number, gender and mood markers of Arabic and English could create translation problems.
6. A translator, who is aware of the repetition phenomenon in Arabic in general and the morphological type in particular, could more easily cope with the problems of translation than the one who is unaware of it.

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