GENDER IN ENGLISH AND ARABIC

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Abstract

The paper introduces the different definitions of gender followed by a contrastive description of the masculine-feminine distinction in English and Arabic. The similarities and differences between the two languages are argued to be relevant to pedagogy and translation: English speakers with their language's natural gender system have to learn the gender of every Arabic noun as part of its dictionary entry since Arabic has grammatical gender with inanimate nouns being masculine or feminine for no apparent reason. They also have to make more gender distinctions since Arabic has a more pervasive gender system involving agreement between nouns and the verbs and adjectives attached to them. Further, it is argued that neither English nor Arabic is gender-biased. It is the social behavior of their speakers that is sexist not the structure of the language.

Key words: *gender, gender loading, natural gender, grammatical gender, gender-bias*

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender is a "fascinating" subject, to borrow Corbett's (1991:1) words. But Corbett is only talking about linguistic gender and not worried about the socio-political implications of the use of the term *gender*. For when the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) issues a report (Feb. 2006) about "gender equality" being "a cornerstone of development", they are only dealing with giving women their human rights and are not talking about language. (See also The World Bank Policy Research Report [2001, 1] which states that "gender equality is a core development issue.") Moreover, gender is defined as a psycho sociological construct acquired by an individual as a result of socializing. The World Bank Policy Research Report (2001) takes gender to refer "to socially constructed roles and socially learned behaviors and expectations associated with females and males" (p. 2) Simone de Beauvoir (quoted in Edwards 1985: 9) puts it this way: "One is not born, one rather becomes a woman." Simpson and Mayr (2010: 15) add that "the same axiom can be extended to the social determination of men." In other words, sex is a natural or biological feature; gender is its cultural or learned significance. "[W]hereas 'sex' is a biological and physiological category, referring to the anatomical differences between men and women, 'gender' is a social category and a social construct" (Simpson and Mayr 2010: 15). People are born, it is argued, with a biological sex and are "taught" a set of attitudes and behaviors which distinguish them as either masculine or feminine. This question of gender seems to be a central issue in the development of Western thought so much so that one, upon reading a book like Tarnas's *The Passion of the Western Mind*, gets the impression that the major transformation in the development of the Western mind is "the analysis of gender as a crucial factor in determining, and limiting, what counts as truth" (p. 397). "No academic discipline or area of human experience has been left untouched by the feminist reinterpretation" of "conventional intellectual and cultural assumptions in all of contemporary scholarship" (p. 408; see also pp. 441-2, and 468-9).

The main concern of this paper is linguistic gender narrowly defined. The definition used by some linguists is much wider and applies to any "classification of nouns into two or more classes with different grammatical properties" (Trask 1999:100). Trask specifies no basis for this classification except the fact that the class of a noun has grammatical consequences on the neighboring elements. For example, if a certain noun governs the use of a certain form of the adjective or requires some agreement marker on the verbs related to it, then it belongs to a specific gender in its language.[(1)] Not that Trask is using the term in his own special way; other linguists concur. Hockett (1958: 232), for example, writes that gender can subsume such distinctions "turning on sex, animateness, size, shape, degree of abstraction, and the like."

1.1. In this paper only the masculine-feminine distinction will be the basis for classifying gender distinctions since it is the basis used in English and Arabic, the two languages dealt with in this paper. The interaction between the masculine-feminine distinction and number and person is of significance to both languages, but is beyond the scope of this paper.

There are two types of linguistic treatment of gender: natural gender and grammatical gender. In natural gender systems, linguistic gender corresponds to biological sex: gender is masculine for males, feminine for females, and neutral for objects where biological sex is irrelevant. For example, English *man* is masculine and is pronominalized *he, woman* is feminine and is pronominalized *she,* and *table* is neuter and is pronominalized *it.*

In grammatical gender systems, on the other hand, nouns are assigned to the masculine or feminine category even where sex is irrelevant. Arabic *rajul* 'man', for example, is masculine, *'imra'ah* 'woman' is feminine, and *Taawilah* 'table' is feminine.

1.2. An interesting issue associated with linguistic gender is whether the language with a certain gender system has or encourages any bias in favor of or against one sex rather than the other. That is, is this language or that one anti- or pro-women? For example, does the fact that French uses the masculine pronoun *ils* when referring to a group in which all or some members are masculine, but the feminine *elles* only to groups in which all members are feminine (Brown 1977: 11) constitute anti-feminine bias? Is French and, hence, are French speakers anti-feminine? Or, to take another example, are Arabic and its speakers biased against women because Arabic masculine *naazil* 'going down' is a neutral word, its feminine counterpart *naazilah* can mean 'a disaster', something very negative?

More implications of the gender distinction between words might be sought in speakers' associating certain features or qualities with masculine nouns contrasting with those associated with feminine nouns even where there is no natural basis for the gender distinction. Clarke *et al.* (1981) asked subjects how 'masculine' or 'feminine' they found a number of asexual objects to "reveal the extent of influence of grammatical gender [...] on the perception and the development of gender identity" (p. 160). It is not clear, however, what a question like 'How masculine or how feminine is *chair, mountain, bridge* or *flower*?' means to anyone answering the questionnaire they administered to their subjects. What 'masculine' or 'feminine' means in relation to inanimate objects is a vague notion and the whole assumption behind their research is thrown into doubt.

1.3. The purpose of this paper is to look into the gender issue in Arabic and English for purposes of comparison and contrast with the hope that this analysis will be of relevance to pedagogy and translation. A basic description of the gender system of the two languages will be a good starting point. English and other languages like it, where the meaning of a noun determines its gender, are termed by Clarke *et al.* (1981: 159-60) "minimum gender loading" languages. Arabic and other languages like it, on the other hand, where every noun is either masculine or feminine regardless of biological sex, are called "maximum gender loading" languages. In the former group, knowing the gender of a noun follows from learning its meaning since gender is not arbitrary but is determined from the natural sex of the entity represented by the noun. In the latter, a learner has to learn the gender of a noun representing an inanimate entity when s/he learns it because gender is arbitrary and there is no apparent relation between the nature of the entity and its grammatical gender.

2. GENDER IN ENGLISH

Gender in English concerns the use of different grammatical forms to show the difference between masculine, feminine and neuter.[(2)] One of the assets of the English language, as compared to other languages including its direct ancestor, Old English, is its natural gender (Baugh and Cable 1978: 10-11). In Old English there are three distinctions, but the distribution is often illogical. For example, *"mōna* (moon) is masculine, but *sunne* (sun) is feminine […]. Words like *mægden* (girl), *wīf* (wife), *bearn* and *cild* (child), which we should expect to be feminine or masculine, are in fact neuter "(*ibid.* 57).

Gender shows in Modern English in (i) personal pronouns (*he* versus *she, his/her,* etc.) and (ii) in some nouns (*lion/lioness, boy/girl,* etc.) In these cases the masculine is different from the feminine not only in the reference to males versus females but also in the pronouns standing for the nouns which indicate gender. An example is (1).

(1) The boy gave *his* sister a present, but *she* refused to take *it*.

The use of *his* which is masculine to refer to the boy means that *boy* is masculine; *she* for *his sister* means *sister* is feminine, and *it* for *a present* means that *present* is neuter.

Gender also shows in minor cases of personification as when a ship is referred to as *she* or when the sun is referred to as *he*, the moon *she.* This is termed "attributive gender [… which] is personification and a matter of rhetoric, not grammar" (Baugh and Cable 1978: 11).

Two more points to make while on the topic of gender in English. The first relates to words like *chairman* which women rights activists insist on changing to *chairperson* to avoid any traces of gender discrimination. The second is the tendency to use *they (them* or *their)* as a singular pronoun to avoid specifying the gender of *he (him* or *his)* and *she (her)*:

(2) If anybody's lost a book, *they* can find it at the secretary's office.

Although *anybody* is singular, *they* is used to refer to it in order to avoid specifying gender by using *he* or *she.* An alternative is the use of *he or she* (*s/he* in writing). (See Swan 1980: §259). This usage is by no means restricted to marginal styles. Even in an authentic dictionary like *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (Seventh Edition), the definition of the word *tease,* for example, reads

(3) …to make sb [=*somebody*] sexually excited, especially when you do not intend to have sex with *them* (emphasis added).

3. GENDER IN ARABIC

In Arabic gender is so pervasive a phenomenon it affects nouns, adjectives, verbs, demonstratives and relative pronouns. Cowan (1958), for example, in his introductory course in Arabic finds it proper to introduce gender as early as Lesson One (p. 10) and his Lesson Two is exclusively about the feminine (pp. 13-17). But before going into any details, a definition of the variety of Arabic dealt with here is in order as it is in any discussion of Arabic. Unless otherwise indicated, whenever Arabic is mentioned in this paper, it is Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) that is intended.[3] There are a few differences between MSA and Classical Arabic, on the one hand, and between MSA and colloquial Arabic, on the other. A Classical Arabic example cited by Biitaar (1998) is the Quranic verse (xii, 30) in (4).

(4) وقال نسوة في المدينة

waqaala	niswatun	fii	l-madiinati
and-said-(HE)[4]	women	in	the-city

'Women said in the city….'

The verb *qaala* 'said (masc.)' in this example would be in MSA the feminine *qaalat*; the feminine human subject *niswatun* 'women' requires feminine agreement, *-t*, on the verb. In one colloquial dialect, rural Jordanian, the verb would be *gaalin* where the agreement is feminine plural and in another, urban Jordanian, it would be *'aaluu* where the agreement is masculine plural. It is not surprising for an Arab reading lists of masculine or feminine nouns and adjectives in a grammar book to find that the gender specified in that book does NOT accord with his/her intuition. The present authors, for example, find *'iSba9* 'finger',*Dil9* 'rib', *9ajuz* 'buttocks' masculine although they are usually listed as feminine (as they are, for example, in az-Zajjaaji [1984: 292]).

It may be relevant here to recall claims like Wright's ([1876]1967: i.183) that "the usage of the language has varied considerably at different periods" and Biitaar's (1998), who in talking about gender and number agreement, explains inconsistencies in usage to the fact that the language was in a state of change and that usage has not always been the same. These differences, however, will not concern us here since MSA in the sense defined above is our focus.

Arabic, in contrast to Modern English, and like other Semitic languages (Biitaar 1998) and most major European languages as well (Baugh and Cable 1978: 10-11), assigns every noun either to the masculine or the feminine category even where sex is irrelevant. There is no neuter category (Wright [1876]1967: i.177). Moreover, Arabic distinguishes masculine verbs and adjectives from feminine ones. In other words, Arabic verbs and adjectives are marked for gender.

3.1. From the point of view of morphology, nouns and adjectives in Arabic can be inflected for gender: the masculine is roughly the unmarked form and the feminine carries one of a number of affixes showing femininess.(5) However, this is not always the case since some feminine words do not show any surface indication of their gender and, conversely, some words which show what is typically a feminine marker are nevertheless masculine. For example, *9allaama* (6) 'very learned' is masculine in spite of the *-a* at the end of the word, a typical feminine indicator; *firdaws* 'paradise' is, at least for many speakers (7), feminine although its morphological form does not show this. Moreover, a number of nouns have separate forms for the two genders, i.e. two words which do not share the same root, e.g., *'asad/ labu'a* 'lion/ lioness', *rajul/ 'imra'a* 'man/ woman', etc. These words are sometimes called 'gender nouns' and they usually exist where masculine-feminine distinction is needed most (Ibrahim 1973: 25). The sweeping generalization is that every noun is either masculine or feminine: animate nouns are masculine if they refer to males, feminine if they refer to females; inanimate nouns are either this or that without a corresponding opposite gender. Most adjectives form their feminine by adding a feminine-forming morpheme.

3.2. Furthermore, verbs agree with their subjects in gender giving masculine and feminine forms. The morphological facts in this case interact with number and person as well, the details seemingly irrelevant for the purposes of the discussion here. Suffice it to say that, for example, *naama* '(he) went to sleep' is masculine while *naamat* '(she) went to sleep' is feminine.

3.3. Demonstratives and relative pronouns also have distinct masculine and feminine forms. So the 'near' reference demonstrative *haaða* 'this', used in the singular, is masculine while *haaðih* 'this' is feminine; in the dual, *haaðaani* and *haaðayni* 'these (two)' are masculine, *haataani* and *haatayni* 'these (two)' are feminine; in the plural *haa'ulaa'i* 'these' is both masculine and feminine. The 'distant' reference demonstrative *ðaalika* 'that' is masculine, *tilka* 'that' is feminine. In the dual and plural *'ulaa'ika* is both masculine and feminine.

The singular relative pronoun meaning 'which, who' is *allaði* in the masculine and *allati* in the feminine. In the dual *allaðaani* and *allaðayni* are masculine; *allataani* and *allatayni* are feminine; in the plural *allaðiina* is masculine, *allawaati* feminine.

4. ENGLISH AND ARABIC COMPARED

It has become clear from the exposition of the gender phenomena in English and Arabic that the two languages have similarities and differences that have to be taken into consideration whether in pedagogy or in translation. It is generally accepted that mother tongue (or first language) interference is a factor to reckon with in language teaching/learning. Contrastive analysis is the method usually used to deal with the difficulties of this kind of interference. Lado (quoted in Fisiak 1981: 5) believes that "[t]he teacher who has made a comparison of a foreign language with the native language of the student will know better what the real learning problems are and can better provide for teaching them." (More details of the applications of contrastive analysis in language teaching are found in James 1980, especially pp. 145 ff.)

The benefits of contrastive analysis to translation need no highlighting being part of the process itself. In a recent conference at Yarmouk University, and in the process of discussing problems of machine

translation, the audience found themselves listening to a presentation of contrastive analysis between English and Arabic. The point of the paper was the difficulties facing machine translation due to the structural differences between the two languages. Translation is one of the branches of "two-valued (two languages are involved) interlingual linguistics" of which contrastive analysis is another (James 1980: 4). The relevance of contrastive analysis to translation is asserted by James (*ibid.*: 84).

4.1. In personal pronouns the two languages show gender, but Arabic makes more distinctions than English does as is shown in the following table:

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2" rowspan="2"></th><th colspan="3">ENGLISH</th><th colspan="2">ARABIC</th></tr>
<tr><th>Masc.</th><th>Fem.</th><th>Neuter</th><th>Masc.</th><th>Fem.</th></tr>
<tr><td>First Person</td><td>Singular</td><td colspan="2">I</td><td>--</td><td colspan="2">'anaa</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Plural</td><td colspan="2">we</td><td>--</td><td colspan="2">na7nu</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Second Person</td><td>Singular</td><td colspan="3" rowspan="3">you</td><td colspan="2">'anta | 'anti</td></tr>
<tr><td>Dual</td><td colspan="2">'antumaa</td></tr>
<tr><td>Plural</td><td>'antum</td><td>'antunna</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Third Person</td><td>Singular</td><td>he</td><td>she</td><td>it</td><td>huwa</td><td>hiya</td></tr>
<tr><td>Dual</td><td colspan="3" rowspan="2">they</td><td colspan="2">humaa</td></tr>
<tr><td>Plural</td><td>hum</td><td>hunna</td></tr>
</table>

Each of the English nominative pronouns in the above table has a corresponding accusative form and a possessive pronoun (*I/ me/ mine*, *we/ us/ ours*, etc.) as well as a possessive adjective (*my*, *our*, etc.). However, the latter two classes are clitics in Arabic unlike their English counterparts. So the equivalent of English *he visited me* is the single word *zaarani* where *zaara* is *he visited* and *–ni* is the first person singular object pronoun, *me*. Likewise, the equivalent of English *my book* in Arabic is the single word *kitaabi* (*kitaab* 'book'+*--i* 'my'); *our book* is *kitaabuna*, and so on. Arabic does not have possessive pronouns parallel to *mine*, *ours*, *yours*, *his*, *hers*, *its*, and *theirs*, their function being performed by a structure involving the word *xaaSSa* 'property', though this structure seems to be minor and might have been introduced as a result of borrowing from European languages in recent days.

The distinctions Arabic makes more than English pose problems of pedagogy and translation. The English sentence in (5) can be translated in Arabic as (5b, c, d, e, f or g).

(5) a. You are nice.

b. 'anta laTiif.

c. 'anti laTiifa.

d. 'antumaa laTiifaan.

e. 'antumaa latiifataan.

f. 'antum laTiifuuna/luTafaa'.

g. 'antunna laTiifaat.

The choice among the above depends on the gender and number of the addressee(s). Translating from English into Arabic, one has to choose among the different forms by looking for cues in the context (be it in the text or outside it).[(8)] Teaching Arabic to speakers of English poses a parallel problem: the learner has all the different forms to learn as equivalents for the single native form. Fortunately,

context very often determines this choice, but the difficulty can always arise. Mistakes like (6) committed by an English speaker learning Arabic are not unusual.

(6) a. * ’anta laTiifa. (Cf. 5b.)

b. * ’anti laTiif. (Cf. 5c.)

c. * ’antuma laTiifataan. (addressing two masculine speakers; cf. 5d.)

d. * ’antumaa laTiifaan. (addressing two feminine speakers; cf. 5e.)

e. * ’antum laTiifaat. (Cf. 5f.)

f. * ’antunna luTafaa’. (Cf. 5g.)

Add to this difficulty the fact that every noun in Arabic has to be specified as to whether it is masculine or feminine. Its reference is of help when it refers to a male or a female, i.e. when it is an animate noun. However, when biological sex is irrelevant, the learner has to learn the gender of the noun together with its meaning and its syntactic behavior, an extra effort added to his/her sizable tasks. Since there is no clue why *šubbaak* ‘window’, for example, is masculine and *naafiða* (also) ‘window’ is feminine, the available option left for the learner is to learn of noun and, for that matter, all other inanimate nouns as well, together with their gender and to forget looking for logical explanations. There is no such explanation and the whole issue is arbitrary.

In English, on the other hand, the meaning of a noun, i.e. its referent, determines its gender, which means that learning the meaning automatically means learning the gender. (See **0.3** above for the definition of a ‘maximum’ and ‘minimum gender loading’).

5. BEYOND GRAMMATICAL GENDER

The present paper started with the term gender in its different uses. Later it moved on to the grammatical use of the term to refer to the masculine-feminine distinction. The question remains valid whether linguistic gender is related to the social concept of gender involving issues related to women’s human rights and the social correlate of biological sex. It has been already mentioned that a language like French in referring to a group of people uses a masculine pronoun if the group is exclusively male or if it includes any males at all, but uses a feminine pronoun only when the group is exclusively female. This asymmetry can be interpreted as anti-feminine. Similarly, Arabic’s calling the two parents *waalidayn/waalidaan* ‘(two) parents’ which is the dual form of *waalid*, a masculine noun, can be taken as giving a certain degree of priority to the masculine over the feminine. Moreover, it is argued sometimes that feminine Arabic words like *naazila* ‘disaster’, *muSiiba* ‘calamity’, *(Darbatun) qaadiya* ‘mortal (blow)’, *Hayya* ‘snake’ and *naa’iba* ‘disaster’, all of which carry negative connotations when compared to their masculine counterparts, *naazil* ‘moving down’, *muSiib* ‘in the right’, *qaaDii* ‘(male) judge’, *Hayy* ‘living’ and *naa’ib* ‘representative’ constitute evidence that Arabic expresses anti-feminine bias in associating feminine words with “bad” meanings and masculine words with “better” meanings.

The masculine preference over the feminine in referring to mixed groups, as in the case of French *ils* versus *elles* and Arabic *waalidayn/waalidaan* rather than the feminine *waalidatayn/waalidataan,* seems to be in line with the patriarchal character of human civilization at this period in the history of *man*kind. Notice that the English use of the word/affix *man* in words like *mankind, Man,* and *chairman* is consonant with this tendency. Moreover, English uses *he* and *his* “when straightforwardly referring to the human species” (Tarnas 1991: 468). For the sake of economy, language prefers to use either the masculine or the feminine rather than a more cumbersome form involving the two. When it comes to the choice between the two, the masculine wins in a civilization which for millennia has had “the tendency […] to conceive of […] the human species in predominantly masculine terms”, to use Tarnas’s words (*ibid.*: 1).

As to the cases of lexical items with negative meanings in the feminine forms compared to their positive (or, at least, neutral) meanings in Arabic, one dare say that this is simply a matter of coincidence in a very small number of isolated cases. Feminine words with very "positive" meaning, like *janna* 'paradise', may be taken as counterexamples. The masculine *lawH* 'board' is not anywhere as nice as the feminine *lawHa* 'painting'; *firdaws* 'paradise' was judged by 47 out of 80 subjects of a short experiment conducted for the purposes of the present paper as feminine with its very positive meaning; *warda* 'rose' and *zahra* 'flower', both feminine, are nice words. And so on.

Another piece of evidence comes from the fact that Arabic uses what is called the 'feminine sound plural' more than any other form of the plural to form the plural of 'foreign' words. In a short experiment designed for the purposes of the present paper, subjects were asked to give the plural of non-words, i.e. words they never heard but were encouraged to assume that they are technical terms they did not have to know. For example, they were prompted to complete a phrase like 'five X's' notwithstanding the fact that they did not know what X was. Out of 800 responses, that is, instances of making plural forms of words the subjects did not know, subjects gave 597 feminine sound plurals. At a percentage of 72.38%, the responses indicate the productiveness of this morphological process. Assuming that native speakers resort to the unmarked form when they are faced by a choice of more than one possibility, one is tempted to assume that of the different possibilities of making the plural, the unmarked choice is that of the *feminine* sound plural, not the masculine sound plural nor the 'broken' plural. Incidentally, in the experiment above no subject gave a masculine sound plural; only the sound feminine or the broken plural were used. If the analysis above is valid, then this gives credence to assuming that the feminine is unmarked in some sense. Add to this the fact that in Arabic, broken plurals of non-human nouns are always feminine regardless of whether their singular is masculine or feminine (Ammar 2001: 113), again giving the feminine a larger distribution which could be interpreted as indication of a less marked status. (See Trask [1999: 180] for whom a "marked form may be distinguished from an unmarked one […] by greater rarity in a particular language or in languages in general").

If one accepts the above argument establishing the feminine in contrast to the masculine as the unmarked member of the masculine-feminine contrast, one is led to conclude that the feminine is the more important of the two. Chandler (2002: 32) argues that '[t]he unmarked form is typically dominant" while the marked "is presented as different and is (implicitly) negative." However, it is not our intention to argue for the feminine being more prominent or basic than the masculine; rather, we are trying to say that there is no hard and fast argument that Arabic is biased against one gender in favor of the other.

This is not to be confused with whether the Arabic culture is or is not sexist; these are two different issues. Describing a language as anti-feminine or anti-masculine means that its structure is such that one gender is inferior to the other as, for example, if the masculine (e.g. Arabic *naazil* 'going down') were always positive or good in some sense while the feminine (*naazila* 'disaster') were negative or bad. Sexism, on the other hand, is "discrimination within a social system on the basis of sexual membership", to use Wodak's words (reported in Simpson and Mayr 2008: 16). It is social practice that defines sexism not the structure of the language. So, a pair of words like English *bachelor* and *spinster* simply shows that English has a word for the masculine of unmarried and another for the feminine. The fact that the English-speaking culture associates one member of the pair with what Simpson and Mayr (*ibid.*:17) call "semantic derogation" where "certain terms describing women have changed over time from neutral to negative connotation" is sexism not a structural feature of English.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has presented a short description of the masculine-feminine distinction in English and Arabic and a brief discussion of gender as a social construct. The former, like any work of contrastive analysis, is hoped to have relevance to pedagogy and translation, the latter to counter the argument that either language (English or Arabic) is gender-biased, i.e. anti-masculine or anti-feminine. If any bias is evident in the use of language, it is in the speakers' social attitudes not in the structure of the language.

Notes

(1) Ibrahim (1973), for whom gender "is a syntactic category with sex as its corresponding notional category" (11), finds the essence of gender to be agreement or concord (see, for example, p.26). In other words, the syntactic relation of a noun to its environment is a characterizing feature of gender.

(2) Swan (1980: xvi) adds the distinction between human and non-human to the gender category. Quirk and Greenbaum (1973: 89-93) add animate-inanimate. Both additions have no bearing on the argument advanced here.

(3) For purposes of clarity, the differences among intuitive judgments of native speakers of different dialects of Arabic on what constitutes "good" MSA are ignored in this paper, the judgment of Jordanian Arabic speakers being consulted here. It should not be surprising to find *firdaws* 'paradise', for example, judged as masculine for speakers of a given dialect while it is feminine for speakers of another dialect.

(4) 'HE' is used here as a shorthand for third person masculine singular agreement.

(5) Details of the masculine-feminine distinction in the morphology of nouns and adjectives and elsewhere in the language will not be given here but can be easily looked up in grammar books (e.g. Wright [1896]1967: 177 ff. and Cowan 1958: 13-17). Only representative examples and details relevant to the point under discussion will be given.

(6) The figure *9* will be used throughout the paper as a symbol for the Arabic *9ayn*, a voiced pharyngeal fricative, the figure *7* for the *7aa'*, a voiceless pharyngeal fricative and the apostrophe (') for the *hamza,* a glottal stop; a double letter indicates a geminate in the case of consonants and a long vowel in the case of vowels. Upper case symbols indicate the emphatic counterpart of the consonant. Other transcription conventions will be observed in their commonly used values. In citing single words the feminine ending usually called *taa' al-ta'niiθ* 'the *t* of the feminine' will appear as a final *a* only without its *t*, i.e. the citation form will be the pausal form, the form at which a speaker makes a pause in normal speech. The *t* would appear if the word is to be inflected and thus vocalized. So *9allaama* would be pronounced as *9allaamatun* if the nominative inflection *-un* is attached to the noun. (Cf. Wright [1876]1967: i.184).

(7) In a short experiment carried out for the purposes of the present paper, 47 subjects out of 80 described *firdaws* with the adjective *khaalida* indicating its feminine gender; a masculine noun requires the masculine adjective *khaalid.*

(8) For an interesting example see Hassan (2002).

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