

Default Diminutives: Evidence from Modern Standard Arabic

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Abstract—Different approaches to inflectional morphology converge on the notion that default inflection is computed through a combinatorial mechanism. The current study explores the mechanism of defaultness which makes an inquiry for the emergence of the diminutive plural inflection as a default form taking the suffix *-aat* in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). The findings of this study showed that there is a role displayed by the "canonical root" in the formation of this default form thus the wide application of the default inflection results from the fact that the default inflection applies to mental variables which are abstract labels 'VERB or NOUN' (Berent 1999, Kim et al 1991, 1994 and Marcus et al 1995). Further, this study replicated previous studies on English and Hebrew (Berent: 1999) in maintaining the insensitivity of defaultness to similarity effects.

Index Terms—default, canonical root, similarity effects, diminutives, sound feminine plural

I. INTRODUCTION

Investigations on inflectional morphology have been the subject of much debate between the associative accounts of cognition presented by Rumelhart & McClelland (1986), McWhinny & Leinbach (1991), Plunkett & Marchmann (1993) Stemberger (1998); and Bybee (1995) and the symbolic accounts stated by Pinker and Prince (1988), Marcus et al (1992), Marcus et al (1995) Clahsen (1996); and Pinker (1998). Both theories converge on the proposal that irregular inflection is achieved by associative memory, while the difference between them is in their treatment of regular default inflection. According to the associative–single mechanism model, both regular and irregular forms are processed in the associative memory, hence explicable by associations between specific token and type frequencies. Bybee (1995) also provides accounts for this proposal in the schema model of inflection treatment. On the other hand, proponents of the symbolic model attribute the default regular inflection to a symbolic combinatorial process working over variables which lack canonical roots. The current study examines these accounts of inflectional morphology using evidence from the diminutive forms observed in Modern Standard Arabic (hence MSA). In this study, we will argue that the plural of the diminutive forms in MSA is expected to provide evidence on the architecture of the MSA lexicon in terms of the defaultness representation.

II. THE PLURAL SYSTEM IN MSA

There are two distinct classes of plural inflection observed in MSA: the sound plurals and broken plurals. The sound plurals are formed in a concatenative mechanism by adding either the suffix *-aat* to the singular form to make the sound feminine plural (e.g. *maktaba/maktab-aat* 'a library/libraries') or the suffix *-uun* to the singular form to make the sound masculine plural (e.g. *saaʔiq/saaʔig-uun* 'a driver/drivers'). McCarthy and Prince (1990, p. 212) state that the sound feminine plural is systematically found with the following: proper names; transparently derived nouns or adjectives such as participles, deverbals, and diminutives, noncanonical or unassimilated loans (*keibil /keibl-aat* 'a cable/cables'); and the names of the letters of the alphabet which are mostly noncanonical. On the other hand, broken plurals are formed by a hierarchical non-concatenative process. McCarthy & Prince (1990) also provide evidence that the broken plural usually has the same consonants (root) as the singular form but vowels are inserted between the consonants in accordance with a strict pattern or template. For example, the singular *kur.si* 'a chair' CVC.CV word maps to the plural *ka.raa.si* 'chairs'; the plural template in this case being *CaCaaCi*. Wright (1995) indicates that Arabic contains 31 broken plural templates and these broken plural templates constitute the major process of plural formation in Arabic.

III. DEFAULTNESS IN MSA

The mechanism of defaultness to be investigated in this research makes inquiry for the emergence of the diminutive plural inflection as a default form taking the suffix *-aat* in MSA and the role displayed by the notion "canonical root" in the formation of this default form. Marcus (1998 & 1999) and Pinker and Prince (1988) in their accounts of the symbolic model made clear that the wide application of the default inflection results from the fact that the regular inflection applies to mental variables which are abstract labels 'VERB or NOUN'. Marcus (1995) views 'defaultness' as an operation which applies not to particular sets of stored items or to their frequent patterns, but to any item whatsoever, as long as it is not listed in the lexical memory. This item may be unfamiliar, dissimilar to familiar items or computationally inaccessible because of noise in memory or because of the way the data in memory is structured. Corbett (1994), on the other hand, deals with defaults rather than "markedness" since defaults are language specific, while "marked" is universal. Based upon our assumptions, the notion of "defaultness" is an indispensable mechanism to account for the lexical status of the nominal system (i.e. diminutive forms) in MSA.

Berent (1999), Kim et al (1991 & 1994) and Marcus et al (1995) provide ample evidence that the regular inflection as a default (the sound feminine with the suffix *-aat* in our case) can be observed with the inflection which is assigned to borrowings, names, and denominals in English and Hebrew, all of which fail to trigger default irregular patterns as a stored association, because these default forms lack a canonical root. Prasada and Pinker (1993) show that according to the symbolic account, default inflection could also apply to non-words that are dissimilar to English forms, hence are unlikely to activate stored irregular tokens. In terms of the irregular inflection, this account has the same application observed with the distribution asymmetry account. This account is motivated by the argument that the irregular forms are tightly bounded, and thus new words take similar inflection to these clustered ones and if blocked the default regular inflection is applied.

Moreover, the purpose of this research is to articulate the following predictions. The symbolic account can be maintained to deal with the plural forms of diminutive forms to define 'defaultness' in MSA. The symbolic approach assumes a single-default rule system for the grammar, which follows from an exclusive reliance on the 'elsewhere' principle. The current research aims at exploring the representation of the default system of the diminutives in the plural forms of the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). This representation is expected to account for the status of the derived forms (the diminutive forms in our case) that take the sound feminine marker *-aat* to denote the plural inflection as a default form due to the lack of the canonical root (more articulation on the notion of *canonical root* account to be introduced in the body of this research). Our analysis would take into account the fact that the emergence of the default forms with the diminutive forms is not subject to similarity effects.

A. The Sound Feminine Default in MSA: Diminutives

The category of derived nouns includes diminutives and derivatives or participles, which are formed from other words by rules of morphological derivation. For instance, the existence of a verbal noun presupposes the existence of a verb from which it is derived. Derived nouns in MSA -diminutives in particular- have the property of having a default inflection in the plural. According to the data displayed below, our assumption is that the diminutive forms take the sound feminine plural (*-aat*) due to the fact that these forms -when derived- have no canonical root; hence they have no access to the lexicon of MSA and thus fall into the "elsewhere" category or outside the phonological space.

Ratcliffe (1998) and Wright (1995) indicate that a diminutive form like what is shown in data set (1) in MSA is formed from a noun by inserting the short vowel *u* after the initial consonant; the diphthongized sound *ay* after the second consonant and the long vowel *ee* after the third if the word has a quadrilateral root. For example, Wright (1995) and Khoulooughli (1992) provide data on the collective noun *waraq* 'paper' and its plural *waraqat* 'pieces of paper', we have *wuraygaat* 'little pieces of paper', for instance. The singular word, *juz?* 'a part' has the iambic broken plural *ajzaa?* 'parts' whereas its diminutive *juzay?* 'a molecule' has the sound-feminine plural *juzay?-aat* 'molecules'.

Diminutives in MSA provide converging evidence on the existence of the symbolic mechanism, which calls for the default inflection if access to the lexical memory is blocked. Thus, this default inflection process works for diminutives as new derived forms in the language. Every noun in MSA has a diminutive form and this derived form is sound-feminine plural inflected regardless of the plural inflection of the non-diminutive form.

In the data in (1), we notice that the nouns in the non-diminutive form may take a broken plural form (for example *nahr* /ʔanhaar 'a river/riverss'), while the same nouns in the diminutive form all have the sound feminine inflection. Another supporting example can be seen with the noun *jaba/jibaa* 'a mountain/mountains', the plural of its diminutive form *jubayl* is *jubay-laat* with the suffix *-aat* across the board added in the plural.

DATA SET (1):

NOUNS TAKING NON DEFAULT PLURAL FOR NON-DIMINUTIVE FORMS WHILE THEIR DIMINUTIVE FORMS ARE DEFAULT INFLECTED WITH THE –AAT SUFFIX

Noun (nondiminutive Forms)	Plural (nondefault)	Diminutive	Pluralized Diminutive	Gloss
nahr	?anhaar	nuhayr	nuhayr-aat	'a river'
ghuSn	?aghsaan	ghusayin	ghusayin-aat	'a branch'
manzil	manaazil	munayzil	munayzil-aat	'a house'
lugmah	lugam	lugaymeh	lugaym-aat	'a piece of food'
thi?b	thi?aab	Thu?ayb	thu?ayb-aat	'a wolf'
saqf	?asguf/suguuf	sugayif	sugayf-aat	'a ceiling'
rajul	rijaal	rujayl	rujayl-aat	'a man'
daar	duur	duwayrah	duwayr-aat	'a house'
baab	?abwaab	buwayb	buweb-aat	'a door'
naab	?anyaab/nabaat	nuwayb	nuwyb-aat	'a fang'
thawb	thyaab	thwayb	thweb-aat	'a dress'
Halum	?aHlaam	Hulaym	Hulaym-aat	'a dream'
Hajar	?aHjaar	Hujayr	Hujayr-aat	'a stone'
gamar	?agmaar	guamayr	gumayr-aat	'the moon'
ragheef	?arghifeh/reghfeh	rughayf	rughayf-aat	'a loaf'
zawraq	zawaarig	zwayrig-aat	zwerig-	'a boat'
Hamuud	?aHmideh/Humdaan	Humayd	Humayd-aat	'a pillar'
burkaan	baraakeen	buraykeen	buraykeen-aat	'a volcano'
Hasfour	Hasafeer	Husayfeer	Husayfeer-aat	'a bird'
galam	?aglaam	gulaym	gulaym-aat	'a pen/pencil'
dirham	daraahim	durayhim	durayhim-aat	'a coin'
miftaah	mafaateeh	mufayteeh	mufayteeh-aat	'a key'
mandeel	manadeel	munaydeel	munaydeel-aat	'a scarf'
barmeel	barameel	buraymeel	buraymeel-aat	'a barrel'
shams	shumuus	shumaysah	shumays-aat	'the sunn'
Nakhlah	nakheel/ nakhl	nukhaylah	nukhayl-aat	'a tree palm'
Sanduug	Sanadeeq	Sunaydeeq	Sunaydeeq-aat	'a box'
kalb	kilaab	kulayb	kulab-aat	'a dog'
yad	?aydi/?ayaadi	yudayah	yuday-aat	'a hand'
jamal	jimaal	jumayl	jumayl-aat	'a camel'
gandee	ganadeel	gunaydeel	gunaydeel-aat	'a candle'
misbaaH	maSaabeeH	muSaybeeh	muSaybeeH-aat	'a light'
girtaas	garaatees	guraytees	guraytees-aat	'stationary'
nimir	mumuur	numayr	numayr-aat	'a tiger'
dub	dubab(h)	dubayb	dubayb-aat	'a bear'
minbar	manaabir	munaybeer	munaybeer-aat	'a speech place'
maHrath	maHaarith	muHayrith	muHayrith-aat	'a gallery'
Faanuus	fawaanees	fwaynees	fwaynees-aat	'a light'
jundu	janaadib	junaydeeb	junaydeeb-aat	'a hopper'

In data set (1), there is evidence supporting the predictions proposed by the symbolic accounts that the derived forms-diminutives in particular- all have the sound feminine default form with the combinatorial suffix –aat added to the diminutive to derive the plural form.

B. The Canonical Root Account

According to the data provided in (1), the emergence of the default inflection for the diminutive forms is marked with the suffix –aat. This default representation is accounted for in terms of the notion of the canonical root. Canonical root can be of considerable importance in the generality of the default inflection to words that have no access to the memory such as borrowings, denominals, names, diminutives, etc. So, the default inflection with –aat is assigned to diminutives which fail to trigger stored associations due to their lack of the canonical root. Marcus (1995) defines the canonical root as “address or distinct identity as a word in the language; a part-of-speech category, subcategory features (e.g., transitive or intransitive for verbs, count or mass for nouns); a semantic representation and phonological representations”. A canonical root has the implication that words cannot be represented in the mental lexicon as random collections of information, one of the prominent features of the ‘canonical root’ is that it has a representation format for these words. McCarthy and Prince (1990) draw attention to the fact that the phonological representation must conform to a canonical template for words in the language. In MSA, canonical roots are marked by their inflection in the plural. For example, the two-syllable words ending with the feminine marker –a take the sound feminine plural (For instance the word *majalla/ majall-aat* ‘a magazine/magazines’). On the other hand, MSA presents instances of noncanonical root words like diminutives. For example, the word singular masculine noun *mandeel* ‘a scarf’ has the broken plural *manadeel* ‘scarves’ while its derived diminutive form *munaydeel* ‘a small scarf’ is default sound feminine inflected as *munaydeel-aat* ‘small scarves’. These noncanonical words may be assigned any plural form due to the lack of access of these categories to their canonical root in the lexicon. In this case, no lexical access exists between the derived word and

any mental representation; as a result, the sound feminine default comes into play as a default inflection for these derived forms.

IV. SIMILARITY EFFECTS AND DEFAULTNESS

In this section, we discuss how the similarity effects are modulated by the defaultness of the nouns of diminutive inflection. Both the symbolic and associative hypotheses converge in their view of irregular nondefault inflection as an associative process. Hence, both accounts predict that irregular nondefault inflection should be sensitive to the similarity of the target to its base. Berent (1999) states that while the default inflection is a combinatorial process; it is insensitive to similarity effects. The dissimilarity between the two views concerns regular inflection. If regular inflection is achieved solely by the default mechanism, then it should be insensitive to similarity effects: targets that are highly similar to a regular base should be just as likely to agree with its inflection as highly dissimilar targets. The data in (2) and (3) below provide evidence that the singular diminutive forms are default inflected with the suffix *-aat* regardless of whether the singular nondiminutive form is inflected with the default marker *-aat* regularly or with the irregularly inflected singular form. In other words, the noun *kitaab* 'a book' for example is broken plural inflected as *kutub* 'books' and the noun *maṭaar* 'an airport' is sound feminine inflected as *maṭar-aat* 'airports' while their diminutive forms *-kutayeb* and *mutayr-* are both default inflected as *kutayb-aat* and *maṭar-aat* respectively. Thus, it is necessary to indicate that the plural of the diminutive form is insensitive similarity effects.

DATA SET (2):

NOUNS THAT ARE NOT SOUND FEMININE PLURAL INFLECTED BUT THEIR DIMINUTIVE COUNTERPARTS ARE

Noun	Plural onsound feminine	Diminutive form	Plural diminutive	Gloss
kitaab	kutub	kutayib	kutayib-aat	'a book'
xaatim	xawaatim	xuwaytim	xuwaytim-aat	'a ring'
jisim	?ajsam	jusayim	jusaym-aat	'a body'
juzu?	?jzaa?	juzay?	juzay?-aat	'a small part'
jabal	jibaal	jubayl	jubayl-aat	'a mountain'

DATA SET (3)

NOUNS AS WELL AS THEIR DIMINUTIVE COUNTERPARTS ARE SOUND FEMININE PLURAL INFLECTED

Noun	Regular Plural	Diminutive form	Plural diminutive	Gloss
maṭaar	maṭar-aat	mutayr	mauṭayr-aat	'an airport'
jarraar	jarrar-aat	jurayreer	jurayreer-aat	'a tractor'
muḥarrik	muḥarrik-aat	muḥayreek	muḥayreek-aat	'an engine'
jawaaz	jawaz-aat	jwayz	jwayz-aat	'a passport'
shajarah	shajar-aat	shujayrah	shujayr-aat	'a tree'
thamarah	thamar-aat	thumayrah	thumayr-aat	'fruit'
gurfah	ghurf-aat	gurayfah	ghurayf-aat	'a room'
waraqah	?awr-aat	wurayqah	wurayq-aat	'a piece of paper'
wardah	ward-aat	waraydah	wurayd-aat	'a rose'
baqarah	baqar-aat	buqayrah	buqayr-aat	'a cow'
tamrah	tamar-aat	tumayrah	tumayr-aat	'a piece of date'

In MSA, as shown in the data in (2 & 3), the diminutive forms for both the nouns that have sound-feminine inflected plural (*jarraar/ jarrar-aat* 'a tractor') and the words that are non sound-feminine inflected plural (*jisim/?ajsam* 'a body') take the default form with the sound-feminine plural *-aat* in all cases of the diminutive derivation. Accordingly, there is no evidence showing similarity effects for the plural inflection of the diminutives of non sound-feminine plural inflected words. Evidence of similarity effects would be observed if the plural inflection of the non-sound feminine inflected nondiminutive forms would be a non sound feminine plural in the plural diminutive, while, on the other hand, the inflection of the sound feminine inflected form would be the default sound feminine plural for the diminutive form. The mapping between the singular and the plural form in this context would be evidence on similarity effects. In both cases, the default inflection applies generally, regardless of the similarity of the targets to stored tokens. Prasada and Pinker (1993) present evidence that the assignment of the default sound feminine plural inflection to non-words that are dissimilar to existing regular verbs does not differ from non-words that are highly similar to familiar regular verbs. Conversely, Kim et al. (1991& 1994) Marcus et al. (1995) argue that default inflection is observed for borrowings, names and denominals that are highly similar, or even identical to stored irregular words. These findings support the view that regular default inflection is achieved by the symbolic mechanism.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As far as we can tell, ever since Rumelhart, D.E. and McClelland, J.L. (1986), the representation of defaultness and the mechanism by which it comes into play have been under scrutiny. The questions that this study raised are how defaultness can be represented and in what domains this defaultness can be analyzed crosslinguistically.

The architecture of defaultness in MSA was shown to have a crosslinguistic characteristic. This conclusion was based upon the defaultness definition which refers to the application of the 'elsewhere rule pattern' on non-canonical forms.

Accordingly, the data taken from MSA offers evidence that the symbolic account is expected to account for the representation of the diminutive forms as having the default form when pluralized. The notion of the canonical root was introduced to account for the emergence of the default for the diminutives in MSA. Default forms are observed as an emergency inflection when lexical access is blocked due to the lack of the canonical root. In the present research, diminutives as new forms in the lexicon of MSA are proved to have no canonical root and thus have the default inflection in the plural with the suffix *-aat* attached to the singular form of the diminutive regardless of its nondiminutive plural form.

Moreover, insensitivity of defaultness to similarity effects is observed in the inflection of the diminutive forms in MSA. In the data above (2 & 3) the sound-feminine inflected singular nouns as well as the non sound-feminine inflected singular nouns take the default sound-feminine plural in the diminutive inflection. This type of default inflection confirms the notion of the absence of similarity factors between the sound feminine inflected forms taking the diminutive inflection and the nonsound feminine inflected forms taking the sound feminine default for the diminutive form in MSA. This insensitivity of default inflection -the sound feminine - to similarity effects replicates the English findings provided by Parasada and Pinker (1993) and Hebrew findings investigated by Berent et al (1999). Therefore; this default inflection is accounted for due to the fact that diminutives are categorized as separate entries from their root nouns.

These findings are compatible with the symbolic view in terms of two perspectives: First, the default sound feminine inflection in MSA has the productivity to be extended to any word that does not have a canonical root by a computational mechanism of adding the suffix *-aat* to the diminutive form. Second, no role of similarity effect is observed between the default sound feminine plural diminutives and their base non-feminine singulars.

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