FOLIA ORIENTALIA
VOL. LVI — 2019
DOI 10.24425/for.2019.130714

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On Verbal Numbers in Arabic: Preliminary Remarks

Abstract

This article shows that Classical Arabic expresses verbal number. Arabic, of all the Semitic language family, meets the typological tests of the languages expressing verbal number. In addition, I will show that Classical Arabic provides a morphological verb form to express number. I will, however, show that for the form to express verbal number it requires a combination of morphological and semantic conditions. Without which the designated form does not express number, but expresses transitivity or the transfer of agency. These conditions are: form II must come from a root that has a form I, form I must be the transitive meaning of the root and the root must express an instant action. Form II, therefore, does not exclusively express number. Verbal number in Arabic is conditional. However, I will also propose that when form II verb expresses number, it does not express the transfer of agency.

Keywords

number, verbs, typology, Arabic, Semitic, feature, event.

Introduction

The purpose of this rather preliminary article is to start a discussion of verbal number in Arabic. I hope to assert that there is enough typological reasoning and structural linguistic evidence at least in some varieties of the multitude of social and geographical varieties that cognitively constitute Arabic (Classical and Modern Standard Arabic at least) to warrant considering the possibility of number as a verbal category. This article, being a pilot study, however, derives its data entirely from Classical/Modern Standard Arabic and excludes the rest of the Arabic varieties. This focus is not a statement on the potential of verbal number in other varieties of the language or the primacy of Classical Arabic in this

respect. Classical/Modern Standard Arabic affords us a historically continuous and non-geographically bound stream of linguistic data.[1]

One of the general assumptions about number as a linguistic feature of Arabic, Semitic and indeed many other world languages is that it is strictly a nominal category (Greenberg 1991: 577 and Corbett 2000: 2). In Classical/ Modern Standard Arabic and in the various regional dialects nouns are known to be the original carriers of the number feature, while pronouns, adjectives and verbs are merely marked morphologically for number agreement with that head noun (Ratcliffe 2008: 439). This general nominal number system is intact and nearly identical in the modern spoken dialects of Arabic despite the structural differences with Classical/Modern Standard Arabic and among themselves, such as the absence of case marking on dual and plural nominal markers in these dialects, and the generalization of the Classical oblique number/case marker and the variable reduction of the productivity of the dual category in the dialects (Ratcliffe 2008: 446)[2]. The same nominal number system is also intact and productive in all the types of Arabic varieties despite the varying levels of productivity of the dual in modern dialects of Arabic (Brustad 2000: 44–87).

Generally speaking, number marking on Arabic verbs within the general Semitic nominal number systems is a function of agreement. Agreement is expressed by a set of complex affix inflectional agreement markers on the stem of the verb. These verbal affixes express, sometimes solely, the number of the subject carrying out the action denoted by the verbal lexical item (Ratcliffe 2008: 446). But the number feature in Arabic has as of yet not been considered as a verbal category, i. e. marking the number of events an agent or several agents carry out or an object receives rather than the number of individuals involved with a single event. In other words, the hypothesis that any variety of Arabic may have developed a dual nominal and verbal number systems such as the Marori language (Arka 2012: 23–43) is what this article sets out to test.

The relative lack of focus on verbal number in Arabic is probably a direct echo of the relative lack of focus on the same concept in the Semitic languages[3] in general on the one hand, and may also be a result of its pervasiveness, productivity and complexity in other distant linguistic regions and language families of the world, especially in North America Malayo-Polynesian, Austronesian and New Guinea on the other hand (Sapir 1922: 94 and Durie 1986: 355). The languages which have productive verbal number features are not even remotely historically or geographically connected to Arabic and/or the Semitic domain. Although the phenomenon is well-attested in all the four language families of Africa

[1] For a definition of Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic see Fischer (2006: 397–405).

[2] For more on case marking and number assignment in different varieties of Arabic, see Al-Sharkawi (2013: 1–22) and (2015: 59–72).

[3] Recent handbooks of the features and typological structures such as Goldenberg (2013) do not entertain the idea of verbal number.

especially in the Chadic group (Newman 1990: 53–87), its existence in the Semitic group (a subgroup of the Afroasiatic languages in which Chadic is another branch) is understudied. Apart from sporadic references to a vague relationship between some of the verb forms and the expression of action intensity, Greenberg (1991: 577–587) starts this discussion in a manner that I will discuss later in this article.

I will try in this rather sketchy article to show that, among the different varieties of Arabic, Classical Arabic seems to have always had verbal number. I will discuss tokens of verbs carrying number from Modern Standard Arabic and traditional sources as early as the Qur'an. I will frame my remarks after this introduction in four sections. I will start by a small discussion of the previous attempt to approach the subject. Then, I will discuss the notion of number as a verbal category followed by a discussion of the typological conditions which languages realizing verbal number fulfill. I will briefly show that Classical Arabic fulfills these typological conditions. In the following section, I will discuss tokens to show that Classical Arabic verbs have the formal morphological capacity to express verbal numbers. I will discuss the changes of the stem of the Arabic verb from form I to form II to express number. In this section, I will also make the distinction between the semantic categories in which the stem modification conveys verbal number and the semantic categories in which it does not. The data discussed in this section

The Semitic intensive as verbal plurality

Broadly speaking, the study of Semitic morpho-syntax lacks any focus on verbal number (Lipinski 2001: 235–236 and Huehnergard 2006: 1). Number in Semitic is considered strictly a nominal feature.[4] However, while Watson (2007: 138–139) entertains the idea that a change in the verb stem by augmenting the second root consonant to make form II indicates a certain plurality among other things, verbal number as a feature was not in discussion. Greenberg (1991: 580) notes that traditional grammars of Arabic give the second verbal stem, form II, two functions: the intensive and the extensive. Under the extensive function, there is the possibility of an action by a number of individual agents and an action on a number of individual recipients- participant number. Wright (1896: 31) gives the following two examples for the function of participant number:

1a	Baraka	al- ğamal
	kneeled	the camel
	the camel kneeled	

[4] See Rubin (2017 especially pp. 862–863) for the typical view of Semitists on number.

1b Barraka al-’an‘ām
kneeled (many actors) the animals
the animals kneeled

2a qatala
he killed

2b qattala
he killed (many victims)

Examples 1a and 1b indicate that action was by one actor and by many actors respectively. Examples 2a and 2b express action on one and action on many recipients respectively. I agree with Wright that the verb in (1b) may possibly indicate an action by many actors, but I also assume that this interpretation is lexically based and morphologically determined by the plural form of the agent of the verb. The lexical meaning of the following word *al-’an‘ām* indicates a more than one of the actors. Let us look at 3 below:

3a nafaxa al- rağul
he puffed (once) the man-s
the man puffed

3b naffaxa al-rağul
he puffed (many times) the man-s
The man puffed many times

In 3 above, the only difference between (a and (b is in the form of the stem, namely the augmentation of the second root consonant. In 3a, the verb indicates that the actor, expressed by the suffix, did the act once, while 3b shows that the same singular actor carries out the action many times. With singular subject and object the number is not a number of participants, but rather a number of occurrences or events. Participant number, that is action by many and action on many, is lexically bound. When a lexical subject and/or an object allow the number on the verb to be interpreted as a participant type, it is often ambiguous. The verb in 4b can also express the number of events the herd as a single group carried out. The same ambiguity also works for 4b. Let us consider 4a and 4b below:

4a ḥammala al-sayāra
he loaded (many times) the car-s
he loaded the car once

4b	ḥammala	al-sayārāt
	he loaded (many times)	the car-p
	he loaded the cars	

In both verbs of 4, the act is repeated many times. The number of the participating cars is determined by the nominal plural feminine suffix on the patient of the verb in (b. The absence of a direct object as in 4b makes the issue of verbal number vague. Is it a number of patients who have been killed, or is it rather an act of repeated killing? In all cases, though, verbs in examples 1 to 4 express more than one type of number, participant type or the event type. Add this ambiguity to the diversity of functions ascribed to the second form in Arabic. The same ambiguity of type of verbal number colors Greenberg's (1991: 581) analysis of Erwin's (1963: 65–66) discussion of the second form in Iraqi Arabic, Reinhardt's (1894: 159) discussion of Omani Arabic and Cowell (1964: 253) discussion of Syrian Arabic. The examples he considers as expressing verbal number of the participant type are lexically bound.

Verbal Number[5]

Plurality in verbs, or verbal number, is also oftentimes vaguely defined, or defined in ways that are not exclusive of but intertwined with argument number. It is broadly sometimes defined as either temporal repetition of an event, special dispersion, action by many, and/or action on many (Greenberg 1991: 577). More specifically speaking however, verbal number indicates either the number of events and/or the number of participants in the event/s (Corbett 2000: 246). While this characterization of verbal number is clearer, or more detailed, the second aspect of verbal number still infringes on the function of nominal number to a certain extent as I mentioned earlier, and as the case of A-verbal number and O-verbal number in Marori (Arka 2012: 25–26). Participant number can refer to the number of participants receiving the event/s expressed by the verb. It may express the plurality of events as they relate to any of the arguments of the verb, namely the transitive object and/or transitive/intransitive subject or agent. The main distinction in verb participant number is between singular and plural (Durie 1986: 356). This distinction is, however, not very strict (Corbett 2000: 248) and indeed not quite informative.

The real and stark difference between the well-known nominal/argument number and the less-studied verbal number is that the earlier relates to entities expressed by nouns while the latter relates to the events expressed by verbs (Corbett 2000: 243). Verbal numbers are related to, and dependent on, the

[5] For a recent overview of number as a typological grammatical category see Moravcsik (2017: 440–476).

semantics of the verb, and this relation is expressed formally; number is not marked on the verb for agreement purposes but for the number of times an event is carried out or the number of events carried out in time. Within verbal number, we can make several general distinctions. The most important distinction is between single event and multiple events. More intricate and therefore controversial distinctions are sometimes made, such as continuous repetitive actions and durative action. Such distinctions are controversial because they touch on the aspectual domain of the verbs, is not repeated versus non-repeated action a classic aspectual meaning? There are languages that have both types of verbal number by using the same formal structure.

As opposed to nominal number that expresses number on any member of the nominal phrase, verbal number is expressed solely in the stem/form of the verb, and oftentimes by morphologically modifying the stem itself not by the insertion of any affixes. Nominal agreement can also be simultaneously located on the number bearing verb in the form of an affix marking agreement. But in this case, this marking does not relate to the number of events or participants of the object type, but the number of agents of the event. Formally, number is expressed morphologically on the verb by a modification to the stem. In the overwhelming majority of cases, number is usually marked by reduplication of the stem or only in a part of it (Corbett 2000: 258). Since nominal number agreement and verbal number can occur on the same verb, and since this duality can cause the number type to be not clear especially when the participant number is involved, diagnostic characteristics of the verbal number must are in order, and will be discussed in the following section.

Diagnostics of Verbal number

There are three main linguistic features that mark languages with number as a verbal category. These diagnostic features are: ergativity, differential number values, and differences in availability. It is my opinion that Arabic satisfies these three conditions and its morphological structures indeed allows for a formal accommodation to express number on the verb stem. The issue of ergativity remains unsettled in Arabic, but there are strong enough indications to justify considering Arabic typologically suited to a category of verbal number.

I will start by discussing the first diagnostic criterion that verbal number expresses different values from nominal numbers. The values available to verbal number are usually less complicated and diversified than the nominal number values (Corbett 2000: 255). Verbal number, which is expressed by form II of the root in Classical Arabic, is usually binary. It makes the distinction between single time and more than single time happening of the event. Arabic is no exception; it fits this pattern. Nominal number in Arabic, standard and dialects, has the singular, plural dual, and in some cases as well the pausal number

value. In contrast, the second form, when it expresses number, it does so in a binary system of one event and/or participant versus more than one events and/or participants. It does not express different shades of plurality. The plural is both an open-ended category, and also extends from immediately after the number one without a dual.

5a	kitāb	kitābān	kutub
	Book	books(d)	books (Pl)

5b	Kasara al-bāb	kassara al-bāb
	Broke (s) the door	broke (Pl) the door

5a above is the nominal singular-plural-dual number paradigm of Arabic. 5b is the expression of the number of events in the verb. In 5b the distinction is only between the event once and the events more than once. The number of participants is the same in both structures and it is encoded in the singular intransitive object noun.

Participant number, which I mentioned earlier as intertwined with nominal number, is distinguished lexically more than morphologically and can, therefore, theoretically express the same or similar values as nominal number. The case of stem form II in Classical Arabic is not different. As far as the marking of different values is concerned, verbal agreement marks a one, two and/or many of the participants in an event by means of person, number and gender affixes mirroring the corresponding nouns in the phrase. In addition, participant number can be expressed lexically by collective nouns such as rūs 'Russians'. In such cases, the verb reflects the plurality of the noun. However, when a stem is modified in Arabic to encode event number it only expresses either one or more than one event. Participant number in Arabic is in fact less of a feature of verbal number than of an argument number, especially in light of the morphological distribution number marking affixes.

The second typological diagnostic characteristic criterion for verbal number language is that the morphological values available for marking verbal number are different from the values available for marking nominal number. Nominal agreement is expressed on the head noun, the adjective, pronouns, and even on verbs. By contrast, verbal number is only expressed morphologically on the verb and only through the alteration of the stem itself. For verbal number there is no agreement patterns encoded on any member of the phrase. Example 6 below shows the location of nominal number on different parts of speech:

6a	muhandis	muhandis-ān	muhandis-ūna
	engineer	engineer-two	engineer-many
	one engineer	two engineers	engineers

6b muhandis-ūna kuwaytiyy-ūna
engineer-pl Kuwaiti-pl
Kuwaiti engineers

6c al-muhandis-ūna zakiyy-ūna
the engineer-pl smart-pl
the engineers are smart

6d al-muhandis-ūna ya-fham-ūna
the engineer-pl understand-3pm
the engineers understand

6e al-muhandis-ūna ya-fham-ūna ʻamal-hum
the engineer-pl understand-3pm work-their
the engineers understand their work

In 6a above, the three nominal numbers are expressed on the individual noun in the form of a suffix. The nominal plural number is carried on the following adjective also by the means of a suffix in 6b. In 6c, 6d, and 6e the plural agreement value is carried over by a predicate adjective, a verb, and a verb and a possessive pronoun agreement respectively. Now, let us look at 7 for verbal number by contrast:

7 *al-muhandis-ūna* *yu-ḥaffir-ūna* *ʻinda* *al-bayt*
the engineer-pl dig-many-3mp at the house
the engineers dig near the house

Nominal number in 6 is expressed on the noun and on the verb in agreement. Verbal number, however, is expressed only on the stem of the verb that indicates either many patients or many events. In fact, the verb carries verbal number on the stem and nominal number agreement at the same time, but in the form of a suffix. Therefore, verbal number in Classical Arabic does not express the number of participants in an event. It only expresses the plurality of events.

If Arabic passes the first two typological tests perfectly well, the third test of ergativity is shaky at best. Ergativity is an elusive concept not only in the different varieties of Arabic but also in Semitic. The idea that early Semitic may have been ergative was proposed as early as Diakonoff (1965). This notion did not gain much support among scholars as a typological marker of the family. Various Semitists, however, intertwined the idea, which can still be found in some of the most recent treatments of case in Semitic. One of its champions is Lipiński (2000). Despite the fact, however, that most scholars of Arabic reject the ergative hypothesis, the idea continues to have academic appeal (Hasselbach

2013: 55). The case for ergativity can be made in Arabic, where case marking exhibits diversity and particular width.

Ergativity refers to the pattern of marking the subject of an intransitive clause in the same manner as the object of the transitive clause, both are marked by an absolutive case. These stand in opposition to the subject of the transitive clause, which is marked by the ergative case (Dixon 1994: 1 and Manning 1996: 3). It is noteworthy that ergative languages employ a mixture of accusative and ergative strategies while accusative languages commonly only use one system to mark subject, transitive agent and transitive patient (Hasselbach 2013: 102). Classical/Modern Standard Arabic is largely a language with accusative alignment. We have to keep in mind, however, that it is not uncommon for a certain language to have some sort of a split system of alignment (Hasselbach 2013: 107). Arabic seems to have a split alignment system, and the alignment system in Classical/Modern Standard Arabic is optional.

Globally, Arabic treats case[6] in two ways. Classical/Modern Standard Arabic express case morphologically. Regional and social varieties do not. In addition, in modern Standard Arabic case representation is optional, and indeed varies in scope and consistency according to genre, platform and topic when it is expressed.[7] However, when case is expressed, the potential for ergativity exists, albeit conditionally. In the non-conditional cases, Arabic is an accusative alignment type of language, where the intransitive subject and the transitive subject are morphologically marked by an –u suffix vowel. The patient of a transitive subject is marked differently, namely by an –a suffix vowel. In few but rather stable cases the patient of the transitive subject and the intransitive subject align together in an ergative alignment manner, –a case suffix marking both of them. The transitive subject retains its –u suffix marker. In two conditions, the intransitive subject is marked like the transitive object, namely after *lā* of absolute negation and after *'inna* and its sisters. In 4 below, the ergative like case becomes clear in the case of lā of absolute negation:

8a walad-un fataḥa l-bāb-a
A boy-nom opened the door-acc
A boy opened the door

8b lā walad-an fataḥa l-bāb-a
No boy-acc opened the door-acc
No boy opened the door

[6] For a brief overview of case in Arabic, see Letourneau (2006: 347–353).

[7] For variation in the representation of case in Classical/Modern Standard Arabic, see Al-Sharkawi (2016: 223–259).

In 8a, the intransitive subject is marked for the nominative –u-, while the transitive object is marked for the accusative –a. 8a and 8b, both are marked with the same accusative case marker. However, a word of caution about the accusative –a marker is in order here. The accusative in Arabic is used for other functions. After kāna and its sister verbs of existence, nominal predicates are marked in the accusative. One more case of an unusual accusative in Arabic takes place with the vocative particle yā before nouns. After this particle, nouns that are in the construct state take the accusative case marker (Hasselbach 2013: 45–47). Regardless of the potential conditioned ergativety, I assume that the importance of Arabic fulfilling this third test is minimized by the variability of case in Classical /Modern Standard Arabic.

To conclude, number is formally expressed on the Arabic verbs, like verbal number in the other relevant world languages, not by affixation but by means of manipulating the consonantal root from which the verb is derived. This is the focus of the next section. In addition, however, to the morphological pattern, manipulating the verb in the fashion we will discuss below produces more verbal functions than number. For the morphological form under study to convey verbal number exclusively, it must be combined with a particular semantic field. When the verb is in form II and expresses a non-process instant action. This is the discussion of the following section.

Form II

In passing, I mentioned earlier that verbal number in Arabic is expressed by means of a change in the stem form from form I to form II stem. Without further elaboration, this statement is misleading, however. It requires modification. I have so far spoken about form II sporadically without introducing its formal shape and common semantic functions in the Arabic language in any great detail.[8] In the coming few lines, I will do that and focus especially on its morphological subcategories and semantic aspects that are relevant to verbal number.

Form II is medially augmented in comparison to form I of the consonantal root.[9] Form II is CVCCVCV as opposed to the basic form I CVCVCV structure. The consonantal root has a general meaning that form II can change in two main manners. First, it makes the root meaning intensive (increasing the intensity of the action) or extensive (transferring the agency or a degree thereof to one of the direct objects). Second, it indicates transitivity, acquiring two or more direct objects to the agent of the verb (Holes 2004: 101 and Watson 2007: 138–139).

[8] For examples and full derivational analysis, see Ryding (2005: 491–502) and Holes (2004: 101–102).

[9] For a brief introduction to the the root and derivation system in Arabic, see (Zemanek 2009: 93–98).

In 9 and 10 below I will give examples for the intensive/extensive and the transitive functions respectively:

9a	ğama‘a	ğamma‘a
	for I	form II
	collect	pile up
9b	xarağa	xarrağa
	form I	form II
	to leave	to allow another to leave
10	‘alama	‘allama
	form I	form II
	know	teach

In 9a form I indicates carrying out the action in general without any reference to the quality or quantity thereof. Form II of the same pair indicates the same action with intensity. The token in 9b means ‘leaving’. In 9a, the verb indicates that the agent of the verb exited and it is encoded in the suffix carrying gender and number. In 9b, the token indicates that the agency of going out went to another entity. The form II in 10 indicates that an agent causes another agent to carry out an act, in this case, learning. The causative aspect of form II also carries a denominative function by deriving verbs from nouns and adjectives (Ryding 2005: 491) In 9 below, the verb is taken from an adjective:

11	ḥadīṯ	ḥaddaṯa
	modern	modernize

The Problem

Despite the fact that I stated earlier that form II of the verb’s consonantal root may express verbal number, this feature in the Arabic verbs is not quite simple because it is not triggered automatically by the mere change from form I to form II. It is conditional. Not all form II verbs can carry number, although form II is the only designated form for verbal number. The token in 12 below is changed from a form I stem to a form II stem, it does not express number:

12a	‘alama	ad-dars
	Knew	the lesson
	He knew the lesson	

12b ‘allama ad-darsa
Taught the lesson
He taught the lesson

In 12a the verb is transitive and does not reflect the duration or the quantity of the action expressed by the verb. In 12b the stem change signifies the shift from simple transitive to causative transitive. The stem shift must coincide with other non-morphological conditions for the verb to express number. By reviewing form II verbs in Classical/Modern Standard Arabic, it becomes clear that the aforementioned conditions are semantic in nature.

In the following paragraphs I will explain which semantic categories and which relational aspects of the second stem express verbal number and which do not. It is very important to note that even in form II, the expression of number is conditional on the coexistence of two conditions: the relationship of the form II of the verb in question and its form I counterpart within the root and the semantic category of the form II lexical item also determines if it conveys verbal number. Without one or both of these conditions, form II does not express verbal number.

The first condition is of the relationship of the form II to form I. The form II of the verb in question must be an augmented form of an existing form I of the root. There are roots in which form I is dormant, such as in 13 below:

13 ḥarraka
Move

This form II verb in 13 does not have a form I counterpart. In other words, *ḥaraka does not exist, despite its theoretical structural feasibility. For a form II verb to express number, it must be the augmented form of form I as in 13 below:

14 a) ḥasuna b) ḥassana
Be better fI improve fII

In 14, a) the verb is the intransitive non-augmented form of 14 b). In 14 form I exists morphologically and is semantically related to form II. It is this subcategory of form II that can express verbal number. However, 14 and the tokens in 15 do not express verbal number despite the fact they fulfill the previous condition:

15 a) ḥakama al-balad
He ruled fI the country
He ruled the country

15 b) ḥakkama al-wāliya ‘alā al-balad
Allowed rule fII the governoron the country
He installed the governor to rule the country

For a form II verb that is augmented from form I to express verbal number it needs to belong to a particular semantic category. For the purpose of our discussion, I will categorize the augmented form II stem verbs into the following relevant semantic categories: instant and durative. Form II instant verbs are those verbs that denote an event which can be carried out in one single action at a single point in time. In 16–19, below, I list some examples of such instant verbs in form II:

16a kasara
to break (fI)
16b kassara
to break (fII)

17a qasama
to divide (fI)
17b qassama
to divide (fII)

18a qafala
to close (fI)
18b qaffala
to close (fII)

19a katama
to suppress (fI)
19b kattama
to suppress (fII)

In the previous examples, the (a tokens are transitive like the tokens in (b, but they do not express any indication of event number. Tokens (b are transitive as well, but they express more than one event. In 20 below we can see the two forms in context:

20a kasara al-zuğāğ
broke-3ms the glass
he broke the glass

20b kassara al-zuğāğ
broke-3ms (II) the glass
he broke the glass more than once

Please note that in both sentences both the agent of the action, which is represented in the verb conjugation, and the object of the action are singular in number. Note also that the change in form between the two tokens does not cause a change in meaning as it sometimes happens when form I is augmented into form II. The only formal difference between the two sentences is the form of the (b token. It is also important to note that the number carrying form II is not transitive for more than one object of the verb in both tokens. Instant action form II derived from form I instant verb carries verbal number. In 21 and 22 below, I will give some examples of the durative form II verbs:

21a xarağa
to exit or leave (fI)

21b xarrağa
to dismiss or send out (fII)

22a xarağa min al-bayt
Left from the home
He left home

22b xarrağa al-bint min al-bayt
Discussed the girl from the home
He dismissed the girl from home

In 21 above, form I in (a happens to be intransitive while form II in (b is transitive. In form II, the verb is the causative derivative of form I. The causative nature dictates a direct object of the verb. The meaning of (b does not indicate that the event took place more than once. It rather indicates transferring the agency or a degree thereof to the direct object.

The verbs in form II in the Qur'an shed more light on verbal number in two ways. First, they confirm that form II instant verbs have historically as well expressed the number of events which the agent of the verb performs when they are instant. Second, these tokens shed more light on the functional load of form II that expresses verbal number. Table one contains some of the form II tokens from different Qur'an chapters which do not express the transfer of agency formally by means of a modification to the root of the verb:

Table 1. Number Bearing Verbs in the Qur'an

Qur'an	token	meaning	Form I	meaning
Q17:26	Baddar	squander	badar	spread
Q66:1	ḥarrama	deprive	ḥarama	deprive
Q4:65	ḥakkama	judge p	ḥakama	judge s
Q28:4	ḏabbaḥa	massacre	ḏabaḥa	slaughter
Q6:21/66	kaḏḏaba	lie p	kaḏaba	lie s

Both forms in this table are transitive. Each form II token is an instant augmented version of its form I. In the context of these verses, each form II indicates a repeated action. In order to make such determinations I used, in addition to my critical readings, the reading of two medical lexical and grammatical sources, lisān and al-Baḥr, respectively.

There are data from the Qur'an that indicates that there is are some lexical roots that express agency transfer. However, the same data shows a correlation between the expression of verbal number and the lack of agency transfer on form II. The token verbs of table 1 above are verbs however that either do not have the semantic capacity of transferring agency, or express agency transfer by means of the context. Table 2 below shows form II tokens which express number. These tokens also express transitivity. However, form II does not express a transfer of agency. This function is carried out by a different modification of form I of the verb:

Table 2. Number Bearing verbs in the Qur'an

Qur'an	Token	Meaning	Form IV	meaning
Q2:176	Nazzala	descend	ʻanzala	cause to descend
Q33:69	Barraʼa	vindicate	ʻabraʼa	cause to vindicate
Q26:91	Barraza	highlight	ʻabraza	cause to highlight
Q4:72	Baṭṭaʼa	slow	ʻabṭaʼa	cause to slow
Q5:67	Ballaġa	inform	ʻablaġa	cause to inform
Q9:46	ṯabbaṭa	abort	ʻṯbaṭa	cause to abort

In these tokens, the form II is the augmented and transitive of the form I verb. Form IV expresses the transfer of agency. Reviewing medieval Arabic dictionaries indicates that all these form II verbs express the number of events.

Reviewing the earlier data from Modern Standard Arabic it becomes clear that the correlation between verbal number and the lack of transferring agency in form II is a stable correlation.

Conclusion

I showed in this article that Classical/Modern Standard Arabic share the typological diagnostic features present in the languages that have a verbal number feature. I also showed that the stem form the Arabic language uses to express number is form II. It is an augmented form of the basic verb stem in Arabic. However, this stem change in itself potentially expresses features other than number. It also expresses intensity, transitivity and the transfer of agency to one of the patients of the verb. I showed that for form II verbs to express number, there need to be two coexisting conditions. First, the verb form II in question needs to be an augmented form of the basic transitive verbal stem. Second, the form II in question is an instinctive verb semantically.

In the expression of verbal number in Arabic form II does not express the transfer of agency. In Arabic, verbal number does not include participant number. It only expresses the plurality of events. Participants are either encoded in a group of agreement prefixes and suffixes added to the verb stem or semantically by the arguments in the phrase. The stem itself does not encode any information about the number of participants in the event. It is noteworthy that medieval Arabic texts such as the Qur'an reflect the same characteristics of verbal number as Modern Standard Arabic.

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