Distributed number:
Syntax, morphology, semantics

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The aim of this talk is to give a comprehensive analysis of number, and of plurals in particular, from a variety of angles: syntactic, morphological, and semantic. My main proposal is that the plural is not homogeneous and that number is distributed along the nominal spine with different effects depending on the type of functional head (and semantic features) it is associated with.

On my view, number, including plurals, can be associated with bare nPs and a lower NumP (NumP1) but also with a higher NumP (NumP2). Whereas most scholars concentrate on the division of labour between *n* and NumP1, my main focus will be on the division of labour between NumP1 and NumP2.

Although my survey of languages is vast (it includes English, French, Ojibwe, Blackfoot, Hebrew, Arabic, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Turkish, Persian, Western Armenian, etc.), I will focus, for the purposes of this talk, on Arabic. The reason for this move is that this language is extremely interesting with regard to the way it expresses number. In particular, the grammar of Arabic includes a singulative alongside a singular as well as many plurals (broken plurals, sound plurals, plurals of singulatives, plurals of collectives, plurals of plurals) together with a dual and a paucal.

In other words, number in Arabic is complex: it displays various forms of plurals that are somehow unusual and the constraints on plural marking are intricate, exhibiting an interesting division of labour between syntax and semantics. More generally, Arabic provides insights on the relationship between gender and number, showing in particular, from a morphological point of view, that feminine exponents can represent number across the board. Existing evidence points to the idea that there is a close relationship between gender and number and Arabic provides further evidence that the two are closely linked (both diachronically and synchronically).

I will pay particular attention to paucity and the inclusive/exclusive contrast in Arabic, arriving at a simple synchronic system of Arabic number that accounts for a very complex set of facts. I will also provide, time permitting, specific arguments in favour of the view that linguistic change can occur inside words, adding evidence to existing literature in favour of the view that Affix migration is a productive operation in historical linguistic development.