

Plurals: we have to live with them.

Plurals in Arabic are groups of three or more nouns. Before discussing plurals, it's important to note that Arabic differentiates between two different kinds of nouns:

RATIONAL BEINGS (RB)

- humans
- djinn
- angels
- talking animals
- etc.

NON-RATIONAL BEINGS (NRB)

- inanimate objects
- regular non-talking animals
- etc.

I have an (untestable and therefore totally unproven) hypothesis that this is due to the *jahiliyya* period of Arabic, the time before Islam when peoples in the Arabian peninsula could be Christian and Jewish but could also be animists - worshipping rocks and other objects (in addition to other religions present at the time). People needed a way to distinguish between the rocks that could communicate with you and be worshiped, and rocks that were just... rocks.

This lives on today in Arabic plurals:

FOR PLURAL HUMANS/RATIONAL BEINGS (RB):

Most plurals end in **ون** or **ين**.

These are groups of three or more men, or men and women combined. They are called 'sound masculine plurals.'

Singular Plural

مصريّون مصريّ
موظفون موظف
مشغولون مشغول

We use **ون** when it is the subject of a sentence, and **ين** when it is just about anything else in a sentence other than the subject:

هم طلاب طبيّون.
درّستُ طلاب طبيّين هذه السنة.

In dialects, it is always **ين**:

مصريين طبيّين

What about groups of women or feminine objects (ending in **ة**)?

These plurals end in **ات**. They are called ‘sound feminine plurals’

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
مصريّة	مصريّات
موظفة	موظفات
مشغولة	مشغولات

This is true no matter where it is in the sentence, and for dialects as well.

ADJECTIVES ARE STUPID CROWDFOLLOWING MORONS.

They just do whatever their noun is doing – including being plural.

مصريون جيّدون
موظفات مشغولات
بنات وحيدات

However, **When describing plural non-rational beings (NRB), aka non-humans:**

Think **S**an **F**rancisco... **S**ingular **F**eminine

كبت كبيرة طاوولات طويلة الولايات المتحدة مدن بعيدة فلوس كثيرة

We already know that adjectives have to match their nouns when they are singular:

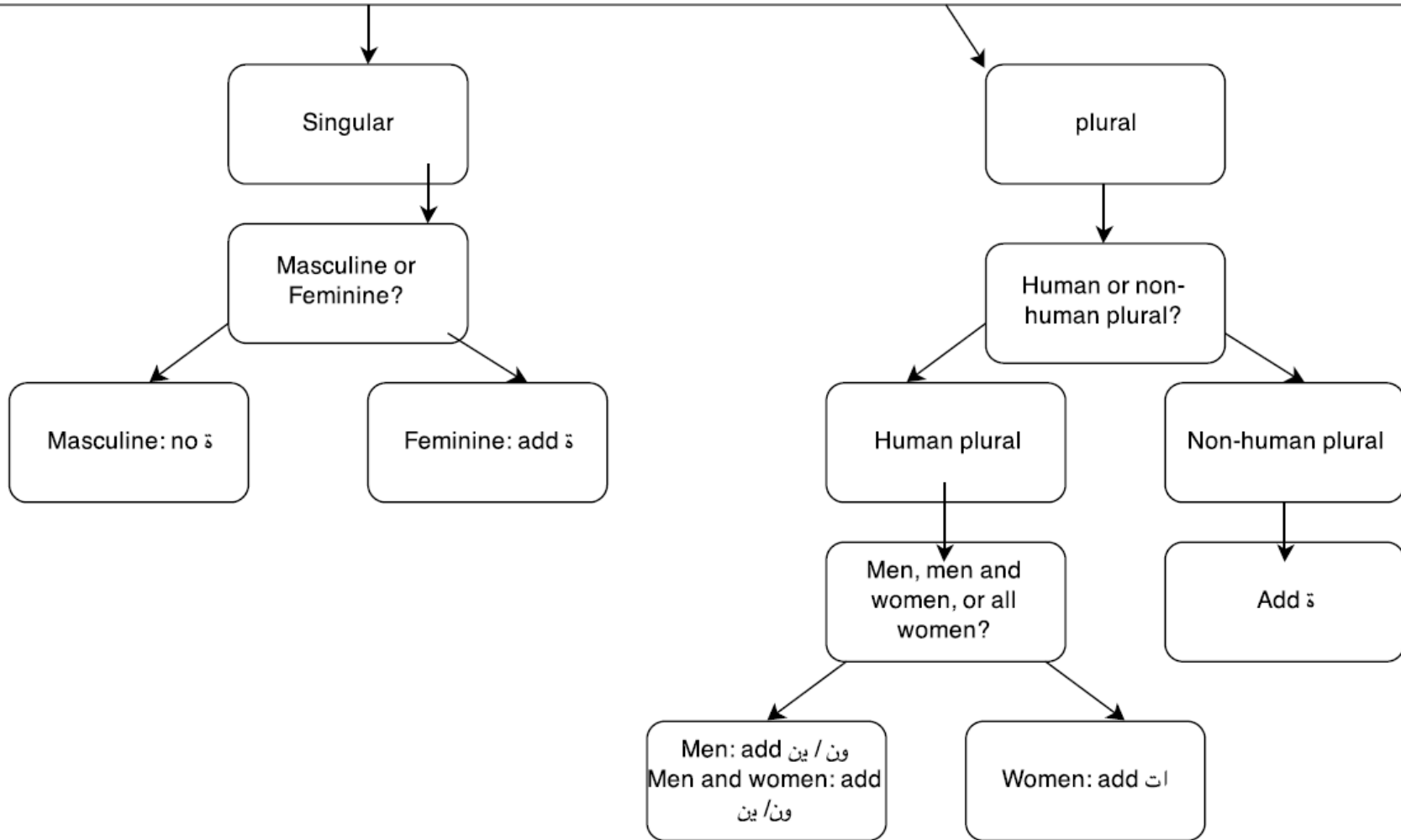
كتاب كبير بنت جميلة رجل جميل قهوة كبيرة

RB or NRB is irrelevant. BUT it becomes relevant when we are talking about the plurals of these objects.

Here is a helpful flowchart of what to do with your adjectives when describing plurals:

ARABIC ADJECTIVES

Is the noun singular or plural?



Additionally, most plurals in Arabic don't actually follow the **ون/ات** pattern. They are what are called **BROKEN PLURALS**, although I like to think of them as misunderstood friends. This means you have to learn the plural along with the singular. Or learn them as separate words.

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
طالب	طلاب
صاحب	أصحاب
فصل	فصول

It is true that there are patterns to plurals and they're not as 'broken' as they seem to be, but the rules governing what form these plurals take is so complex that it's not even worth writing about in a reference grammar book, let alone learning them.