Introduction to Cases

Arabic, like most languages, has a system of grammatical *cases*. This means that some words change form depending on their function in a sentence. Consider in English:

*I* saw *her*

*She* saw *me*

These are the same two people, of course, but we use a different word for each depending on who is the subject of the sentence (the doer) and who is the object (the receiver). This, by the way, is the difference between the words “who” and “whom”. The first is for a subject, the second for an object:

*Who* told you that?

*Whom* did you see there?

The Arabic case system is simpler than most (Russian has a real dandy if you want a complicated case system). For the most part, cases are not used in everyday speech or writing, and are reserved for the most formal of situations. However, a few instances of words differing for case do appear in everyday language (just like in English). We will address these as they come up.

One example is the ون and ين endings you’ve seen on plural words and on numbers. The ون is used for the subject of a sentence, and the ين for all other situations.

المصريون يتكلمون العربية

but

أحب المصريين.

The case ending اً has several uses. You have seen it used to indicate an adverb, such as كثيراً. It is also used to mark an indefinite object of a verb, as in the sentence:

قرأتُ كتاباً جديداً

This has no effect on the meaning, but is just a convention to mark where the object is, since Arabic does not have a standard word order. Note also that the ending, although still pronounced, will not be written after a ة.