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ASPECT IN ENGLISH AND ARABIC

A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

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1. Introduction :

Almost all grammar books in English tend to count tense and compare them to one another for the sake of showing the ways they are used or function and the different verb – forms that express tenses .

Some Grammarians , such as Echersly and Echersly (1960) for instance , count as many as 24 tenses , 12 are active and some other 12 are passive .

A few such books , like Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) , Quirk et al (1985) , Lewis (1986) , and Leech and Svartvik (1994) try to explicate the relationship between the time , tense , and the verb – forms . As for the textbooks of language teaching , Lewis (1986 : 49) reports that he has never seen a textbook that attempts to discuss the notion of time at least systematically and Coherently .

" A discussion of this notion might involve such ideas as how we express the difference between completeness and incompleteness , point and period , simultaneous and successive events , the similarities between then (past) and then (future) " . This suggests that a discussion of the notion of time should involve the type of exploration one may consider , the type of time to be conceived , the way the different types of time can be expressed in words , and whether the different types of time and temporal relationships can be expressed through the use of structure or lexical items , like adverbs .

Generally , the time- tense relationship has been given much attention by the Arab scholars of grammar to the extent that the Arabic verb –foems may hardly be explained without a reference to such a relationship .

As far in the history of the linguistic studies as the first and second centuries , A. H. , the Arab grammarians provided so good accounts of this relationship that both orientlists such as Bergstrasser (2003) and grammarians such as Wright (1967) continually highlight .

Arab scholars , however , could not have certain formally explicit remarks for such aspects as progressive and perfective , yet , they did refer to them in terms of time – tense relations by using certain auxiliaries

like " قد " , "س" , and " سوف " before the main verb – forms in their sentences .

One them could hypothesise Arabic and English tend show , according to their grammarians , an agreement in more than one respect of these notions . The descriptive linguistic efforts of the Arab grammarians concerning the identification and description of time , tense , and verb- form have preceded those of the English grammarians .

2. Time and Tense :

The word time is far more difficult to define , though all people experience it . Time , according to Quirk and Greenbaum (1973 : 46) , is a universal non- linguistic concept with three divisions past , present and future . For Quirk et al (1985 : 175) , time can be thought of as a line , theoretically of non- finite length , on which the present moment is located as a continuously moving moment , anything ahead of this moment is in the future and anything behind it is in the past . This interpretation of the three divisions of time into past , present and future is at a referential level , i. e. level of analysis outside the world of language .

Time , then is " an element of our experience of reality " (Lewis , 1986 : 47) . Time is " what we measure with clocks, watches and calendars , for example " (Fleming , 2003 : online) . Lewis (Ibid : 48) thinks that there could be another conception of time in respect with the language one may use . It is the psychological time which refers to the way language users perceive the action rather than " what objectively happened " . According to this point of view , a language might not be analyzed independently of its user's perception of what happened .

Raiss (n. d : 1) thinks that time does not exist , it is only there in human minds who could measure the idea of time by using clocks and calendars . For him (Ibid : 2) time , in English for instance , is seen as something relating to the point of now . It exists now (present) , before now (past) , after now (future) , or timelessly (covering past , present and future) .

Furthermore , Michaelis (2006 : 1) believes " humans conceive of time in terms of space . as shown by the language that we use to talk about temporal relations : we habitually speak of stretching out or compressing an activity , heading toward the future , returning to the past and so on . In this respect , Badri (1984 : 27) states Jespersen makes the idea of time closer to his readers minds by drawing a line without width or thickness . This line being with the past and ends with the future , ending the future line with an arrow to indicate continuity .

Where is it in the document?

The present is described as an unstable point of no dimension . It lines in the middle of the line and continuously moves towards the past . He (Ibid : 28) adds that the present time is too short to be obviously noticed . Quoting Modern English Grammar vol. IV , he explains this idea via figure 1 below :



The timeline is a line (or , equivalently , an ordered set of points) that is unbounded at both ends and segmented into three parts : The past , the present and the future . The points on the timeline may be times by themselves or times paired with events (Michaelis , 2006 : 1) . At the level of linguistic analysis , the interpretation of the notion of time seems rather different . In relation to language , more precisely to the meaning of the verb , " it is useful to reformulate the threefold distinction " of time (Quirk et al , 1985 : 175) . The sense of 'present' , for instance , changes to be inclusive rather than exclusive . something may be said to be present if it has existence at the present moment with the possibility that its existence may also stretch into the past as well as to the future time . In the example below , the present state of affairs of paris does not only refer to the present moment but it has also obtained for numerous centuries in the past and may extend to an indefinite period in the future .

3. Aspectual Features in English and written Arabic :

The systematic treatment of aspect in English and written Arabic is beyond the scope of this study . But it is in order to give examples which illustrate the justification for recognizing aspectual oppositions in both languages . Consider :

١ . الطالبُ كانَ يبحثُ عن الكتاب

The student was looking for the book .

٢ . الطالبُ بحثَ عن الكتاب

The student looked for the book .

The first of those two sentences indicates that the act of looking for the book was in progress for some time in the past . It presents the act of looking for the book , or the middle phase of it , as being extended in time , i. e. as having duration . In contrast , the second sentence indicates that the act of looking for the book was completed before the moment of speaking , i. e. it presents the act of looking for the book (its beginning middle and end) as a single compressed undivided whole (cf. Comrie , op cit : 16) .

The two examples illustrate aspectual duration versus non duration . The durative / non durative aspectual opposition seems to be signaled in the Arabic sentence by the contrastive elements : /kaan/ + the non-past tens i. e. /kaana yabhaθu / in (1) as against the past tense i. e. /bahaθ a / in (2) . In the corresponding English sentences a similar aspectual contrast seems to be signalled by the (be ... v + ing) form in (1) against the (-ed) form in (2) .

It is often thought that the exponents of aspect are confined to the verb phrase . Indeed the writing of aspectual rules – to the extent that such rules are formulable - would be a straight forward matter if this were the case . but as will be shown presently , aspect in both English and written Arabic is signalled by features occurring at different points in the sentence (cf. Maslov , op cit : 37) . However , neither English nor Arabic has any specific aspectual affixes (i. e. inflexional or derivational

morphemes of aspect) analogous to those attested in , say , Slavonic languages . The remainder of this study will deal with the elements of sentence structure that serve to signal the appropriate aspectual oppositions in English and written Arabic . The presentation is not intended to be exhaustive .

3.1 verb form

Three forms of the verb are particularly relevant to the study of aspect in Arabic , namely , the non-past , the past , and active participle forms . Consider :

1. a. Zaidun yahmilu tabaqan (non-past)

Zaid is carrying a plate زَيْدٌ يَحْمِلُ طَبَقاً

(non-past Be + v ing)

b. Zaidun hamala tabaqan (past)

Zaid carried a plate (past) زَيْدٌ حَمَلَ طَبَقاً

c. Zaidun haamilun tabaqan (active participle)

Zaid is carrying a plate (non-past Be + v ing) زَيْدٌ حَامِلٌ طَبَقاً

The examples at (a) express progressive aspect , and the examples at (b) express perfective aspect in English and Arabic . The examples at (c) illustrate the use of active participle in Arabic to express progressive aspect ,but the English translation is the same as that at (a) .

This shows that a threefold distinction in Arabic is matched by a twofold distinction in English . But it must not be assumed that in Arabic the non-past and the active participle are exponents of the same aspectual feature .

Consider the following extensions of 1 (a) and (c) .

2. (a) Zaidun yahmilu tabaqan kulla yawm .

زَيْدٌ يَحْمِلُ طَبَقاً كُلَّ يَوْمٍ

Zaid carries a plate every day .

(b) ? Zaidun hamala tabaqan kulla yawm .

زَيْدٌ حَمَلَ طَبَقًا كُلَّ يَوْمٍ

? Zaid carried a plate every day .

(c) * Zaidun haamilum tabaqan kulla yawm .

زَيْدٌ حَامِلٌ طَبَقًا كُلَّ يَوْمٍ .

? Zaid is carrying a plate every day .

The occurrence of the adverbial phrase / kulla yawm / every day in 2 (a) gives the sentence an iterative reading , but produces an unacceptable string of words at (c) . The strings at 2 (b) are dubious with / kulla yawm / every day .

Thus , it can be seen that the non-past in both English and Arabic is compatible with the adverbial phrase / kulla yawm / every day thereby producing an iterative reading , but the active participle of certain Arabic verbs seems to be an invariable exponent of progressive aspect and is therefore incompatible with specifics of iterativity like / kulla yawm / every day .

The foregoing statement does not apply to all verb classes . consider the following examples , which illustrate aspectual distinction caused by a difference in verb class .

3. (a) Zaidun yaktubu risaalatan it ? aan (non – past tense – progressive aspect) .

زَيْدٌ يَكْتُبُ رِسَالَةً الْآنَ

Zaid is writing a letter now (non-past tense progressive aspect .

(b) zaidun kataba risaalatan ? amsi . (past tense – perfective aspect) .

زَيْدٌ كَتَبَ رِسَالَةً أَمْسَ

Zaid wrote a letter yesterday .

(c) zaidun kaatibun risaalatan . (active participle)

Zaid will / is going to write a letter .

The passive participle does have aspect implications , but it will not be deal with here .

In the last sentence the active participle / kaatib/ " writing " does not express progressive aspect as / haamil / " carrying " in 1 (c) does .

The verbs (k – t – b) and (h- m – l) belong to different sub-classes . consider also the verb (? – t – y) " to come " :

4. (a) zaidun ya?ti ?ilaa hunaa

زيدُ يأتي الى هنا

Zaid comes here

(b) zaidun ?ataa ?ilaa hunaa (past tense – perfective aspect)

زيدُ أتى الى هنا

Zaid came here .

(c) zaidun ?aatin ?ilaa hunaa .

زيدُ آتى الى هنا

Zaid is coming here .

The non – past at 4 (a) unlike the non – past at 2(a) and 3 (a) does not express progressive aspect , the latter is expressed by the active participle at 4 (c) in the Arabic sentence and by the (be + v ing in the English sentence) .

Note that the non- past " comes here " / ha?ti ?ilaa hunaa / in 4(c) signals iterative aspect , and is compatible with adverbials like /kulla yawm / or / Eaadatan / " every day " or " usually " . But there is no inherent iterativity in comes here /ya?tii ?ilaa hunaa / . consider 5 :

5. Eindamaa ya?tii ?tilaa hunaa , sawfa ?abhaθul ?amra ma Eahu .

عندما يأتي الى هنا سوف ابحت الامر معه

When he comes here , I 'll discuss the matter with him .

As example 5 shows "comes here" / yaʔtii ʔtilaa/ must be interpreted with perfective meaning in both English and Arabic .

Equally there is no inherent progressiveness in the active participle /ʔaatin/ "coming " as illustrated in 6 :

6. wa kullkum ʔaatihi yawma lqiyaamati fardaa

وكلكم اتيه يوم القيامة فردى .

And you are all going to come / coming to him as individuals on the day of judgment .

Nor is English (be + v ing) inherently progressive.

7. (a) they are bombing civilians (now)

انهم يقتصفون المدنيين الان .

ʔinahum yaqsifuna lmadaniyyiina (lʔaan) .

(b) they are bombing civilians (nowadays)

انهم يقتصفون المدنيين هذه الايام .

ʔinahum yaqsifuna lmadaniyyiina (haadihi lʔayyaam) .

The last example illustrates the relevance of adverbs to aspectual distinctions :

7. (a) is progressive in English and in Arabic .

(b) is iterative in English and Arabic .

English language uses a three verbs form paradigm for all tensed constructions : past , present , and past participle . According to Hornby (2004 : 1504) , this paradigm can be shown in table 2 below :

Present				Past	
Forms	base	3 rd person	Present	past	past
	stem	Singular	participle	tense	Participle
Inflectional suffixes	nail	-s 3 rd	-ing v	-d pt.	-d p. p.
Models	Learn	Learns	Learning	Learned	Learned
	Choose	Chooses	Choosing	Chose	Chosen
	Set	Sets	Setting	Set	Set

Table 2 the English verb form paradigm

The present form includes the base –form and s- forms whose choice depends upon the number of the subject , whether singular or plural . It also includes present participle which is the –ing form that may follow any of the seven forms of be : am , is , are , was , were , be or been , to make continuous or progressive verb phrases.

As for the past form , it is either a past or past participle : each has its own uses whether alone or combined with other verb forms .

Further – more , Stager (1981 : 140) surly , he refers to what Quirk and Greenbaum (1973 : 43) called the finite and non-finite verbs forms . For Quirk and Greenbaum (ibid : 30) English has a maximum of five verb forms : base , -s form , -ing participle , past , and past participle and minimum of three : base , -s form , -ing participle . The latter case refers to cases where the base , past and past participle are formally alike , for instance , the verbs set , and put , etc.

According to Quirk and Greenbaum (1973 : 46) and Leech and Svartvik (1994 : 400) tense refers to the relationship between the concept of time and the structural form of the verb that indicates the time of the act denoted by that form .

Thus , a minimum verb phrase possibly consists of a single verb form like examine while a maximum one possibly consists of a combination of fixed order of these four basic constructions as in " may have been being examined . Relevant to the present study is the use of range of such constructions .

While the first and the last constructions describe modality and passive voice of the English verb phrase , the second and the third ones

refer to its aspect . Quirk and Greenbaum (1973 : 46) identify aspect with the manner in which the verbal act is experienced or regarded , perfective (complete) or non- perfective or progressive (incomplete) .

Hence , what Thomson and Martinet (1980 : 90) list above as the English active tense actually include their possible aspectual implications , they are past and present tenses in their simple , progressive and perfective aspects . this evidently widens the spectrum of the possible time tense relationships that English language can describe .

3.2. verb class :

In the foregoing section the relevance of verb form to aspectual distinctions was illustrated , and the relevance of verb class was also briefly mentioned . More examples will be given below to demonstrate the importance of verb class to aspect in English and Arabic .

Modern English grammarians (cf. Palmer , 1974 . Quirk , R. and Greenbaum , S. 1973 , Leech , G. N. 1971) recognize two main sub classes of verbs : dynamic and stative . Perhaps the determining criterion cited by all is that dynamic verbs occur in progressive aspect i.e. in the environment (be + ing) . Whereas stative verbs do not occur in this environment .

Compare the behavior of the two verbs ' write ' and ' know ' . for example

7. he is writing a letter .

8. * He is knowing the answer .

One could formulate the following rules in English .

V	—————>	Dynamic / Be	—————>	ing
V	—————>	stative * // Be	—————>	ing

Now Arabic admits of a similar sub- classification of verbs . consider (k-t-b) to write and (e – r – f) to know in gaud 10 .

9. zaidun yaktubu risaalah .

زيدُ يكتبُ رسالة .

Zaid is writing a letter .

10. zaidun yaErifu ljawaab .

زيدُ يعرفُ الجواب

Zaid knows the answer .

Sentence 9 is to be interpreted with a progressive meaning , While to expresses a state , i. e. zaid is in the state of having known the answer .

This claim is supported by the following extensions .

9. (a) zaidun yaktubu risaalah , * farrisaalatu maktuubah .

زيدُ يكتبُ رسالةً ، فالرسالة مكتوبة .

Zaid is writing a letter , * and the letter has been written .

(b) zaidun yaktubu risaalah wasayakuunn qad katabahaa baeda nisfi saaeah .

زيدُ يكتبُ رسالةً ، وسيكون قد كتبها بعد نصف ساعة

Zaid is writing a letter , and he will have written it in half an hour .

10. zaidun yaErifu ljawaab , falijawaabu maEruuf .

زيدُ يعرفُ الجواب فالجواب معروف

Zaid knows the answer and the answer is known (i. e. in the state of having been known) .

(b) zaidun yaErifu ljawaab , * wasayakuunn qad Earafahu baEda nisfi saaEah .

Zaid knows the answer * and he will have known it in half an hour .

زيدُ يعرفُ الجواب وسيكون قد عرفه بعد نصف ساعة .

However , language is characterized by variation and it tends to defy rigid rules . for although the verb know (E – r – f) is justifiably classified as stative in the light of the above examples , it nonetheless can occur acceptably in the environment of (be ——— ing) provided other

elements of sentence structure . e. g. the adverbial phrases more and more ' ?akθara fa?akθar ' are also present . consider :

11. Zaid is knowing more and more about German habits .

زيد يعرف اكثر فأكثر عن العادات الالمانية .

Zaidun yaErifu ?akθara fa?akθara Ean ilEaadaat it?almaaniyyan (cf. sag 1974) .

This example lends further support to the claim that aspectual contrasts are by no means .

Confined to the verb rather they tend to be conditioned by a variety of formatives occurring at different points in the sentence .

Enough has been said to support the claim that aspect in English and written Arabic is a function of a variety of sentential elements including verb form . verb class and adverbials .

The two language seem to exhibit a remarkable measure of similarity with regard to aspectual distinctions .

Perhaps this is indicative of the universal nature of aspect as a semantico-syntactic category .

4. Auxiliaries and Aspect :

In contrast to full verb forms stated in table 2 above , there are sets of helping verbs or auxiliaries . According to Quirk et al . (1985 : 120) , these include primary auxiliaries such as be , have , and do a modal auxiliary verbs such as will , shall , could , etc.

Furthermore , the verb phrase is either finite or non- finite . a finite verb phrase is , according to Quirk et al . (ibid : 151) , is either simple or complex . the latter shows just four basic constructions (with the verb examine as a model) :

1. Modal	Modal + base form	Must examine
2. Perfective	Have + -d p.p.	Have examined
3. Progressive	Be + ing v d	Is + examining
Passive	Be + -d p.p.	Is examined

Their possible aspectual implications , they are past and present tenses in their simple , progressive and perfective aspects . this evidently widens the spectrum of the possible time tense relationships that English language can describe .

Time and tense in Arabic :

There are many classifications for the Arabic verb-forms , according to their relationship to both time and tense .

These classifications are mostly relating the verb forms to the notion of time , or what is commonly called the ' philosophical time ' . this point seems so controversial in grammar that grammarians often tend to put forward their claims for debate and provide their burden of proof to support this rather than that claim . Generally , grammarians of English and Arabic alike seem to account time – tense relationship on the same bases :

1. philosophical time or what Quirk et al (1985) call referential time .
2. tense and verb form .

Additionally , some Arab scholars , such as at – Tabaatebaai (1983) , identify a third basis for this relationship . He adds the classification of

tense according to the existence and nonexistence of the action indicated by the verb .

5. Aspect and Modality :

Advocating Arabic in the respect of aspect and modality , the researchers could present three points :

1. Apparently , it seems that Wright (1947) has reached this unfair conclusion throughout studying some Arabic grammar books for the beginners such as that of Ibn- Aqeel (1988) and Ibn-hushaam (1987) and neglected the Arabic grammar resources of heavy reliance .
2. for most grammarians , both English and Arabic tend to use two verb forms , past and present , only to express all time relations .
3. As for complex tenses expressed by complex verb phrases , a. English uses some other techniques like auxiliaries and time indicators or adverbs to express actions at a more complex level of time relations . Thus , in addition to the main verb , it uses verb phrases with perfective , progressive , and the progressive perfective combinations of tense like (have+ -en) , (be + - ing) , and (have + been + - ing) respectively . for some grammarians , this is , in fact , a mixture of tense and aspect as two distinct grammatical categories .

b. Arabic behaves in the same way . it has its own adverbs and auxiliaries that accompany the main verbs to indicate such more complex relations . Hence , the Arabic verb phrase may contain auxiliaries like (قد ، كان قد ، س ، سوف) that forms one unit with the present or past form of the verb to express clusters of actions in the past time or clusters of intentions in the future .

This view is supported by the idea that some Arab scholars have noticed the linguistic phenomenon of more than a tense in one , notice the italic expressions in the following statement of Ibn-Ya'eesh (n. d. : 18) describing ' اذا ' and ' اذ ' :

' اذا ' and ' اذ ' could suitably occur in all past and future times . ' اذ ' is ambiguous in all past times and has no special tense rather than any other [to occur with] thus , it is ambiguous at all the future times as well [emphasis added] .

The realization of ' all past times ' and ' all future time ' indicates a better understanding of the various tenses that should express such times .

Emphasizing this fact , Bergstrasser (2003 : 89 – 90) states that what distinguished Arabic from other semantic languages is the specialization and the variation of meanings in its verb forms by using two means , one of such means is the use of auxiliaries such as ' قد ' in constructions like ' قد يفعل ' , ' قد فعل ' and ' سيفعل ' .

6. conclusions :

Throughout the present study , one could refer to the following conclusions , which serve to verify its hypotheses concerning the agreement between Arabic and English in more than one respect of the notions of time , tense , and the verb form and concerning the descriptive linguistic efforts of the Arab grammarians in the identification and description of these notions .

1. Ancient as well as modern grammarians of Arabic and modern grammarians of English have found the link between tense and time and mostly believe that tense , in parallelism with time , is tripartite : past , present and future .
2. The concept of tense has formally developed with time to include some other grammatical categories such as aspect , mood , and modality , i. e. the study of more than a tense in one .
3. Though at different ages , both Arab and English grammarians do agree that the present tense is a mobile moment across the line of time and that every single moment moves out of the future through the present moment to be gradually within the past .
4. Tense is related to verb forms , in the same way a verb is related to its verb phrase in terms of a functional , as opposed to a formal , category . In other words , tense is a functional category . which is a characteristic of the verb phrase within its sentence yet .
 - a. Only do some grammarians of both sides have realized this distinction .
 - b. Arab grammarians use the term ' فعل ' (verb) to refer to both formal as well as functional categories , i.e. to verb form and tense respectively .
 - c. The Arabic term ' زمن ' again , is mostly ambiguous as it may refer to ' time ' and tense in English , though some Arab grammarians use ' زمن ' (tense) and ' الزمن الفلسفي ' (time) .
 - d. Time is a non-linguistic universal , referential or philosophical , and psychological notion , which often shows no correspondence with tense as a grammatical category in both languages .
5. The Arab grammarians have proved their authenticity in description and analysis that mostly go beyond dispute earlier than the descriptive efforts of the English grammarians . Among such

efforts , there has been the study of the relationships between the verb form and tense in connection to both the concept of time and the nature of the denoted action or event .

6. Though the Arab grammarians have their prominent contribution not only in this respect but also in the identification of past and past present tenses that are used for non-past and non-present respectively , they have not devoted separate sections in their grammars for the identification and description of such notions as aspect , mood and modality . they have investigated this particular notion in terms of mere verb form , verb forms an auxiliaries , and of the adverbial time indicators in actual sentence . yet their efforts need to be restudied in terms of such notions to highlight their serious efforts in this regard .

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