

Contrastive and Comparative Study of Tenses in English and Arabic Languages

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الباحث: شيماء المعمار

الخلاصة بالعربية:

يتناول البحث أهمية الأزمنة، ويسعى لإيجاد اختلاف والتشابهات بين اللغتين العربية والانكليزي. لذا يحاول الباحث تشخيص وتحليل ومقارنة معاني وأنواع الأزمنة واستعمالاتها في كلا اللغتين للكشف عن المسائل الكلية الممكنة في هذا المجال في اللغتين، ولتقرير وتحديد اختلافات والتشابهات بينهما قدر الامكان.

Abstract

This paper deals with the importance of tense. It attempts to find whether there are any similarities and differences between English and Arabic languages. So, the study tries to identify, analyze, and contrast the meanings, types and uses of tenses in these two languages in order to reveal the possible universals of the two languages in this field, and to determine as much as possible the similarities and differences between them.

The notion of tense is explained. Then the types are mentioned with some classifications, and restrictions. Arabic tenses, on the other hand, are also illustrated, their notion, levels, types and restrictions. The main findings are discussed in the paper. Then, the references used are documented.

This study provides a general view of the meanings, forms and uses of tenses in English and Arabic Languages. The study is organized into three sections. Section one discusses some related concepts like tense, time and aspect. Then English tenses are investigated in some details by presenting their meaning, forms and uses. Section two sheds some light on Arabic tenses, their types, meanings, forms and uses. Finally, section three is specified to general discussion and conclusions.

1. Introduction:

Every language has ways of talking about time. In most languages there is a variety of expressions that can be used to show when something happened or will happen. These may include temporal adverbs (soon, later,

then), PPs (in the morning, after the election), NPs (last year, that week, the

next day), auxiliary verbs (will, has, did), affixes on the verb, etc. The term

tense is used only for time reference which is marked grammatically that is, by purely grammatical elements such as affixes, auxiliaries, or particles. This distinction is reflected in standard definitions of tense such as the following:

Comrie (1985:32):"Tense is grammaticalised expression of location in time."

Bybee (1985:34):"Tense refers to the grammatical expression of the time of the situation described in the scheme, relative to some other time."

Greenbaum and Nelson (2002:55) define tense as a grammatical category referring to the time of the situation; the tense is indicated by the form of the verb. There are two tense forms: **present** and **past**.

It is important to understand that the comparison between English and Arabic tenses is an interesting subject to investigate. Therefore, this study attempts to find whether there are any similarities and differences between English and Arabic languages. So, the study tries to identify, analyze, and contrast the meanings, types and uses of tenses in these two languages in order to reveal the possible universals of the two languages in this field, and to determine as much as possible the similarities and differences between them.

2. Tenses in English Language

2.1 Time, Tense, and Aspect

It is important to begin by distinguishing three different levels on which the terms 'present' and 'past' can be explained. First, time can be thought of as a line (theoretically, of infinite length) on which is located, as a continuously moving point, the present moment. Anything ahead of the present moment is in the future, and anything behind it is in the past. This is an interpretation of past, present, and future on a Referential level (Quirk et al., 1985:175). But in relating this view of time to language, time is a universal, non linguistic concept with three divisions: past, present, and future (Quirk et al. 1976:39).

Robins (1978:267) says that the semantic ranges covered by the different forms are mainly on two axes, time relations and what are usually called aspectual difference of completion, incompleteness, continuous, and momentariness.

Most linguists agree that English has two tenses: present tense and past tense. The present tense usually refers to the present time and past tense refers to the past time no future tense like:

She is quite well today.

Yesterday she was sick.

Some grammarians like Eckersley & Eckersley (1972:62) have argued for a third, 'future tense', claiming that English realizes this tense by the use of an auxiliary verb construction (such as will+ infinitive). But certain grammatical constructions are capable of expressing the semantic category of 'future time'.

Some grammarians have gone further, avoiding the term 'present' in reference to tense, and preferring 'nonpast'. The terms present tense and past tense have this justification: that the tenses they name typically have reference to present and past time respectively:

She is quite well today. Yesterday she was sick.

Quirk et al (ibid.) say that 'present' is defined in an inclusive rather than in an exclusive way: something can be defined as 'present' if it has existence at the present moment, allowing for the possibility that its existence may also stretch into the past and into the future. When we say *Paris stands on the River Seine* may be correctly said to describe a 'present' state of affairs, even though this state of affairs has also obtained for numerous centuries in the past, and may well exist for an indefinite period in the future.

On the semantic level of interpretation, then, 'present' is the most general and unmarked category. In contrast to [1], which is a generic statement applicable to present, past, and future, [2] is a more limited statement, suggesting that the albatross, like the dodo, is extinct:

Albatrosses are large birds. [1]

Albatrosses were large birds. [2] (ibid.)

Aspect on the other hand, is a grammatical category referring to the manner that the time of a situation is viewed by the speaker or writer; the aspect is indicated by a combination of auxiliary and verb form. Verbs have two aspects: the perfect aspect and the progressive aspect (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002:55).

Aspect then concerns to the way in which the verbal action is experienced or regarded (for example as completed or in progress).

These three categories impose on each other, particularly, the expression of time present and past cannot be considered separately from aspect.

2.2 Types of Tenses in English

Tenses in English can be divided to:

2.2.1. Simple Present Tense

Swick, (2010:3) States that simple present tense of most verbs requires only an -s ending in the third-person singular. This is true whether the subject is a pronoun (*he, she, it*) or a singular noun. The first- and second-person pronouns (*I, we, you*), the third-person plural pronoun (*they*), and plural nouns require no ending in the present tense of this type. It has different uses:

A. *Present without reference to specific time*

It is used where is no limitation on the extension of the state through the present into the past and future time. It is expressed with the simple present form. This category includes 'eternal truths' which do not refer to the present but are general timeless statements. There are two related types:

(i) Universal time statements, particularly associated with stative verbs.

With stative verb senses, the present is used without reference to specific

Time like:

Water consists of hydrogen and oxygen.

Two and three make five.

The earth moves round the sun. (Quirk et al., 1972:85)

(ii) Habitual time statements

When they are used with the simple present, dynamic verb meanings, like

stative verb meanings, usually imply an inherently unrestricted time span.

But in this case the verb refers to a whole sequence of events, repeated over

the period in question:

We go to London every year.

She makes her own dresses.

Water boils at 100°C.

B. The Instantaneous simple present

It is used with a dynamic verb which signifies an event simultaneous with the present moment. It usually happens where the verb refers to a single action begun and completed nearly at the moment of speech. It is expressed with either simple or the progressive form. The instantaneous present, however, because it implies that the event has little or no duration, does not occur outside some rather restricted situations. Such situations include the following:

Commentaries: John passes the ball to Jack.

Demonstrations and other self-commentaries: I pick up the fruit with a skewer, dip it into the batter, and lower it into the hot fat.

Special Exclamatory Sentences (with initial adverbials): Here comes the winner!

Performatives: I advise you to withdraw. I apologize. We thank you for your recent inquiry (Quirk et al, 1972:86).

C. Simple present referring to the past time

The so-called historic present is characteristic of popular narrative style (also the fictional present):

- I couldn't believe it! Just as we arrived, up comes Ben and slaps me on

the back as if we're life-long friends. 'Come on, old pal,' he says, 'Let me buy you a drink!' I'm telling you, I nearly fainted on the spot.

The historic present describes the past as if it is happening now. It conveys

something of the dramatic immediacy of an eye-witness account (Quirk et al, 1985: 181).

A very different use of the present tense in reference to the past is that found with verbs of communication verbs like: tell, hear, learn, write, etc.

The ten o'clock news says that there's going to be a bad storm.

John tells me the Smiths has been abroad.

D. Simple present with future time referring

i. In main clauses, this typically occurs with time-position adverbials to suggest that the event is unalterably fixed in advance, and is as certain as it would be, were it taking place in the present:

The plane leaves for Ankara at eight o'clock tonight.

ii. In dependent clauses, the future use of the simple present is much more common, particularly in conditional and temporal clauses:

He'll do it if you pay him.

I'll let you know as soon as I hear from her (ibid.).

2.2.2. Simple Past Tense

Quirk et al. (1976:42) state that an action in the past may be seen as having taken place at a particular point of time; or over a period; if the latter, the period may be seen as extending up to the present, or relating only to the past; if the latter, it may be viewed as either having been completed, or as not having been completed.

Habitual activity can also be expressed with the simple past like:

He always wrote with a special pen.

A suitable adverb like used to or would may be needed to achieve this sense like:

He used to write with a special pen.

He would write with a special pen.

The simple past tense of most verbs requires an -ed ending with regular verbs. No other conjugational endings are needed for any of the persons in either the singular or plural. Irregular verbs form the simple past tense in more than one way. Some make a vowel change. Some make a vowel and consonant change. A few transform completely. And a small group of verbs in the past tense looks identical to the present-tense verb (Swick, 2010:11).

The past tense combines two features of meaning:

(a) The event state must have taken place in the past, with a gap between

its completion and the present moment.

(b) The speaker or writer must have in mind a definite time at which the event state took place (ibid.).

The first of these conditions can be exemplified by a sentence like: I stayed in Africa for several months, where the usual implication is that I am no longer in Africa. The second condition is most explicitly shown in cooccurrence relations between the past tense and past time-position adverbials such as last week, in 1932, several weeks ago, yesterday, etc.

It is not necessary, however, for the past tense to be accompanied by an overt indicator of time. All that is required is that the speaker should be able to count on the hearer's assumption that he has a specific time in mind.

Just as the simple present does not always refer to present time, so the past tense is not always confined to past time reference. There are again three special meanings:

(a) In Indirect Speech or (Reported speech), the past tense in the reporting verb tends to make the verb of the subordinate clause past tense as well. This phenomenon, known as backshift, is normally optional, but can result in an apparently anachronistic use of the past tense for present time:

A: Did you say you have had no money?

B: Yes, I'm completely broke.

A different kind of backshift is observed when a sentence describing speech or thought in the future contains reported speech clause referring

retrospectively to the present:

My wife will be sorry that she missed seeing you this evening.

(b) The Attitudinal Past is related to the attitudes of the speaker rather than to time. In the following sentence, both the present and past tenses refer to a present state of mind:

Do/Did you want to see me now?

(c) The Hypothetical Past is used in certain subordinate clauses, especially if-clauses, and expresses what is contrary to the belief or expectation of the speaker:

If you really worked hard, you would soon get promoted.

It's time we all took a rest.

The hypothetical past implies the nonoccurrence of some state or event in the present or future (Quirk et al, 1985:186).

2.2.3 Perfective and progressive aspects

The term aspect, as it has previously mentioned, refers to a grammatical category which reflects the way in which the verb action is regarded or experienced with respect to time. Unlike tense, aspect is not deictic, in the sense that it is not relative to the time of utterance. The two aspect constructions of English, the perfective and the progressive, can be seen as realizing a basic contrast of aspect between the action viewed as complete (perfective), and the action viewed as incomplete, ie in progress (imperfective or progressive). But these two aspects may combine within a single verb phrase (eg I have been reading is both perfective and progressive). In fact, aspect is so closely connected in meaning with tense, that the distinction in English grammar between tense and aspect is little more than a terminological convenience which helps us to separate in our minds two different kinds of realization: the morphological realization of tense and the syntactic realization of aspect.

SYMBOL	NAME	EXAMPLE
Type A	present perfective	he has examined
	past perfective	he had examined
Type B	present progressive	he is examining
	past progressive	he was examining
Type AB	present perfective progressive	he has been examining
	past perfective progressive	he had been examining

(Quirk et

al.(1985:189)

The overlap of meaning between tense and aspect is most problematic in

English in the choice that has to be made between simple past and present

perfective:

simple past: John lived in Paris for ten years.

present perfective: John has lived in Paris for ten years.

Here both sentences indicate a state of affairs before the present moment, but the simple past indicates that the period of residence has come to a close, whereas the present perfective indicates that the residence has continued up

to the present time (and may even continue into the future). This kind of difference, although by no means invariable, is often summarized in the statement that the present perfective signifies past time 'with current relevance'.

2.3

2.3.1 Perfective

2.3.1.1 *The present perfective*

The present perfect indicates a period of time returning back into some earlier time, It is past with current relevance.

Simple past: Jack live in London for ten years.

Present perfect: Jack has lived in London for ten years.

Quirk et al. (1972:91) implies that the simple past of the first sentence refers to the period of residence in London has come to be finished. Whereas the perfective aspect implies that Jack still lives in London at the moment of speaking (although there is no implication that his residence there will continue).

The present perfective differs from the simple past in relating a past event state to a present time orientation. Thus in situations (which are not unusual) where either the present perfective or the simple past can be appropriately used, they are not interchangeable, but that the present perfective relates the action more directly to the present time.

The choice between the simple past and the present perfective is associated with time orientation, and therefore with the choice and interpretation of time adverbials. (For the classification of the relevant types of adverbials, Examples are:

(a) Adverbials associated with the past tense:

yesterday (evening).

a week ago.

last Monday.

I saw him on Tuesday.

the other day.

in the morning

(b) Adverbials associated with the present perfective:

up to now.

since I met you.

I haven't seen her so far

lately

hitherto

(C) Adverbials associated with both:

today.

I saw her [this June.

have seen recently. (ibid.)

2.3.1.2 The past perfective

The past perfective usually has the meaning of 'past-in-the-past', and can be regarded as an anterior version either of the present perfective or of the simple past like:

No wonder Miss Matthews' French was excellent - she had lived in Paris since childhood.

In some contexts the simple past and the past perfect are interchangeable like:

came

I ate my lunch after my wife { had come}home from her shopping.

Here the conjunction after refers that the arrival from the shopping had taken place before the eating.

The perfect can be combined with the progressive into present perfect progressive like has been playing and past perfect progressive like had been playing.

2.3.2 Progressive Aspect

Progressive aspect (also sometimes called the **durative** or **continuous** aspect) indicates temporariness or a happening **in progress** at a given time. If we take the following example to compare:

Simple Present: Joan *sings* well.

Present Progressive: Joan *is singing* well.

We can see that these two sentences have the same tense, but different aspects. Notice the difference this makes to the meaning: Joan *sings* well refers to Joan's competence as a singer (that she has a good voice - a relatively permanent attribute); Joan *is singing* well refers to her performance on a particular occasion or during a particular season. The same formal contrast could be made for the past tense:

Simple Past: Joan *sang* well.

Past Progressive: Joan *was singing* well.

Additionally, there are a number of other meanings or overtones that go with the progressive aspect, such as limited duration, incompleteness, simultaneity, vividness of description, emotional colouring, and emphasis(Quirk et al., 1976:89).

The progressive occurs only with dynamic verbs, ie with verbs in dynamic use. Dynamic verbs fall into five classes while stative verbs, which disallow the progressive, can be seen as belonging to one of two classes.

Dynamic verbs can be classified to: 1. Activity verbs like ask, call, drink, eat, etc. 2. Process verbs like change, grow, mature, etc. 3. Verbs of bodily

sensation like: feel, hurt, ache, etc. 4. Transitional event verbs like: fall, leave, lose, etc. 5. Momentary verbs like: hit, kick, knock, etc.

Stative can be classified to: 1. Verbs of inert perception and cognition like: astonish, believe, dislike, hear, know, prefer, smell, understand, etc. 2. Relational verbs like: be, belong, consist of, involve, resemble, etc.

2.3.3 Perfective progressive

The perfect progressive denotes a temporary situation leading up to the present moment like:

Simple perfect: Marry has lived in London since 1990.

Perfect progressive: Marry has been living in London since 1990.

The meaning difference is unimportant, but the use of the progressive means that the speaker considers Marry residence in London to be temporary.

2.4. The Future

There is no obvious future tense in English corresponding to the time/tense parallel for present and past. Instead there are a number of possibilities of denoting future time. Futurity, modality, and aspect are closely interrelated, and this is reflected in the fact that future time is rendered by means of modal auxiliaries, by semi-auxiliaries, or by the simple present or present progressive forms (Quirk et al., 1985:191).

2.4.1 Auxiliary verb construction

a. Will/shall+ infinitive

The most common way of expressing futurity is the modal auxiliary construction with will, shall, or **'ll**.

He will be here in half an hour.

Will you need any help?

The modal verb will (or the contracted form 'll) is used with future meaning with subjects of all three persons. The infrequent modal shall is used (especially in Southern Standard BrE) to indicate futurity, but only with a first person subject:

No doubt I shall see you next week.

The auxiliary construction is also used to refer to a statement seen in the past from a point of orientation in the future.

They will have finished their book by next year.

b. Be going to'+ infinitive

Swick, (2010:4) implies that another construction frequently used to express futurity, especially in informal speech, is be going to followed by

the infinitive. Its general meaning is 'future fulfilment of the present'. In fact, the construction has two more specific meanings, of which one, **future fulfillment of present intention**, chiefly associated with personal subjects and agentive verbs:

When are you going to get married?

Laila is going to lend us her camera.

The other meaning, **Future result of present cause**, is found with both personal and non-personal subjects:

It's going to rain.

She's going to have a baby.

As these examples suggest, the association of *be going to* with the present

often leads to the assumption that it indicates the proximity of the future event. Unlike *will* and '11, *be going to* is not generally used in the clause superordinate to a conditional clause:

If you leave now, you'll never regret it.

c. Present progressive

Quirk et al. (1976:43) affirm that the present progressive can refer to a future happening anticipated in the present. Its basic meaning is: fixed arrangement, plan, or programme:

The orchestra is playing a Mozart symphony after this.

The match is starting at 2.30 (tomorrow).

Since the progressive is used to denote present as well as future, a time adverbial is often used to clarify in which meaning the verb is being used:

They are washing the dishes now

later

The present progressive is especially used with transitional dynamic verb like *arrive*, *come*, *go*, *land*, *start*, *stop*, etc.

The plane is taking off at 5.30

d. Simple present

The simple present is, after the *will/shall* construction, the next most common means of referring to future actions in English. This future use of the simple present is frequent, however, only in dependent clauses, where it is regularly used after conditional and temporal conjunctions such as (*if*, *unless*, and *when*), as well as in some *that*-clauses:

What will you say if I swim in the river?

At this rate, the guests will be drunk before they leave.

In main clauses, the future use of the simple present may be said to represent

a marked future of unusual definiteness, attributing to the future the degree

of certainty one normally associates with the present and the past. It is used,

for example, for statements about the calendar:

Tomorrow is Thursday. School finishes on 21st March.

Also to describe immutable events or 'fixtures', whether or not these are determined by human planning:

When is high tide?

What time does the match begin?

The present progressive is especially used with transitional dynamic verb like arrive, come, go, land, start, stop, etc.

The plane is taking off at 5.30

Both the simple present and the present progressive are often used with transitional dynamic verb like arrive, come, leave, etc. both having the meaning of 'plan' or 'program':

The train{ is leaving }tonight from London.

Leaves (ibid.)

e. Will /shall + progressive infinitive

Swick, (2010:4) maintains that the modal verb construction can be used with the progressive infinitive in a way which simply combines reference to a future time with the 'temporal frame' associated with the progressive: will, shall+ Be + V-ing. The use of this combination avoids the interpretation(to which will, shall, and Be Going to are liable)of volition, insistence, etc.

He'll do his best (future of volitional interpretation possible)

He'll be doing his best (future interpretation only)

f. Be about to + infinitive, on the other hand, expresses near future:

The train *is about to* leave.

I'm *about to* read your essay. (Quirk et al., 1985:192)

g. Be to + infinitive

This expression (a) arrangement, (b) command, or (c) pre-destined future:

a) We *are to be* married soon.

b) You *are to be* back by 10 O'clock.

c) If *he's to succeed* in his new profession, -----

2.4.2 Future time in the past

Most of the future constructions just discussed can be used in the past tense

to describe something which is in the future when seen from a viewpoint in

the past.

(a) Auxiliary verb construction with *would* (rare; literary narrative style)

The time was not far off when he *would* regret this decision.

(b) *Be going to*, + infinitive (often with the sense of 'unfulfilled intention')

You *were going to* give me your address.

(c) Past progressive (arrangement predetermined in the past)

I *was meeting* him in Bordeaux the next day.

(d) *Be to* + Infinitive (formal); 'was destined', 'was arranged')

He was later *to* regret his decision.

The meeting was *to* be held the following week.

(e) *Be about to* + infinitive ('on the point of'; often with the sense of 'unfulfilled intention').

He was *about to* hit me. (ibid.)

3. Tenses in Arabic Language

Wightwick, J. & Gaatar, M. (2008: 14) state that Arabic is relatively straightforward when it comes to tenses. Some languages have many tenses and are very specific about the time of an action and whether or not the action has been completed. Arabic grammar is vague about time and aspect, there are only two basic tenses:

- The past (or perfect) الماضي
- The present (or imperfect) المضارع

The present is used for both continuous and habitual actions or states, where in English we might use a different tense. The past stem is formed from the three root letters with a *fatHa* after the first root and a *fatHa* (or sometimes a *kasra*) after the second root letter (*katab/sharib*). Endings are added to the stem to show the subject of the verb. The present stem is formed from the three root letters with a vowel after the second (*ktub/shrab/jlis*). Prefixes, and sometimes also endings, are added to the stem to show the subject of the verb. The future may be made by adding (*sawfa*) or (*sa*) to the present.

3.1 The Past Tense

(1) Action in the past: The Arabic past tense refers to a completed action and thus equates in most respects with English past tense and past perfect

(2) Non-past action: Depending on the context, the Arabic past tense may also be used to convey other meanings (Ryding,2005:440).

The past tense in Arabic is formed by suffixing person-markers to the past tense verb stem. The person markers in the past tense also denote number (singular, dual, plural) and gender.

In a simple regular verb, the basic past tense will look like this:

كتب(kataba): (he) wrote

شرب(shariba): (he) drank

حمل(Hamala): (he) carried

If we take off the final vowel, هو ("he"/"it") this part of the verb (third person masculine singular) becomes the base, or stem of the past tense. Different endings can be added to this past stem depending on who is carrying out the action (the subject of the verb). So, كتب (kataba) is "he wrote" and كتب (katab) is the past stem. If we add the ending ت (tu) to the stem, it becomes كتبت (katabtu) – "I wrote"; if we add نا (naa), it becomes كتبنا (katabnaa) – "we wrote," etc. Here is a table showing all the endings for the past tense:

singular	Ending	Example
انا I	ت (tu)	كتبت (katabtu)
انت You (mus)	ت (ta)	كتبت (katabta)
انت (fem)	كتبت (ti)	كتبت (katabti)
هو He/it	- (a)	كتب (kataba)
هي she /it	ت (at)	كتبت (katabat)
Plural	Ending	Example
نحن We	نا (naa)	كتبنا (katabnaa)
انتم You(mas.)	تم(tum)	كتبتم (katabtum)
انتن You (fem.)	تن(tunna)	كتبتن (katabtunna)
هم They(mas.)	وا (uu)	كتبوا (katabuu)
هن They(fem.)	ن (na)	كتبن (katabna)

Wightwick, J. & Gaatar, M. (2008: 16)

One can note that we will not meet or need the feminine plurals as often as the masculine plurals. This is because we only use the feminine plural if all the people in a group are female. If the group is mixed male and female, the masculine is used. Therefore, this form is the most important to learn

and become familiar with in the first place. There are also different endings for two people (the dual). We do not have to use the personal pronouns (he, she, etc.) before the verb as we do in English. If we see an Arabic sentence like this:

كتبت رسالة لامها (She) wrote a letter to her mother.

We can tell it is "she" because of the ending of the verb (katabat). The sentence could be more specific and say exactly who wrote the letter (the subject of the verb). Then we would see:

كتبت فاطمة رسالة لامها. Fatma wrote a letter to her mother.

In written Arabic the subject (Fatma) usually comes after the verb (wrote).

3.2 The Present Tense

The present tense, or imperfect, refers in a general way to incomplete, ongoing actions or ongoing states. It corresponds to both the English present and present continuous tenses. There is no distinction between these in Arabic.

The present tense is formed from the present tense stem of a verb, to which both a prefix and a suffix are added. The stem by itself is not an

independent word; it needs the prefixes and suffixes to convey a complete

meaning (Ryding, 2005:441).

Wightwick (2008:15) states that the present is used for an action (or state) which is still going on (unfinished). Whereas the past is formed by adding endings to a stem, the present adds letters on the beginning *and* end of a different present stem to show the subject of the verb. The following table explains the addition to the present:

Singular

انا	اكتب	'aktub(u*)
انت you (masc.)	تكتب	taktub(u*)
انت you (fem.)	تكتبين	taktubiina
هو he/it	يكتب	yaktub(u*)
هي she/it	تكتب	taktub(u*)

Plural

نحن we	نكتب	naktub(u)
انتم you (masc. pl)	تكتبون	taktubuuna
انتن you (fem. pl)	تكتبن	taktubna
هم they (masc.)	يكتبون	yaktubuuna

هن they (fem.)

يكتبن

yaktubna (ibid.)

If we look at the table, we can see that the present stem which appears in all the examples is كُتِبَ (*ktub*): the three root letters *k/t/b*, with no vowel after the first letter and a *Damma* (o`) after the second. The different letters added on the beginning and end (*prefixes* and *suffixes*) are arranged around this present stem to show the subject of the verb.

The present is used for both continuous and habitual actions or states, where in English we might use a different tense:

يلعب الاطفال الكرة يوم الجمعة.

The children play football on Friday(s).

يجلس صديقك في مقعدي

Your friend is sitting on my chair!

As with the past, the vowel on the second root letter varies in the present. If the middle vowel on the past is a kasra, then it usually changes to a fatHa in the present:

شرب Shariba (he drank)

يشرب yashrab (he drinks)

However, the majority of verbs have fatHa as the middle vowel of the past and, for these verbs, there is no rule to follow in the present. If we need to know the vowel, we can look in a dictionary where we will find the middle vowel written after the entry. In most cases the middle vowel will not affect the meaning of the text or our understanding of it (ibid.).

Ryding(2005: 345) tackles the issue of Present Perfect Continuous with *mundhu* in Arabic by saying "An action started in the past and continuing into the present is usually rendered by the present tense in Arabic, whereas in English, the present perfect is used. The preposition *mundhu* is used to specify at which point in the past the action started. This structure may occur with verbal predications or with equational predications".

يعمل في الادارة منذ شهرين

He has been working in the administration for two months.

3.3 The Future

This procedure conveys an explicitly future action. If we want to talk about the future in Arabic we also use the present tense. The word سوف (*sawfa*) or the prefix س (*sa*) are usually added to the front of the verb to indicate the future (Wightwick, J. & Gaatar, 2008: 18).

سنذهب الى المتحف المصري غدا.

We are going to the Egyptian museum tomorrow.

سوف يزرع الفلاح البطاطا في الخريف.

The farmer will plant potatoes in the Fall.

(Ryding, 2005:443) calls it the future tense which is formed by prefixing either the morpheme *sa* or the particle *sawfa* to a present tense indicative verb. The verb may be active or passive. The particle *sa-* is identified by some grammarians as an abbreviation of *sawfa*.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

Tense/Aspect Distinctions in English and Arabic

Ryding (2005:51) affirms that tense and aspect can be seen as two different ways of viewing time. Tense usually deals with linear points extending from the past into the future. Aspect sees the completeness of an action or state as central: is the action over with and completed, ongoing, or yet to occur? The points of view of the two terms are different: one focuses on when the action occurs and the other focuses on the action itself whether it is complete or not. These two grammatical categories do overlap to some extent and have in practice blended into one in Modern Standard Arabic.

Wright (1967:51) says: "The temporal forms of the Arabic verb are two in number, the one expressing a finished act, one that is done and completed in relation to other acts (the Perfect); the other an unfinished act, one that is just commencing or in progress (the Imperfect)" (emphasis in original). On the same page he gives an indication of the complexity of Arabic tense/aspect relations when he states that "The Arabian Grammarians... have given an undue importance to the idea of time, in connection with the verbal forms, by their division of it into the past (*al-maaDii* الماضي) the present (*al-Haal* الحال) and the future (*al-mustaqbal* الاستقبال) the first of which they assign to the Perfect and the other two to the Imperfect."

There are two basic morphological tenses in Arabic: past and present, also called perfective and imperfective, respectively. In dealing with the modern written language, many linguists and teachers find it more pragmatic to describe Arabic verbs in terms of tense, and the terms past/present (referring to time or tense) and perfect/imperfect (referring to aspect) are often used interchangeably.

There is also a future tense as Ryding(2005: 440)& Holes(2004:234) indicated by prefixing either *sa-* or *sawfa* to a present tense form. Other tenses exist, such as the past perfect, the future perfect, and the past

continuous, but they are compound tenses involving the use of auxiliary verbs and particles

Tense and aspect can be described as two different ways of looking at time. Tense usually deals with linear points in time that stretch from the far past into the future, in relation to the speaker. Aspect, on the other hand deals with the degree of completeness of an action or state: is the action completed, partial, ongoing, or yet to occur? So the perspectives of tense and aspect are different: tense focuses on the point on the timeline at which the action occurs, whereas aspect is focused on the action itself – whether it is complete or not (ibid).

In Standard Arabic, the basic distinctions in the verb are fundamentally aspectual, not tense-related. However, they are often treated as tense distinctions for the sake of those who speak such a language as English. The earliest grammar book of the Arabic language, the /kitaab/ of Sibawayh states that there are three forms of the Arabic verb:

one signaling the past time, the other indicating the present or future, while the third expresses commands or orders. The early Arab grammarians call the first form /ʔal-maaDi/ which merely means ‘the past’ and call the second form /ʔal-muDaari9/ which means ‘that which is similar (to the noun).’ Modern linguists now use the terms perfect(ive) and imperfect(ive) for the two forms, respectively. The two forms are distinguished morphologically as stated by Gadalla (2000: 76). “The perfect form is obtained by the attachment of suffixes only, whereas the imperfect form is obtained via the addition of confixes, i.e., combinations of prefixes and suffixes.”

Other linguists, like Eisele (1990:52), propose that the distinction between these two forms corresponds to a distinction between past and non-past, others assert that there is no one-to-one correspondence between aspect and tense. Therefore, Radwan (1975: 30) affirms that aspect and tense should be treated as two independent categories. Both terms are used to name two different features of verbal patterns. The term ‘Aspect’ covers then semantic ranges of completion versus non-completion and continuation versus noncontinuation, whereas ‘Tense’ covers time reference.

Nida (1964: 198-9) indicates that while tense marks the relative time of events, aspect defines the nature of the action. He also asserts that “when translating from one language to another, it is necessary not only to adjust to quite a different system, but also to consider the special restrictions which may exist within such a system.”

Needless to say that the tense/aspect systems differ from one language to another, particularly in languages which belong to different families such as English and Arabic. That is why Nida (ibid: 199) affirms that "regardless of the formal or semantic differentiations made in the tense system, the important fact is that no two systems are in complete agreement."

Conclusions:

1. Tense is the grammatical expression of the location of events in time. It anchors an event to the speaker's experience of the world by relating the event time to a point of reference. The universal, unmarked reference point is the moment of speaking – speech time. In narrative, a point in past time is usually taken as the reference point.

2. English has two tenses, the present and the past, the past being the marked

form, both morphologically and semantically. In Arabic language there are also two basic tenses: the past and the present.

3. The basic meaning of the present tense is to locate a situation holding at the present moment. This may be an instantaneous event expressed with either simple or the progressive form (*I promise to wait*), a state which holds over time expressed with the simple present form (*Jupiter is the largest planet*), or a habitual occurrence also expressed with the simple present form (*He works in an office*). Secondary meanings of the Present include reference to past and future events, 'historic present' (*This man comes up to me...*) and the quotative (*and she goes/she's like 'I don't believe it'*). The simple present tense of most verbs requires only an -s ending in the third-person singular. This is true whether the subject is a pronoun (*he, she, it*) or a singular noun. The first- and second-person pronouns (*I, we, you*), the third-person plural pronoun (*they*), and plural nouns require no ending in the present tense of this type. In Arabic, the present tense, or imperfect, refers in a general way to incomplete, ongoing actions or ongoing states. The present stem in Arabic is formed from the three root letters with a vowel after the second (ktub/shrab/jlis). Prefixes, and sometimes also endings, are added to the stem to show the subject of the verb.

4. The past tense primarily refers to a definite event or state that is prior to utterance time. Its secondary uses refer to a present event or state as hypothetical (*If I were you*). The simple past tense of most verbs requires an -ed ending with regular verbs. No other conjugational endings are needed for any of the persons in either the singular or plural. Irregular

verbs form the simple past tense in more than one way. Some make a vowel change. Some make a vowel and consonant change. A few transform completely. And a small group of verbs in the past tense looks identical to the present-tense verb. In Arabic, In Arabic, The past tense refers to a completed action and thus equates in most respects with English past tense and past perfect. The past stem is formed from the three root letters with a fatHa after the first root and a fatHa (or sometimes a kasra) after the second root letter (katab/sharib). Endings are added to the stem to show the subject of the verb.

5. English has no verbal inflection to mark a future tense. Instead, English makes use of a number of forms to refer to future events. In Arabic, the future may be made by adding (sawfa) or (sa) to the present.

6. In English, verbs have two aspects: the perfect aspect and the progressive aspect, while in Arabic an action started in the past and continuing into the present is usually rendered by the present tense in Arabic. The preposition *mundhu* is used to specify at which point in the past the action started. As far as Progressive is concerned, the present is used in Arabic for both continuous and habitual actions and states.

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