

Past Tense for Non-past: A Contrastive Study

By

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Abstract

Understanding Past tense is closely related to the notions of time, tense, and verb-form. Syntactically, it is claimed that most of the verb forms expressing past and present tenses tend to show a somehow correspondence with past and present times respectively. Yet, in the very nature of language use, this is not always the case. Future time, for instance, can be expressed by more than a form, none of which is specifically used for future tense. This behaviour of the verb phrase is common to both Arabic and English languages

Past tense, similarly, might refer to past, present, or future times; furthermore, it might refer to simple, progressive, or non-progressive aspects. The present paper attempts to shed some light-beams on these notions in both languages theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it attempts to explicate areas where past verb-forms can easily be used to indicate, past, present, and future, if possible to call them so, tenses. Practically, the two languages tend to show similarities as well as differences that characterise them or each of them.

It is hypothesised that past verb-forms in English and Arabic tend to show certain similarities in relation to the ways these verbs are formed and used to express past and non-past tenses. Besides, what might be syntactically similar could be completely different from the viewpoint of language use. Conclusions and recommendations of the present paper might be of significant to linguistics, teachers of Arabic and English, and translators to and fro the two languages.

1. Introduction

The term 'tense' can be defined as a grammatical category that serves to locate an event or situation in time. It encompasses two aspects: a morphological aspect, namely a system of tenses encoded in the verb-form morphologically and a semantic aspect dealing with the temporal location of the events depicted in one or more sentences (Hackmack, n.d.: online).

The three tense/time distinctions in both English and Arabic languages seem to be so common among ancient as well as modern grammarians who believe that tense, in parallelism with time, is tripartite: past, present, and future. Furthermore, tense has been found to be a

functional rather than formal category which is a characteristic of the verb phrase within its sentence (Reishaan and Ja'far, 2008: 110)⁽¹⁾. Yet, the relationship between these two notions is so complex. Hence, though related, time and tense has no one-to-one correspondence as present tense does not mean time.

It is hypothesized here that (1) past verb-forms in English and Arabic tend to show certain similarities in relation to the ways these verbs are formed, (2) such verb-forms could be used to express both past and non-past tenses, and (3) what might be syntactically similar could be completely different from the viewpoint of language use. A syntactically oriented comparison, then, between the verb-forms in both languages is needed; a section is devoted to Arabic, another to English, and a third is to compare the two.

The tenses are not the only means available of locating events in time. An additional possibility is the use of other linguistic elements, for example temporal adverbs such as *yesterday* or *soon* or prepositional phrases such as *before* or *in two weeks*. But these expressions do not have the same status as tense: they are lexical, not grammatical expressions of temporality. Hence, the latter has been excluded in the present study. Furthermore, this study limits itself to a syntactic-semantic approach to the full verb-forms whereas primary auxiliary verbs, in terms of Quirk et al. (1985) model, have been treated complementarily to tenses.

2. Past Tense in Arabic

2.1 Past Verb-Forms

The basic patterns of trilateral and tetraliteral verbs are as follows:

1. Trilateral verbs have the following three basic patterns:

(فَعَلَ، فَعِلَ، فَعَّلَ).

2. Tetraliteral verbs have only one basic pattern which is represented as: (فَعَّلَل).

From these basic forms, many derivatives are produced and these are based on the number of consonants in the verb. The derivation is composed of the basic consonants forming the root to which we add one or more consonants. The derivatives forms of the trilateral and tetraliteral verbs are described in the following subsections (Belkredim and el Sebai, 2009: 49).

(1) This paper is the second among a group of papers the researchers are writing on time and tense and their uses. Next is the present for non-present.

2.1.1 Primary Derivations from Triliteral Verbs

There are twelve primary derivations from triliteral verbs and these are classified into three categories.

1. Derivations that have *four* characters (The three basic characters from the root add one) and they have the following three patterns (فَعَّلَ، أَفْعَلَ، فاعَلَ).
2. Derivations with *five* characters (the three basic characters add two) and they have the following five patterns: (تَفَعَّلَ، تَفَاعَلَ، افْتَعَلَ، افْعَلَ، انْفَعَلَ).
3. The six-character derivations and they have the following four patterns (افْعَوْعَلْ، افْعَوْلْ، افْعَوْعَلْ، اسْتَفْعَلَ).

2.1.2 Derivations from Tetraliteral Verbs

There are three derivations from tetraliteral verbs and similar to triliteral verbs; the classes are defined based on the number of characters composing the derivations. The first category contains the only one five-character derivation of the form (تَفَعَّلَلْ) while the second category contains two derivations with six characters; they have the patterns (افْعَعَّلَلْ، افْعَعَّلَلْ).

2.2 Morphophonological Construction

The phonological construction of the past verb-form in Arabic is of three vowel phonemes: vowel points *a*, *u*, and vowellessness (of a medial consonant) with the graphic symbols of these phonemes being (َ ُ ْ) respectively. The past verb-form is indeclinable whether it is sound or unosound. The following classification could explicate this point (Ghalaiyni, 1986: 162; ad-Dahdaah, 2001: 233):

1. Sound verb form ends indeclinably in point *a* or *fath* (َ-) when it is unattached, as in
 - ذهبَ. (He went).
2. However, in case it is attached, this verb-form end indeclinably in either of the following:
 - It ends indeclinably in *fath* (َ-) in the following:
 - i. the dual masculine pronoun *alif* الف الاثنین (aliful ithnein), as in:
 - الرجلان ذهبَا; (The two men went);
 - ii. quiescent singular-feminine pronoun *te* تاء التانيث الساكنة (taa?uta?nith as-sakinah):
 - خرجتِ الفتاةُ; (The girl went);

iii. or plural speakers object pronoun *na* نا (damirul-mutakallimeen lil-maf'aul *na*) as in:

• أَزَلْنَا اللَّهُ مَنزَلًا مَبَارَكًا. (Allah has habited us a blessed habitation).

• It ends indeclinably in *dam* (ُ-) only when it is attached to plural (union) *waw* واو الجماعة (wawul-jama'ah), as in:

• فَلَمَّا اسْتَيْأَسُوا مِنْهُ خَلَصُوا نَجِيًّا. (2)

(Then when they despaired of him they retired conferring privately together)

• It ends indeclinably in vowellessness (ْ-) if it is attached to the rest of pronouns such as:

i. singular subject pronoun *te* تاء الفاعل (taa?ul-fa'ail) as in:

• ذَهَبْتُ. (I went)

ii. plural speaking subject pronoun *na* نا المتكلمين للفاعل (dameerul-mutakallimeen lilfa'ail *na*), as in:

• فَلَمَّا رَأَوْنَا كَشَفْنَا عَنْ جَمَانَا لِيَعْلَمُوا أَنَّنَا بَكَرٌ أَمْشُرُونَ

(When they saw us, we took off our helmets)

iii. plural feminine (women) pronoun *ne* نون النسوة (noonun-niswah), as in:

• فَلَمَّا رَأَيْتَهُ أَكْبَرْتَهُ وَقَطَّعْتَ أَيْدِيَهُنَّ. (3)

(So when they saw him, they deemed him great, and cut their hands (in amazement))

3. Unsound past verb-form could be attached to *alif* , *waw*, or *ya?* or *aa*, *uu*, or *ee* respectively⁽⁴⁾. Accordingly, the indeclinable ending varies in the way below:

a. Attached to *alif*, the form declines in suppressed *fath* which is expressed by vowellessness in articulation, as in

• سَقَى الْفَلَّاحُ الْحَدِيقَةَ. (The farmer watered the garden.)

b. Attached to *waw* or *yaa?*, it inclines in expressed *fath*, as in

One characteristic of Arabic is that, speakers of Arabic neither begin with movent nor pause at quiescent; hence, when pause at whatsoever past verb-form ending, they use vowellessness.

2.3 Uses

Past verb-form has several uses. It might be used to express past tense, future tense, timelessness, etc. Besides, it may be used in its bare infinitive form or with some auxiliaries and particles. Below are most of these uses:

2.3.1 Past Times

(2) Yusuf, 79

(3) Yusuf, 31

(4) a, aa, u, uu, e, ee have been suggested to be used here for representing Latin-letter transliteration of the Arabic words; they stand for the six vowel phonemes in Arabic, three short and three long, *fath*, *alif*, *dam*, *waw*, *kasr*, *ya?*.

A past verb in Arabic realizes different past tenses that anchor events/action in some specific past times whether they are very close (near), near, far, very far, and absolute past.

1. Absolute Past

Absolute past tense can be expressed by the verb-form only (ibn Hishaam, 1987: 172), as in

- كَتَبَ الطَّالِبُ الدَّرْسَ (absolute past). (The student wrote the lesson)
- قَامَ زَيْدٌ (absolute past). (Zeid stood)

2. Frequent actions or events

It expresses an event that frequently occurred and possible to occur, as in (al-Makhzoomy, 1964: 155):

- اتَّفَقَ الْمُفَسِّرُونَ (much frequent) (Interpreters agreed)

3. Narration

The verb-form *fa'ala* is always used in narrating old events in a style of a story; this could be found in some historical books like **al-Aghani**, for instance (Nooruddeen, 1984: 55):

- فَاسْتَحْسَنَهَا وَبَكَى ثُمَّ قَالَ: بَطَلْتَ يَا بُنَيَّ وَخَابَ أَمَلِي فِيكَ.
- (He applauded it, cry, and said, "You fell into disuse and disappointed me")

4. Future in the Past

Preceded by a present verb-form, *fa'ala* could express futurity in the past, as in (as-Saamarraai, 1966: 30; Nooruddeen, 1984: 70):

- وَاقْرَأَ اللُّصُّ أَنْ يَكُونَ سَرَقَ أَثَاثَ الدَّارِ
- (The thief confessed that he would steal the furniture of the house)

5. Verbs of Appropinquation

These verbs are used to express the special meaning of approximation between the time of the subject and the predicate of the verb of appropinquation, as in:

- كَادَ الْمَاءُ يَغْلِي (The water is about to boil)

The verb (كَادَ) implies two senses: first, the water does not boil; second, it is very close to the status of boiling, i. e., it will boil after a while if kept in fire. Other verbs of appropinquation are: (is about to) قَرِبَ, (is about to) اوشك, etc. (Hassan, n. d.:614-5).

2.3.2 Futurity

The verb-form *fa'ala* could be used to express future time in more than one place:

1. Pray

It is so common to use this form in order to express a pray or beseech for someone where the verb-form is past while the intended meaning is in the future, as in:

- رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ (May Allah bless him)

● حفظكم الله (May Allah keep you safe)

Similarly, it is used to damn someone, as in:

● لعن الله الظالمين (May Allah damn the unjust)

2. Guaranteed Occurrence of Action and Planning

The past verb-form can be used to refer to future time when the action denoted by the verb is taken for granted. This is so common in expressions of promise, threat, and treaties, as in (al-Makhzoomy, 1964: 155):

● وقد كثرَ شاكوكَ وقلَّ شاكروك، فإما اعتدلتَ و إما اعتزلتَ.

(Those who protested against you have increased and those who praised you have decreased; so, you should either straighten or resign).

3. A Hope in the Future

A-future-to –be-fulfilled hope can be expressed by simple past verb-form, as in (Hassan, n.d.: 53):

● عسى أن ينفَعنا أو نتخذَه ولدا. (5)

(May he be useful to us or we may adopt him as a son)

4. Apocopative Conditioning

Then the past verb-form is preceded by an apocopative conditional particle, it will be past in form but future in meaning, as in (as-Saamarraai, 1966:29):

● إن غابَ عليّ غابَ محمودُ. (If Ali is absent, Mahmood will be absent.)

5. Adverbial Conditional

When it is preceded by the adverbial conditional *ithaa* (= if), as in (ibid.):

● إذا جئتني أكرمتك. (If you come to me, I will be generous with you)

6. Apprizing of Future Events

This verb form is used to mean the future when informing of the future events with the intension of emphasizing the sure occurrence such events, i.e. planned to happen actions, as in (Nooruddeen, 1984: 57):

● و سيقَ الذينَ كفَرُوا إلى جهنمَ زُمَرا. (6)

(And those who disbelieve shall be driven to Hell in companies)

2.3.3 Probability of Past or Future

When there is no time indicator to limit its tense, the past verb form might refer to either past or future tenses. This could happen when the form is used in the following cases:

1. Hamzayut-Taswiya (Hamza for equality)

In the following example, it is not clear whether the action took place in the past or will take place in the future (Hassan, n.d.: 54):

(5) Yusuf, 21

(6) Az-Zumar, 71

- سواء علي أقمت أم قعدت.

(It is the same for me whether you stood/ will stand or sat/ will sit down).

2. Adverbial *Heithu* (=where)

This adverb can be used to refer to either past or future when has the sense of condition, as in (Nouruddeen, 1984: 59):

- حيثما نزلَ قرأ . (Wherever he descended, he read)

3. Generic Conjunctive Noun

A relative clause with a generic conjunctive noun may have a past verb-form with a future reference, as in (ibid.: 60):

- الذي أتاني فله درهم . (That who will visit me will have a dirham)

4. Adjective Modifying Generic Indefinite Noun

A verb-form of a verb clause that modifies a generic indefinite noun might refer to future meaning when it has a sense of condition, as in (ibid.):

- كل رجل أتاني فله درهم.

(A/Every man who will come to me will have a dirham)

5. Whenever/Wherever

The past verb-form can be used to refer to future meaning when it has a sense of conditioning, as in:

- كلما جاء فله جائزة.

(Whenever/wherever someone came he will be given a prize)

2.3.4 Present

The past verb-form may be used to refer to present time under the following circumstances:

1. Acts of Contract and Verbs of Oath

When the action takes place within the duration of speech simultaneously and the action could not be fulfilled but by virtue of the speech itself. This is a common use of the past form for non-past meaning in the speech acts of contracts and expressions of oath, as in (al-Makhzoomy, 1964: 155):

- بعثك داري . (I sell my house to you)

- زوجتك ابنتي . (I married you off to my daughter)

- نشدتك الله . (I adjured you by Allah to go away)

2. Verbs of Beginning

These verbs include *shara'aa, ansha'a, tafiqa, akhatha, etc* which all mean 'began'. The action denoted by these verb always begins really in the past and did not end then; instead, it refers to the present, consider the following example (Hassan, : 620):

- شرع المغني يجربُ صوته و يصلحُ عوده.

(The singer began to try his voice and amend his lute.)

It is noticed that these verb are overtly past but covertly present.

3. Past Tense with Present Markers

The meaning of the past verb-form is geared toward present time when it is accompanied by a present time marker just like *al?aana* (now), *al-yauma* (today), as in (Badri, 1984: 116):

● الْآنَ خَفَّفَ اللَّهُ عَنْكُمْ وَ عَلَّمَ أَنَّ فِيكُمْ ضَعْفًا. (7)

(For the present, Allah has made light your burden).

● الْيَوْمَ يَنَسُّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ دِينِكُمْ. (8)

(This day have those who disbelieve despair of your religion)

2.3.5 Progression

1. Progression through Times

Again, the past verb-form can be used to refer to actions in progress rather than to the past tense; a progression that goes through the past, present and future times, as in:

● وَقَضَىٰ رَبُّكَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ. (9)

(And your Lord has commanded that you shall serve (any) but him)

● وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ إِحْسَانًا. (10)

(And We enjoined on man doing of good to his parents).

2. Kaana

Conditioned by a time marker/indicator, kaana may be used in the same sense above, i. e., a continuation of an action that has been extending from the past through the present to the future, as in (Hassan, : 55):

كَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا. (11)

This means that Allah was Forgiving and Merciful, He is, and He will be.

3. Zaala, Feti?a, Beriha, infakka, etc.

A group of past verb-forms that are negative and nonexistence by nature. Yet, when preceded by a negative particle, like *ma* (not), they turn to be positive. In such a case, any verb of them, with both its subject and predicate, means that the subject is permanently described, either forever or till the time of speech, by the predicate, as in (ibid.):

● مَا زَالَ اللَّهُ رَحِيمًا بَعْبَادِهِ. ()

(7) Al-Anfaal, 66

(8) Al-Maaida, 3

(9) Al-Israa, 23

(10) Al-Ahqaaf, 15

(11) An-Nisaaa, 96, 100, 152

• مازال الفيل كبير الأذنين. (Elephant is still of big ears)

4. Progressive Completed Actions

Some past verb-forms might be used to refer to an action which had been already completed and continued as completed up to the time of speech, as in (as-Saammarrai, 1966: 30):

اذكروا نعمتي التي انعمت عليكم. (12)

(Call to mind My favors which I bestowed on you)

2.3.6 Timeless Permanent Description

These are other configurative forms of past. While past verb-forms are configured as *fa`ala*, these forms are configured as *fa`ula* or *fa`ila*. Such verbs like *karuma* (to be so generous), *dharufa* (to be genteel), *hasuna* (to be beautiful), or *safira* (to be yellow), and *arija* (to be lame) are not used to refer to any sense of past tense; they are rather used to state the permanent description of their subjects. Consider the following (ibid.):

• كَرُمَ محمد. (Mohammad became generous.)

• ظَرَفَ طبعه. (He became genteel.)

2.4 Particles / Part of the Verb

It has been noticed that the past verb-form alone has many uses and may refer to different meanings. Furthermore, Arabic has certain grammatical techniques of its own to express some other meanings by using the same verb-form. Some particles, prepositions, or other accessory constructions in Arabic may restrict the use of a verb to a specific meaning, gear its tense to a new one, further extend its existing meaning into other senses, or the like. Among the auxiliary verbs that could accompany the past verb-form, there are *qad*, *qad Kaana*, and *Kaana qad* (13).

1. *Qad* + past verb-form

Ibn Hishaam (1987: 171) states that *qad* may accompany a declarative configurative positive bare verb-form and is considered as an inseparable part of that verb but in cases of oath. This *qad* has several uses with past tense.

- a. Making the past time closer to the present, as in (al-Haashimi, n. d.: 21):

• قَدْ قامَ زيد. (Zaid has stood)

(12) Al-Baqarah, 40, 47, 122

(13) No specific translation could be suggested to any of these because there is no one-to-one English counterpart. They may have different translations within their instances.

b. Indicating that the action has already been done:

• **قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ.** (14) **(Successful indeed are the believers)**

In the examples above, it seems that the past sense of the verb-form is geared towards that of the present. In the first instance, the past tense is closely related to the present moment as we can modify it by adding **تَوَّأ** *tawwan* (= just); that is why it is translated into the present perfect tense. Yet, in the other example, there are two extra senses: first, the action has been done for sure in the past and the believers were successful; second, they *will* be successful in the future as well, as it is a promise for them to be so. That is why the translation has put the verb-form in the simple present tense (are).

Many grammarians, such as the German Bergstrasse (2003), al-Makhzoomy (1964: 184), as-Saamarraai (1966: 29ff), Nooruddeen (1984: 67), believe that Arabic uses some more complex verb constructions to cope with development in civilization.

2. *Kaana* + past verb-form

This verb combination refers to the far past, as in:

• **و كنت جمعت رؤوس أفاعٍ كُنَّ عندي لأرميَ بها.**

(I collected the heads of snakes I had and threw (them) at (someone))

3. *Qad kaana* + past verb-form

This verb combination refers to the far past too, as in al-Mutanabbi's and ad-Darimi's lines below successively Nooruddeen (1984: 68-9) :

• **قَدْ كَانَ أَشْهَدَ دَفْنِي قَبْلَ قَوْلِهِمْ جَمَاعَةً ثُمَّ مَاتُوا قَبْلَ مَنْ دَفَنُوا**

(They had gotten a band witnessed my burial before their saying
Then they died before those who buried them)

• **قَدْ كَانَ شَمَّرَ لِلصَّلَاةِ ثِيَابَهُ حَتَّى وَقَفْتَ لَهُ بِيَابِ الْمَسْجِدِ**

(He had folded his sleeves for prayer
Until you stood for him at the mosque)

4. *Kaana qad* + past verb-form

This verb combination refers to the far past again, as in (ibid.: 69):

• **و كَانَ قَدْ اسْتَسْقَى الْعَمَامَ وَقَدْ بَدَأَ لَهُ عَارِضٌ مِنْ جَانِبَيْهِ جِهَامٌ**

(He had asked the clouds for water as he had seen
An obstacle cloud arose at his both sides)

• **و كَانَتْ قَدْ اغْبَرَّتْ رُبَاهَا وَ أَظْلَمَتْ جَوَانِبُ قَطْرِيهَا وَ بَانَ اخْتِلَافُهَا**

(The hills have gotten dusted
And their two tracts have gotten dark with a clear difference)

(14) Al-Muminoon, 1.

Apparently, the use of *qad kaan* is not a matter of only expressing a far or remote past time but it also indicates a relationship between two actions or events in the past the relationship between them is that of perfection before a specific point in the past. This is what English calls past perfect tense. Farer in the past, a relationship between two or more actions/events could be deliberately sequenced according to their completion and point of anchor to time of occurrence.

Such particles are considered by some grammarians, as ibn Hishaam (1987) a part of verb-form . However, there are articles that do not function as part of the verb; they work with the past verb-form, such as (لَمَّا (when), لَوْ (if), لَوْلَا (if not), لَوْ مَا (if not)). They are specially used for negation, conditioning, or the combination of conditioning and negation, respectively. They always shift past tense to present and to future.

• لَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِنْ كُلِّ امَّةٍ فِرْقَةٌ لِيَتَفَقَّهُوا فِي الدِّينِ. (15)

(Why should not then a company from every party from among them go forth that they may apply themselves to obtain understanding in religion).

3. Past Tense in English

3.1 Past Verb-forms

3.1.1 Simple Past

Verbs in English have been classified differently by different grammarians. Among the most plausible is Quirk, et. al. (1985: 96) classification of the English verbs into full vs. auxiliary verbs as in *leave* and *be* respectively and of primary vs. modal auxiliary verbs, as in *be* and *might* respectively again. English language has a paradigm of verbs that varies from three to eight forms; some irregular verbs have only three, as in *set* and *cut*, for instance. The verb *be* has eight forms. As for regular full verbs, English is accustomed to using five-verb paradigm in active tenses of past and present, see the table below (16).

Table (1) The Inflectional Paradigm of Past Verb-form in English

	Present			Past	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Forms:	(base) Stem	3 rd person Singular	Present Participle	Past tense	Past Participle

(15) At-Taubah, 122

(16) See also Quirk and Greenbaum (1973/1989: 31) and Hornby et al (2004: 1504)

Inflectional Suffixes:	unmarked	-s 3d	V -ing	-ed	-ed/en
Example	Learn Choose set	Learns Chooses Sets	Learning Choosing Setting	Learned Chose set	Learned Chosen set

The first three verb-form are supposedly specialized in present tense while the last two are in the past tense. In fact when a sentence main verb, the fourth form, -ed past is the only form for the past tense. In complex noun phrases, however, the third through the fifth forms could be combines with past forms of primary auxiliary verbs to express past tense.

3.1.2. Past Progressive

The present participle –ing would be combined with *was* or *were* to make past progressive tense. Consider the following examples (Stageberg, 1981: 140; Thomson and Martinet, 1960:177)):

- While they were writing letters, the electricity got off.
- He/She/It was working...

3.1.3. Simple Past Perfect

A simple past perfect tense is a verb phrase made from the past form of the auxiliary *have* and the past participle, (Praninskas, 1977: 197), for example:

- Prof. Baker had already dismissed the class when it began to rain.

3.1.4 Past Perfect Progressive

Continuous past perfect is a verb phrase made from *had + been + ing-form* (ibid.:198-9), for example,

- Bill had been working for two hours when Jack called.

3.2 Morphophonological Construction

English verbal morphology is rather restricted, compared to that of a fully fledged inflectional language such as Arabic; it offers only four inflectional morphemes: (the 3rd singular present, the present participle, the past tense, and the past participle). Thus it does not provide any opportunity to study the complex interaction between intersecting inflectional categories within a paradigm, such as person, number, mood, and tense (Bybee and Slobin, 1982:265).

English, however, provides the opportunity for the study of regular and irregular verb-forms. It has a demonstrably productive process of suffixation for past-tense formation, in the form of *-ed*, it also has many irregular verbs where past tense is formed, in some cases, without suffixation in the stem (ibid.).

English irregular verbs are relatively few in number. Bloch 1947 identifies about 200 (several of which are archaic), but thousands of verbs form their past tense by adding an allomorph of *-ed* ⁽¹⁷⁾.

Whether regular or irregular, past verb-forms tend to end with either of three sound: /t, d, id/. While regular verbs do not exceed these three sound pronunciations, about 70% of the irregular verbs come under such sounds; other irregular verbs of the different pronunciation or sound endings are not more than 30%.

3.3 Uses⁽¹⁸⁾

The various past verb-forms have the following uses:

1. **Simple past tense**⁽¹⁹⁾ is said to be used to state that
 - a. an action or situation that began and ended in the past, i. e., definite past time, as in:
 - The teacher **assigned** two problems last week.
 - b. an action or situation that existed usually, always, or habitually in the past, as in:
 - The teacher **assigned** problems regularly.
 - c. Stories and talks about the **past**, i.e., storytelling and reports, as in:
 - Then, the king died and the queen died of grief.
 - d. in complex sentences: an untrue condition (subordinate clause), combined with a 'would' result (main clause), as in:
 - If you **did** the work, you would understand more.
2. **Past progressive** often indicates:
 - a. an action/ condition already in progress at a certain time or occurrence in the past, as in:
 - The teacher **was assigning** problems when the bell rang.
 - b. a repeated action in the past, as in:

(17) "Although irregular verbs are relatively insignificant as to type frequency, the picture is quite different when token frequency is considered: these are among the most frequent verbs of the language. Of the thirty most frequent past-tense forms (KuCera & Francis 1967), twenty-two are irregular. The situation changes radically in the second 30 most frequent past-tense forms, where 8 are irregular" (ibid.).

(18) Uses of past verb-form are so common in almost all English grammar books. The list below is quoted from **Meg Leimkuhler**, Spring 2010 "*English Verb Tense Overview*". School of Liberal Arts, Indiana University.

(19) The past tense needs to be properly "anchored" in past time (through adverbs –e.g. yesterday –, and/or introductory sentences – when we met in Brussels –, etc.)

- I **was studying** all last week.
 - c. activities going on in the background, as in:
 - The earthquake struck just when the government **was pushing through** reforms.
 - d. activities going on simultaneously, as in:
 - Our visitors were being treated to the usual programme. Pam was showing one group round the factory while Jim was giving them his lecture on corporate values.
- 3. Past perfect** has the meaning of:
- a. an event or condition that occurred before another event or time in the past, as in:
 - She **had assigned** several problems before the class ended.
 - b. making it clear which of two past events came first; referring to a previous past, as in:
 - The follow-up meeting was cancelled because they **had made** no progress in the first round of negotiations.
 - c. in complex sentences, an untrue condition (subordinate clause), as in:
 - If I **had studied** more, I would have earned an A
- 4. Past Perfect Progressive** indicates:
- a. an action or habitual action taking place over a period of time in the past, prior to some other event or time, as in:
 - **The teacher had been assigning five problems a day prior to midterms.**
 - b. in complex sentences: a past action in progress (main clause) that was interrupted by a more recent past action, as in:
 - **The teacher had been planning to have an inclass exam, but she had a take-home exam instead.**

3.3.1 Backshift

Backshift is an optional phenomenon is so common in English. It can be considered as another way of using the past tense to express meanings with reference to both present and future. Quirk et. al. (1985: 187-8) identify three types of special meanings in this respect: indirect thought, attitudinal past, and hypothetical past.

1. Unreal Events and Conditions with *if*

Conditional sentences deal with a event or situation which is/was dependent on the fulfillment of a condition. They are hypothetical sentences where both the condition and the outcome are imaginary. The

condition-outcome sequence can be reversed. Conditional clauses are basically of three types (Devitiis et. al., 1989: 160-5):

- a. When the *If*-sentence contains present tense and the main clause contains *will* future, as in:
 - If you **change** the structure, the paper **will be published**.
- b. When the *If*-sentence contains past tense while the main clause contains *would/should*, as in
 - If you **changed** the structure, the paper **would be published**.
- c. When the *If*-sentence: past perfect tense and the main clause: *would have / should have*, as in:
 - If you **had changed** the structure, the paper **would have been published**.

2. Conditional Clauses without *if*

In conditional clauses using *should*, *were to*, or *the past perfect tense*, the *if* can be left out and the subject and the auxiliary are reversed, as in (Mautner, n.d.: online):

- **Should you** discover other errors, please let me know at once.
- **Were they** to merge, they could greatly accelerate their cost-cutting programmes.
- **Had they** used more sophisticated software, they would have achieved more reliable results.

3. Polite and Formal Requests:

In most cases, it is more polite to make a request than to give an order. *If ...could/would* expressions are often used for routine requests, i. e., for things that are done habitually (Devitiis et. al., 1989: 189).

- I'd be grateful **if you would** send me a copy.
- It would help us **if** conference participants who are planning to take part in the excursion **would** please register by Monday 6 p. m. (Mautner, n.d.: online).

With verbs expressing volition or mental state, past tense reflects the tentative attitude of the speaker rather than some past time, as in (Quirk et. al., 1985: 188):

- Do/Did you want to see me tomorrow?

4. Reported Speech

Reporting verbs in a past and past perfect tense refer to back shifts from present to past times and from past to past times. This is indicated in the following relations between direct and indirect speech acts:

- a. Simple present → Simple past.
 - "I **know** Jim," she said. → She said she **knew** Jim.
- b. Simple present perfect → Simple past perfect.
 - "I **have paid** the bill, " she said. → She said (that) she **had paid** the bill.
- c. will → would
 - "I'**ll** phone him," she said. → She said (that) she **would** phone him/ (that) she'**d** phone him.
- d. Simple past → Simple past perfect
 - "I **had** a new book yesterday", he reported. → He reported that he **had had** a new book the day before.

It is evident that backshift in time is expressed by changes in pronouns and adverbs, as in the following instances:

- *today* → *that day*
- *this morning* → *that morning*
- *yesterday* → *the day before / the previous day*
- *next week* → *the following week*
- *here* → *there / in that place*
- *this, these* → *that, those / the*

4. Wishes

Past verb-forms might imply the nonoccurrence of some state or event in the present or future (Quirk et. al., 1985: 187-8):

- I wish I had a memory like yours.

4. Comparison

The two languages have proven to have some similarities and differences in terms of the verb-form, morphophonological features, uses, and the particles of past tenses. Below is a sketch of the points of convergence and divergences, in parallelism with the sectioning and sub-sectioning of the paper:

4.1 Past Verb-forms

Arabic Past verb-form constructions are various and enormous in comparison to those in English. While English has one verb-form derived from a bare-infinitive and regularly ended with –ed such as play-played (see Table (1) above), the conjugation of the Arabic past verb-form show a wide variety of form out of which other Arabic verb-forms can be derived. Arabic trilateral and tetraliteral past form are the verbs out of which all other verb-forms can be derived.

The following diagram shows how the processes of verb derivation in Arabic happens and the criterion verb *faʿāla* is used as a model for the conjugation of all other verbs.

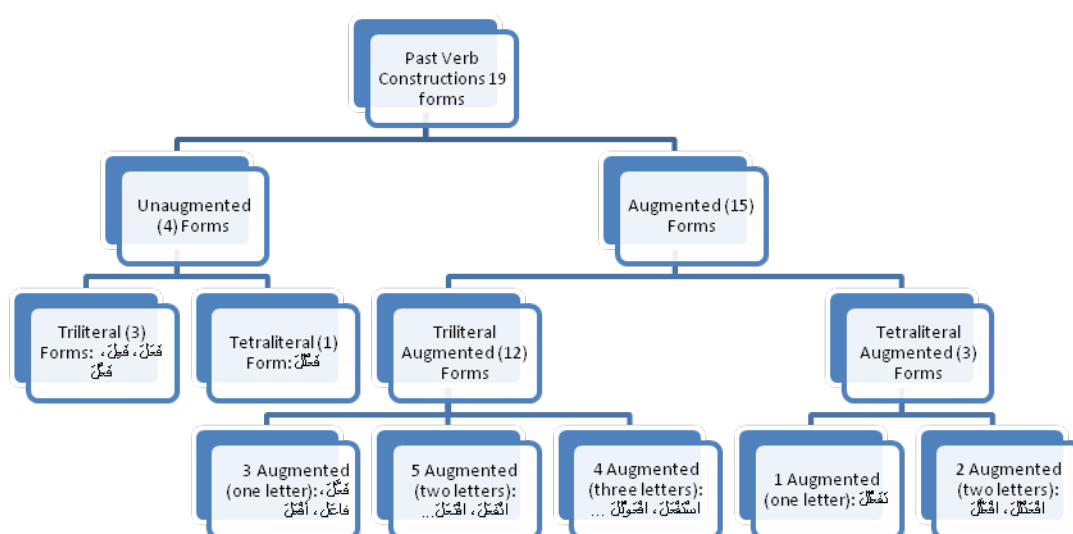


Figure (1) Primary Derivations of the Past Verb-form in Arabic

In this figure, the total number of the primary derivations of the past verb-form is *nineteen* dividing into augmented and augmented constructions. Besides, there are other *eighteen* secondary derivatives for the tetraliteral verb-form⁽²⁰⁾. The unaugmented trilateral forms are only *three*: فَعَلَ، فَعِلَ، فَعَلَّ while there is only *one* tetraliteral form: فَعَلَّلَ. Examples for these four forms could be: خَرَجَ (went out), عَلِمَ (knew), كَرُمَ (became generous), and بَعَثَرَ (scattered) respectively. As for the augmented constructions, there are *fifteen* different trilateral and tetraliteral verb-forms, all consist of the three letter verb فَعَلَ *fa'ala* plus either أ *hamzah*, ا *alif*, و *waw*, ن *noon*, س *seen*, ت *taa*?, or repeating the same letter in the word either geminated or successively as in: أَفَعَلَ، فَاعَلَ، فَوَعَلَ، أَفَعَّلَ، أَسْتَفْعَلُ، تَفَاعَلَ، فَعَّلَلَ respectively. These are just samples of the criterial forms and models for the constructions of the past verb-forms. Examples for such forms could be: أَظْهَرَ (showed), سَاعَدَ (helped), قَوْلَبَ (modeled), أفرَنَقَعَ (withdrew from), اسْتَعْفَرَ (asked (Allah) for forgiveness) respectively.

However, these simple past forms, in Arabic, could be used with some auxiliary verbs or particles/parts of verbs, such as *qad*, *kaana*, or combinations of both, to provide a spectrum of different senses to the basic use of the verb in anchoring the past event to the past time. In English auxiliary verbs are used to express aspect, perfective/progressive, mood, as well as tense. Yet, the two languages have their own means to tense relationships and sequences among events/actions in the past times and.

4.2 Morphophonological Construction

The morphophonological behavior of the past verb-form in English, whether regular or irregular, tends to show a variation in the form of past – ed morpheme between –d, –ed, –t, or zero allomorphs. These are pronounced as /d, id, t/ or with mutation or vowel change in complimentary distribution with each other. The verb's phonological environment of the free morpheme decides on the type of pronunciation in terms of voiced, voiceless, or the like (see Stageberg, 1981).

(20) The study limits itself to the primary derivations of the past verb-form, for brevity.

Arabic tends to show a more complicated set of forms and pronunciations than English. As an inflectional language, it has the ability to attach the past verb-form to a group of pronouns that vary according to person, gender, and number. However, the verb-form may indeclinably end in either *fath*, *dham*, or *vowellessness*, according to the attached pronoun that takes a form of a suffix, see Table (2) below.

4.3 Uses

4.3.1 Arabic

1. In Arabic, a past verb realizes different past times. It is used to tell about Absolute Past, frequent actions or events, narration, future in the past, and appropinquation.
2. *fa'ala* could express future time in more than one place as in pray, guaranteed occurrence of action and planning, a hope in the future, apocopative conditioning, adverbial conditional, apprizing of future events.
3. Probability of both past or future events could be expressed by means of *hamzayut-taswiya* (hamza for equality), adverbial *heithu* (=where), generic conjunctive noun, adjective modifying generic indefinite noun, or whenever/wherever.
4. under circumstances, past verb-forms could refer to present time in cases of acts of contract, and verbs of oath, verbs of beginning, past tense with present markers.
5. It may refer to actions in progress, i. e., a progression that goes through the past, present and future times.
6. Some past verb-forms might be used to state the permanent description of their subjects

Table (2) Conjugating the Past Verb-form in English

Person	Gender	Number	Base	+	Suffix	→	Active voice
3 rd	Masculine	Singular	فَعَلَ	+		→	فَعَلَ He/It (S/M) did
3 rd	Masculine	Dual	فَعَلَا	+	ا	→	فَعَلَا They (D/M) did
3 rd	Masculine	Plural	فَعَلُوا	+	وَا	→	فَعَلُوا They (P/M) did
3 rd	Feminine	Singular	فَعَلَتْ	+	تْ	→	فَعَلَتْ

							She/It (S/F) did
3 rd	Feminine	Dual	فَعَلَ	+	تَا	→	فَعَلْتَا They (D/F) did
3 rd	Feminine	Plural	فَعَلَ	+	نَ	→	فَعَلْنَ They (P/F) did
2 nd	Masculine	Singular	فَعَلَ	+	تَ	→	فَعَلْتَ You (S/M) did
2 nd	Masculine	Dual	فَعَلَ	+	تُمَا	→	فَعَلْتُمَا You (D/M) did
2 nd	Masculine	Plural	فَعَلَ	+	تُمْ	→	فَعَلْتُمْ You (P/M) did
2 nd	Feminine	Singular	فَعَلَ	+	تِ	→	فَعَلْتِ You (S/F) did
2 nd	Feminine	Dual	فَعَلَ	+	تُمَا	→	فَعَلْتُمَا You (D/F) did
2 nd	Feminine	Plural	فَعَلَ	+	تُنَّ	→	فَعَلْتُنَّ You (P/F) did
1 st	Masculine and Feminine	Singular	فَعَلَ	+	تَ	→	فَعَلْتُ I did
1 st	Masculine and Feminine	Plural	فَعَلَ	+	نَا	→	فَعَلْنَا We did

M = Masculine, F= Feminine, S = Singular, D = Dual, P = Plural (Sattar, 2011: online)

4.3.2 English

1. simple past tense may be used to refer to a punctual event or situation in the past, i. e., an action that began and ended at a certain time in the past.
2. When focusing on duration, English uses past progressive verb-form. It often indicates an action/ condition already in progress at a certain time, a repeated action in the past, activities going on in the background, or activities going on simultaneously.
3. Perfective and perfective progressive verb-form refer to an event or condition that occurred before another event or time in the past or to make clear which of two past events came first.
4. It can be used to show time backshift, indirect thought, attitudinal past, and hypothetical past event or situation which is/was dependent on the fulfillment of a condition. This provides facilities to talk about conditioning, polite requests, wishes, and volition or mental state.

5. Conclusions

The present paper has attempted to compare the forms and uses of past tenses in both English and Arabic. It has reached at the following conclusions:

1. While English and Arabic both use different verb-forms to express past tense, Arabic tends to use a greater variety of such forms, all primarily or secondarily derived according to one criterion verb form of *fa'ala*, than English does. Regularly, there is only one verb form for past tense in English but at least thirty seven different standard verb-forms in Arabic. Whether trilateral, tetraliteral, or more, Arabic verb-forms are conjugated according to certain morphological model; yet, the English ones are inflectionally derived by adding the -ed past morpheme. The pronunciation of the English verb-form regularly includes three basic allomorphs in complimentary distribution of phonological variation: /t, d, id/ while the Arabic verb-forms may indeclinably end in either *fath, dham, or vowellessness*, according to the attached pronoun that takes a form of a suffix. This proved the opposite of the first hypothesis concerning the similarities in the syntactic verb-forms in the two languages.
2. A for uses, past verb-form in both languages could be used to express either past tense or some other non-past tenses like, present and future. This validates the second hypothesis.
3. Whether in English or Arabic, the syntactically similar behavior of the verb-forms could express some completely different meanings from the viewpoint of language use. Arabic, on the one hand, uses the past verb-form, for instance to express futurity in cases of pray, planning, and hope; it could, further, express hypothetical meanings in conditions and impossible wishes. Past forms in Arabic might refer to present times in cases of oath and acts of contract or refer to permanent description that is anchored to no particular time, past, present, or future. On the other hand, English uses past verb-forms to express unreal hypothetical meanings in conditions and wishes, to express polite requests, or back-shifting in reported speech. This conclusions validates the third hypothesis.

Paradoxically, while there is an evident divergence in the syntactic and morphological processes of verb formation in both languages, these languages use such verb-forms for almost the same purposes and meanings.

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